

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

January 2003

Domestic Affairs

January 3: Fidel Castro has returned home to Havana, following a visit to Brazil where he attended the inauguration of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/1/03)

January 3: Cuban dissidents said they intend to monitor parliamentary elections this month to try to prevent Fidel Castro's government from inflating the vote. A recently formed umbrella group of the dissidents said its planned efforts at the January 19 vote do not mean the dissidents think the vote will be legitimate, but that they feel they must show that there are opponents. The group calling itself the Assembly for Promotion of Civil Society told a news conference it will try to ensure that election workers don't inflate the number of voters or count ballots that have been purposefully annulled as a form of protest. (AP, 3/01/03)

January 3: Cuban practitioners of the Santería religion honored a long-dead high priest after their leaders predicted war, government collapse, the death of high-ranking personalities and marital infidelity for the world in the coming year. Known as the "Letra del Año" — Letter of the Year — the world predictions issued in the first days of January are watched closely by many Cubans, even those who are not Santería followers. The group making the predictions is the largest of at least three Santería groups that issue a Letter of the Year each January. More than 800 Santería priests, known as babalawos (babalaos), put the predictions together during a meeting in Havana held by the Miguel Febles Padron Letter of the Year Organizing Committee, named after a late priest. Among the slogans for the year that raised some eyebrows was: "The king turns in his crown before dying." The babalaos insisted the slogan did not refer to 76-year-old Fidel Castro, now 44 years in power. "This letter is for all of humanity," they added. Santería is a syncretic mix of Roman Catholicism brought to Cuba by the Spaniards and Yoruba spiritual traditions carried in the island by African slaves. (AP, 3/1/03)

January 3: Juan Miguel Gonzalez, who fought US-based relatives bent on keeping his shipwreck-survivor son Elian in the US against his will, has been nominated as a candidate for Cuba's National Assembly, official media reported. Gonzalez, who works in a restaurant in the resort city of Varadero, was nominated for a district in Cárdenas, where he lives. (AFP, 3/1/03)

January 4: A prominent member of an outlawed dissident group has said that the year just ended was a bleak one as far as human rights in Cuba are concerned, and that 2002 closed out its account books of advances and repression with a "negative balance". At least 34 people were being held as prisoners of conscience in Cuba, most of them awaiting trial for offenses as heinous as "attending church" said Marta Beatriz Roque of the Assembly for Promoting a Civil Society. (EFE, 4/1/03)

January 4: With traffic accidents the leading cause of violent death on the island, and the fourth cause of all deaths, order must be restored to Cuba's streets and highways, said Lt. Col. Francisco Bruzón, head of the traffic division of the National Revolutionary Police. Among other things, drivers are banned from using a cell phone with their hands, playing overly loud music or abandoning a car with engine problems in the road -- a common practice. A national traffic safety commission is also being created to study the creation of a new and more complete code of traffic laws while more traffic police will be assigned to the streets. New fines begin at \$1.50 US (36 pesos) -- a significant penalty where the average government worker's monthly salary is only about \$17 US. (AP, 4/1/03)

January 5: Fidel Castro could soon leave to his brother Raúl the top position of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), as part of a restructuring that would lead to important changes in the Cuban political power system. "The move is part of the discussions that have delayed the Congress of the Party from being held; changes are to be approved by the Congress", said to the press a highly placed official source. "Raúl favours giving the government increased independence while he retains political and military control" added the source. Such restructuring would mean that Fidel Castro would remain President of the Council of State, while Raúl would become First Secretary of the PCC. Speculations in reduced circles of power in Cuba suggest that Carlos Lage would be appointed First Vice-President of the Council of State. (El Nuevo Herald, 5/1/02)

January 5: Fidel Castro has stated that Cuba will not starve nor will basic social services be affected in spite of the likelihood of a world crisis due to the erratic increase of oil prices. Our society is best prepared to confront and overcome that probable catastrophe given the U.S. plans to attack Iraq, said Castro during the inauguration of the Universal Higher Education Program. (Juventud Rebelde, 5/1/03)

January 7: Two Cuban émigrés, novelist Edmundo Desnoes, and storyteller and journalist Mayra Montero, are part of the jury for the Casa de las Américas literary award in Havana. (AFP, 8/1/02)

January 8: Cuba's infant mortality rate last year registered a national average of 6.5 for every 1000 live births: the lowest infant mortality rate in all of the Americas. Infant mortality for the year 2002 was among the third lowest in the history of the Cuban Revolution – with 6.4 in 1999 and 6.2 in 2001. (Radio Havana Cuba, 8/1/03)

January 8: There were at least 223 political prisoners in Cuba at year's end, a Cuban human rights group said. The report listed seven prisoners fewer than at the middle of 2002, according to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and Reconciliation. The commission reported 210 political prisoners in 2001. "This report constitutes a clear statistical expression of the Cuban government's legal and political immobility," the commission said. (The New York Times, 8/1/03)

January 8: Social tension is bound to increase in Cuba this year as citizens continue to deal with economic hard times and to press for individual liberties, one of the island's main human rights groups said. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), a dissident group, predicts a "notable increase in social tension fueled by growing economic difficulties and demands for civil, political and Cultural freedom by Cuban citizens." (EFE, 8/1/03)

January 10: The Cuban government promised to crack down on foreigners bringing illegal narcotics into the communist country and complained that US officials refuse to cooperate in their fight against drugs. "Recently the illicit use of drugs (in Cuba) has grown, although at a much lower rate than it has in other countries," said an editorial on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma. The editorial called on Cubans to "permanently battle for the present and future of the country against threats and risks as dangerous as the imperialism out to exterminate us." That use of illegal narcotics "must be prevented and caught in time," it added. The editorial offered no statistics about drug use on the island, but said that 252 foreigners had been arrested since 1995 for bringing narcotics here, including 146 who were either awaiting trial or serving sentences in Cuban prisons. (AP, Reuters, 10/1/03)

January 11: Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega said the Communist-run government continued to ignore the Roman Catholic Church, and always tense relations had not changed five years after Pope John Paul II visited the island. "Relations with the Cuban government remain essentially the same. There is no substantial change (...) The social-political space is always very limited and it appears often the church is ignored," Ortega said, in declarations to the press after opening a Havana art exhibit. Christmas Day holiday was banned in 1969 by President Fidel Castro's

government and only restored in 1997 on the eve of the pope's visit. Church officials complain that while the government now recognizes Christmas as a holiday, it does nothing to encourage the religious nature of the day. (Reuters, 11/1/03)

January 11: Fidel Castro announced that the problem of drug consumption that has arisen in Cuba can be most effectively and radically fought as part of the "Battle of Ideas", a wide propaganda campaign launched by the Cuban government. Castro said that the most urgent programs of the Battle of Ideas in the areas of education and culture can contribute to helping the young understand the dangers and consequences of such harmful habits. (World Data Service, 12/1/03)

January 13: The Cuban Central Workers Union (CTC) called on its 3,198,942 million members to vote in the general elections on January 19, and reassert their support to the process that began in 1959. The text exhorted all workers to vote, "in a message of participation, discipline and revolutionary conscience facing our powerful enemies." CTC also called on its affiliates to promote voting at their workplaces, as an invitation to achieve an overwhelming political triumph. (Prensa Latina, 13/1/03)

January 13: Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana and main figure of the Catholic Church in Cuba, clarified that Pope John Paul II received in the Vatican Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas as a courtesy not to be interpreted as an offer of support. "The church does not support any political projects", said Ortega in reference to Payá's activities. (World Data Service, 13/1/03)

January 15: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas said that his country's elections for the National Assembly and provincial assemblies are unconstitutional and illegitimate. "In Cuba, candidates are put forth by organizations controlled by the government," Payá said. "In Cuba there is an environment of disrespect for [civil] rights. This is neither constitutional nor legitimate." Payá said that he respected people's right to go to the polls, but "I don't say 'to vote' because there is no vote." (The Miami Herald, 16/1/03)

January 16: Fidel Castro returned to Havana, arriving from Quito where he attended the inauguration of Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutiérrez. (Radio Havana Cuba, 17/1/03)

January 16: Cuban authorities detained 252 alleged drug-traffickers from 1995 to 2002 and impounded 175 shipments of drugs at local airports, according to a report presented by Cuba's minister of Justice, Roberto Díaz Sotolongo at the opening of the II Regional Conference on Drug Control in the Caribbean that took place in Havana. The shipments would either be carried to Europe or commercialized inside the island. (Notimex, 17/1/03)

January 17: Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas denied that the Cuban people are gambling on the death of Fidel Castro to gain their rights and freedom. The Cuban people are not basing their struggle or their hopes on the death of Castro, because this is a civic struggle and [not] thinking about the other "we call it biological fatalism: waiting for a person to die so that people can obtain freedom and rights," he said. (Notimex, 17/1/03)

January 17: Fidel Castro urged Cubans to turn out for the general election to show support for the communist-run island in the face of US imperialism. "What is needed is an overwhelming and energetic victory that demonstrates to the enemy our unity and force," Castro said in a reference to the United States during a nationally televised program on the election. (Reuters, 18/1/03)

January 18: Several leading dissident groups announced they would not vote in Cuba's parliamentary elections and called on others to protest by abstaining, or by annulling a ballot by marking it incorrectly or casting it blank. In an unusual protest, dissident Mayelín Cedeño erected

a sign outside her Havana home reading: "No to the electoral farce. No to the vote. No to more of the same." "It occurred to me after hearing Castro on the television. He said that in Cuba there is democracy and that's not true," Cedeño said. "Voting is practically obligatory to keep from being humiliated." About 100 neighbors crowded outside Cedeño's home in their own protest, chanting pro-government slogans and waving signs reading ``Viva Fidel!" (Reuters, 18/1/03)

January 19: Cubans voted in one-party general elections, while leading opponents refused to participate. The election is held every five years and will select 609 deputies to the National Assembly and representatives to provincial assemblies. (VOA News, 19/1/03)

January 19: Answering questions to international reporters after voting in parliamentary elections in the island, Fidel Castro became irritated by a question about the Varela Project. "Let's talk about serious things, not silliness," Castro said. (Reuters, 19/1/03)

January 19: Those in charge at an electoral college in Havana did not allow three dissidents to attend as observers the recount of votes to elect national and municipal deputies. Martha Beatriz Roque, Arnaldo Ramos and Francisco Pijuán, of the Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, went to the electoral college No. 1, of the 68th district in the municipality of Diez de Octubre, but were not allowed in. Television cameras and journalists from Spanish Television, CNN, AP, Reuters and AFP accredited in Havana were kept out too. (AFP, 19/1/03)

January 20: Cuba's Communist Party said that more than 97 percent of voters showed overwhelming support for the nation's socialist system by electing 609 candidates who ran uncontested for parliament. While Fidel Castro and millions of other Cubans voted in general elections, many dissidents labeled the process a farce and refused to participate. About 8.1 million of Cuba's 8.2 million registered voters cast ballots, prompting the Communist Party daily Granma today to declare the elections "overwhelming proof of popular support for the nation, the revolution and socialism." (The Toronto Star, 20/1/03)

January 20: The diocese in the province of Holguín has organized gatherings of families in response to the Fourth World Meeting of the Families that will take place in Manila, the Philippines. The meeting in Holguin intends to act in response to the difficult times that the "basic cell" of Cuban society is going through. The meeting will also mark the fifth anniversary of the Pope's visit to Cuba and his words: "¡Cuba: take care of your families so that your heart stays wholesome!" (Zenit, 20/1/03)

January 21: Fidel Castro says Cuba wants to develop tourism fit for the whole family, without the illegal drugs and gambling. "You won't see any casinos here," Castro said as he inaugurated a new resort on the island's northeastern coast. "Nor will there be drugs." (AP, 22/1/03)

January 21: Cubans themselves can influence the time when Fidel Castro's totalitarian regime will fall, Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá told journalists when laying flowers to the memorial to the victims of the communist regime at the Wenceslas Square in Prague's Center. He said that Cubans' basic rights should be respected. Payá said that the parliamentary elections which ended with another victory of the ruling Communists in Cuba were undemocratic. (CTK, 21/1/03)

January 23: Developing a vaccine for typhoid fever is the most relevant achievement of the Carlos J. Finlay, Cuban Research Institute in 2002, Cuban official daily Granma reports. The Institute is widely known for its leading product: a vaccine for Meningitis B and C. (Prensa Latina, 23/1/03)

January 23: Cuba's National Assembly has rejected as unconstitutional the Varela Project, an opposition petition seeking political and economic reforms through a popular referendum, an aide to the assembly's president said. "The Constitution and Legal Affairs Committee carefully studied

the petition and decided not to move it forward because it went against the very foundation of the constitution, amongst other reasons," Miguel Alvarez, advisor to National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, told the press. "It has already been shelved", Alvarez added, in the first official declaration from the assembly that Cuba's one-chamber parliament considered the Varela Project dead. Alvarez could not detail the reasons the project was declared unconstitutional and referred questions to Jose Luis Toledo, committee president and dean of the University of Havana law school. A secretary at Toledo's office said he was out of town. Alvarez said the project's leader, dissident Oswaldo Payá, was informed of the decision last November. Payá was out of the country and not immediately available for comment. (Reuters, Sun Sentinel, 23,24/1/03)

January 23: A spokesman for the Varela Project said no formal response had been received from the National Assembly and the petition drive continues. "They have not given us a response. The Varela Project is going forward with thousands of citizens continuing to sign," Efrén Fernández, a member of the project's steering committee, told the press. [For more on this, see Chronicle on Cuba, December 2002.] (Reuters, 23/1/03)

January 23: Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, congratulated dissident leader Oswaldo Payá, for winning the Sakharov prize for freedom of expression, informed the catholic Cuban magazine Palabra Nueva. "On the occasion of your winning the Sakharov Prize, I wish to express to you my regards as a pastor of this archdiocese for your unwavering loyalty to Christ and His Church", read Ortega's letter. "As a lay Christian you have always followed your catholic consciousness in your actions, without depending on the Church but by assuming your responsibilities as a layperson and a Christian", continues the text. (Notimex, 23/1/03)

January 25: Cuba, after believing itself immune from the problem of drugs for many years, has now declared war on drug trafficking. A government campaign against the illegal use and trafficking of drugs in Cuba has intensified in recent days with the participation of the main social organizations and the island's mass media. A statement from the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), a state organization with more than seven million members in block-by-block watch groups around the island, said its members were "closing ranks" in the fight against drugs and the corruption associated with the illicit trade. (EFE, 26/1/03)

January 25: Forces of the Cuban Interior Ministry (MININT) arrested several citizens in Havana for links to drug traffic and consumption, according to a report in the local TV. The note, which was read in the prime time Cuban TV news report, did not mention the number of people arrested, nor the municipalities in Havana where the operation took place, which will continue "as long as necessary, to put an end to this phenomenon", as the note said. (Prensa Latina, 25/1/03)

January 27: Countless activities to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Cuba's National Hero José Martí are taking place across the island. Fidel Castro attended the opening of a sample of wax sculptures, paying tribute to the Cuban national hero. More than 20,000 students marched through the streets of downtown Havana in the traditional Torchlight March. Beginning at the University of Havana, the march ended with a huge rally attended by Raúl Castro, Second Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. The annual march was first held on this date 50 years ago, in 1953, when Fidel Castro and other university students and activists organized the event to commemorate the 100th anniversary of José Martí's birth and, at the same time, protest the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. (Radio Havana Cuba, 28/1/03)

January 28: More than 24,000 grade school students gathered at Havana's Plaza de la Revolución for a gigantic parade and cultural activity, complete with poetry readings, music and dancing. Schools and work centers across the island all held special activities to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Cuba's National Hero, José Martí, on January 28, 1853. (Radio Havana Cuba, 28/1/03)

January 28: The International Conference for World Equilibrium is taking place in Havana, with the participation of over 500 experts from more than 30 countries. Delegates to the meeting, underway at Havana's International Convention Center, are focussing on an analysis of culture and its present day challenges. Organized to coincide with the 150th anniversary of José Martí's birth, conference participants are also looking at the influence of Martí's thoughts and writings on culture and education. [For more on this, see sections Foreign Affairs and US-Cuba Relations.] (Radio Havana Cuba, 28/1/03)

January 28: Cuba's small farmers pledged to help fight the communist island's incipient drug problem, saying they will watch out for and report others who grow, sell or use narcotics in the countryside. While the government blamed the island's narcotics problem on foreigners who bring in drugs, the farmers' vow - in a letter published on the back of the Communist Party newspaper Granma - for the first time publicly raised the possibility that drugs are being grown in Cuba. The letter from the National Association of Small Farmers also acknowledged that drugs are now being shipped here specifically for use on the island, not just for temporary storage on their way to other countries. (AP, 28/1/03)

January 30: The 12th International Book Fair opened at the San Carlos de la Cabaña Fortress, Havana, in a ceremony attended by Fidel Castro, Latin American political and cultural personalities and diplomats accredited in Cuba. This year's forum is dedicated to the Andean community countries, represented by a comprehensive selection of its rich culture. The Fair also includes a strong literary and academic program plus a special tribute to Cuban poet, narrator and essayist Pablo Armando Fernández. (Prensa Latina, 1/2/03)

January 31: Fidel Castro attended the launching of a book entitled "Scarred Memories" about terrorist attacks against Cuba. The activity was held at the Havana's International Book Fair. (Radio Havana Cuba, 1/2/03)

Economy

January 1: Cuba's key tourism industry started the new year on a positive note as the cruise ship Sunbird sailed into Havana Bay with a record 1,414 passengers -- the largest single load of cruise passengers to visit the island. The towering ship arrived at Havana's cruise ship terminal and was to sail on to Cuba's smaller Island of Youth on its way to Grand Cayman, said a spokesman for the Silares terminal management firm. (AP, 1/1/03)

January 1: At the close of 2002, the biotechnology sector in Cuba had brought in over \$30 million -- a 10% increase over the previous year. (World Data Service, 1/1/03) **January 4:** More than 400,000 Canadians travelled to Cuba in 2001, up from 109,000 in 1994. "People come for sunshine and beaches," said Ibrahim Ferradaz Garcia, the minister of tourism for Cuba, "but many other Caribbean nations have great beaches." Garcia, in Ottawa to promote tourism, said he wants to diversify the reasons to visit Cuba. Garcia said he hopes that Cuban architecture, music, history, eco-tourism and scuba diving will also lure Canadians, and that it will become a popular spot for conventions. (Edmonton Journal, 4/1/03)

January 6: Glasgow's connection to Cuba's Caribbean heat was strengthened with the announcement of the first direct flights between the city and the island. The news follows last year's high-profile twinning between Glasgow and Havana and was hailed by Alex Mosson, the city's Lord Provost, as a sign of increasing links between Castro's Cuba and Jack McConnell's Scotland. (Scotsman.Com, 7/1/03)

January 7: Cuban Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro said the restructuring of the island's sugar industry was "going well," though the current harvest should prove "very difficult." Rosales del Toro said in an interview that the process of restructuring what was previously Cuba's top

industry "is a complex process, conducted at an also complex time." According to Rosales del Toro, the goal is to cut production costs to below \$0.035 per pound so as to be able to compete successfully on the international market. About 100,000 sugar workers have been laid off. "More than 94,000 workers have gone back to school. We should reach the goal of 100,000 very shortly," Rosales del Toro said. (EFE, 7/1/03)

January 8: The use of the Euro as an alternative to the US Dollar in two tourist facilities has been successful, said a Cuban government official. Last year, the European common currency began to circulate in Varadero, and it is also doing well Jardines del Rey. (AP, 8/1/02)

January 8: Cuba's 2002 foreign investment was over US \$1 billion, highlighted Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Minister Marta Lomas. During an evaluation held in the central Cuban City of Santa Clara, Lomas said the 24 new businesses established with other countries last year is a good indicator amidst economic difficulties. (Prensa Latina, 8/1/03)

January 8: A communique issued by Cuba's Foreign Ministry confirmed that imports of crude from Venezuela were cut off on December 2, due to the walkout declared by the managers of the state oil monopoly Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA), and only began to arrive again early this month. Among the damages suffered by the Cuban economy, the ministry mentioned the virtual shutdown of the oil refinery in Santiago de Cuba, 967 kms east of Havana, and the fact that the government was forced to purchase oil from intermediaries at a high cost. (Inter Press Service, 8/1/03)

January 14: Cuban leaders hope that the island's oil reserves will pull it from its economic crisis. Onshore wells already cover nearly half of Cuba's domestic fuel needs. Officials predict that next year's combined oil and natural gas production will jump 17 per cent to a record fuel output equalling 34.1m barrels, equivalent to 93,400 barrels a day. That production is due largely to foreign partnerships that help convert the heavy, sulphur-laden crude of Cuba's onshore wells into useable fuel. Three years ago, Cuban officials parcelled the island's 112,000 sq km exclusive economic area in the Gulf of Mexico into 59 leaseable blocks to attract foreign investment. Repsol-YPF, the Spanish company, optioned the first six offshore blocks between Havana and the resort city of Varadero. Sherritt International, the Canadian group, won rights to explore four adjacent blocks in what is becoming the centre of offshore attention. Pebercan, a third, French-Canadian concern developing Cuba's onshore reserves, has pinned its hopes on a 4,500 metre well in central Cuba that the group thinks may hold over 600m barrels of light crude. (The Financial Times, 14/1/03)

January 14: Cuba and China have signed an agreement to trade Cuban nickel. The agreement, signed by Miao Gengshu, director of China's Import and Export of Minerals and Metals Company, and Angel Roberto Fernández, Ministry for Basic Industry's director of Cubaniquel Managerial Group, was made at the opening of the 15th Inter-government Joint Commission. Other countries export nickel to China, but this agreement stipulates that our company will only import Cuba's product due to its excellent quality and price, assured Miao. (Prensa Latina, 14/1/03)

January 17: Cuba will continue working to promote investment that provides technology, markets and financial support in 2003, assured Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and Collaboration (MINVEC), Marta Lomas. (Prensa Latina, 17/1/03)

January 21: Fidel Castro opened the country's largest hotel on land claimed by a Cuban-American family, saying the socialist island was owned not by individuals but by all the people. "Cuba is not the private property of anyone," Castro said in a speech. The hotel site had been owned before 1959 by the Sanchez-Hill family, which now lives in the US. The family filed a claim under the US Helms-Burton law in 2000 against Spain's Sol Meliá company which it said planned to manage the hotel. Castro's presence, and the broadcast, showed the enormous importance

the government places on this new project in particular and tourism in general. Hotels in Holguín draw visitors primarily from Canada, Germany, Britain, Italy, France and Switzerland. (Reuters, AP, 21/1/03)

January 22: Sherritt International Corp. is proposing to swap its equity and debt for that of its struggling Cuban subsidiary to head off a cash crunch at the end of March. Sherritt Power Corp., in which Sherritt International holds a 49.7-per-cent stake, is scheduled to pay \$45-million to noteholders in March, but does not have enough cash to fulfill that obligation, Sherritt International spokesman Ernie Lalonde said. Delays in construction caused by the bankruptcy of a key supplier and a 2001 hurricane meant that Sherritt Power's debts came due before it was able to begin generating cash from natural gas plants in Cuba, Mr. Lalonde said. To avoid default, Sherritt International is proposing that the holders of debt and equity in Sherritt Power exchange their securities for Sherritt International equivalents. (The Globe and Mail, 23/1/03)

January 27: Marta Lomas, minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, informed that 2002 closed with 403 international economic associations in operations, out of which 82 are based abroad. Foreign partners with greatest participation remained: Spain (105), Canada (60) and Italy (57); 56% of the total corresponding to EU countries. Since opening to foreign investments 578 businesses have been created and 175 have been dissolved due to expiry of contracts and others causes. The total amount of foreign investments was \$5,930 million. (Granma, 28/1/03)

January 28: A bold experiment by Glenfiddich to mature whisky in old Cuban rum barrels has given the spirit too much of an island flavour for US officials, who have banned the Scotch for violating American restrictions on trade with Cuba. Glenfiddich Havana Reserve 21-year-old single-malt Scotch whisky, with an evocative fusion of flavours and culture, is arriving in Canada, where it is marketed with the slogan: "Politics hang heavily over this product." "The US position is unfortunate, but it does leave more for the rest of us," noted James Doherty, the rare-whisky manager at Glenfiddich. (The National Post, 28/1/03)

January 28: State-owned Cubaníquel is looking at expanding its "Che Guevara" plant to 50,000t/y nickel plus cobalt compared to last year's 31,500t, the company's director Angel Roberto Hernández told local business weekly Opciones. Hernández said the Pedro Sotto Alba plant could also be expanded to 50,000t from 2002's 33,000t of the metal. That plant is a 50:50 joint venture with Canadian company Sherritt International (TSX: S). (Bnamericas.Com, 28/1/03)

January 29: Business representatives from Great Britain are interested in Cuban oil, not only what could be extracted on the island's platform but in deep water as well, said in Havana Lord Colin Moynihan, the new president of the UK-Cuba Initiative, while in Havana. The initiative seeks to explore foster business opportunities in general. (World Data Service, 29/1/03)

January 30: Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous, headed a ceremony to mark the registration of the tugboat "Don Víctor Santín", which was purchased from the Cuban company Astilleros del Caribe (Asticar). The tugboat will be used in the port of Morelos, Quintana Roo, Mexico. (Notimex, 30/1/03)

January 30: The Government of Cuba confirmed to the cattle raising authorities of Uruguay's Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries (MGAP) the purchase of dairy products. Negotiations had begun prior to the break of diplomatic relation last year. (El País, 31/1/03)

Exile Community

January 6: The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) expressed its support for Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Payá, President of the Christian Liberation Movement. Mr. Payá met with Secretary Colin Powell. "Today's meeting with Secretary Powell is very encouraging. It sends a clear message that the Administration not only recognizes the diverse and growing dissident movement in Cuba, but is also committed to lending support to dissident efforts like Mr. Payá's Project Varela," said Jorge Mas, Chairman of the CANF. "Mr. Payá and the increasing numbers of courageous men and women in Cuba who struggle for the rights guaranteed by international law, yet systematically denied to the Cuban people by Fidel Castro's regime, are worthy not only of our recognition but now, more than ever, of our unwavering support. It is individuals like Mr. Payá that will play a critical role in helping to bring about a transition to democracy in Cuba," stated Mr. Mas. (PRNewsWire, 6/1/03)

January 6: While polls show that many Cuban-Americans support the Varela Project, the Cuban Liberty Council and some 10 small Cuban-American organizations issued a joint statement in Miami asserting that Oswaldo Payá's efforts are not viable. The groups said Payá and his supporters give legitimacy to Cuba's National Assembly, judiciary and communist system without explicitly demanding an end to the one-party state in Cuba. "We feel it is important to establish that Cuba's internal opposition is much larger, varied and extensive than Project Varela," said the statement, which was signed by groups representing Bay of Pigs veterans, physicians, former political prisoners and other exile groups. Those groups did not include the Cuban American National Foundation, the largest exile advocacy group. (The Miami Herald, 7/1/03)

January 6: A radio station in the American state of Florida has played a practical joke on President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela with a hoax phone call he believed was from his friend and ally, Fidel Castro. Two presenters at Radio El Zol, in Miami, called Chávez on a private line and used taped extracts of Castro's voice to make him think it was the communist leader himself on the phone. (BBC, 8/1/02)

January 8: Venezuela's government won't press charges "for now" against two Miami radio hosts who called President Hugo Chávez and used recordings of Fidel Castro to get him to believe he was talking to the Cuban leader, the foreign minister, Roy Chaderton, said. (AP, 8/1/03)

January 11: Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá, speaking at Georgetown University, said the island nation's exiles should not press property claims. Payá asked the Cuban exile community in the United States to dispel fears on the island that exiles might seek revenge or try to recover property and evict people living in the houses they lost in Cuba. "Reclaiming lost property makes no sense, at least at first, and I say 'at first' because later the free Cuban people will decide this democratically, keeping in mind what is good for the majority," he said. The Cuban dissident, who resides in Havana, said the Cubans living on the island and abroad have been "exiled" from their liberties, and that they must unite to "defend our vocation for freedom, under the sign of love." (EFE, 1/1/03)

January 13: The ex-wife of Juan Pablo Roque, a Cuban spy, placed the winning \$7,000 bid for a biplane that carried eight defectors to Key West from the communist nation, saying she hoped to sell the aircraft privately for more money. The auction was arranged by the Monroe County Sheriff's Office to help pay the \$27.1 million the Cuban government owes Ana Margarita Martínez, after she won a lawsuit in 2001. She said she decided to buy the aging Antonov AN-2 Colt because bids were below the plane's value. (AP, 13/1/03)

January 13: Luis Andrés Vargas Gómez, an economist, diplomat and anti-Castro activist who spent 21 years in Cuban prisons, has died of kidney failure. Vargas Gómez, the grandson of General Máximo Gómez, a hero of Cuba's wars for independence, died at his home in Coral Gables. (AP, 14/1/03)

January 13: With a message of unity and a call to action, Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas spent a hectic day in Miami urging Cuban Americans to support his Varela Project. He courted support from Miami's Cuban community, saying it will have an important role in his referendum and in the country's reconstruction after Fidel Castro. "The role of the exile community is important in whatever changes happen in Cuba, primarily because they are an inseparable part of the Cuban people," said Payá. "The [Cuban] reality is very complex, and solutions to it are as well," Payá said after meeting with several hundred prominent members of the Cuban American community. "It's important that we respect each other in diversity." "This is where the other half of the heart of the Cuban people is, and when a heart is divided, both parts suffer," Payá told the Miami Cuban Americans. "Help me. This is a task for all of us." (The Miami Herald, EFE, 14/1/03)

January 13: Ten exile organizations issued a joint statement expressing skepticism about the Varela Project. In contrast, Payá is a genuine "freedom fighter," said Joe Garcia, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, which is seen as the most influential of the exile organizations. Some Cuban Americans may dispute some of Payá's views, as Garcia does the dissident's call for an end to the long-standing US embargo on trade with Cuba. But there can be no doubt he is a "real hero," Garcia said. For Frank Calzon, executive director of the Center for a Free Cuba, Payá is a deep and courageous thinker on a par with the late Soviet dissident Andrei D. Sakharov, and merits serious attention. Cuban-American Republican Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, representing South Florida, suggested Payá, who has been jailed in his homeland for his activism and continues to suffer harassment there, is playing into the hands of the Fidel Castro regime. "If the Cuban government should accept the Varela Project and permit, for instance, dissident representatives, this would be interpreted internationally as an illusion of openness," Diaz-Balart said. "And this is precisely what Castro wants." Other Cuban Americans wondered if the fact that Payá was allowed to travel meant he was in accord with Castro, or being used to give a more human face to the only communist-ruled country in the Western Hemisphere. (Los Angeles Times, EFE, 14/1/03)

January 14: Cuban exile organizations plan to place nearly 13,000 crosses in a Miami park in memory of those whose deaths they attribute directly to the Castro regime. The crosses, white and nearly three feet high, will bear the names of the victims as well as the dates and places of their deaths. According to the promoters of the Cuban Memorial, the dead represented are those who were executed, murdered without trial or disappeared, and those who died in prisons, in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and attempting to flee the island. According to organizers, the project was made possible through the support of more than 30 exile groups. (EFE, 14/1/03)

January 17: Building on a decades-old cultural bond, Florida's Cuban and Venezuelan exiles have formed a political alliance countering Fidel Castro's friendship with Hugo Chávez, underscored by an ambitious anti-Chávez protest in Southwest Miami. "It's a battle for democracy. Castro helps Chávez. We help Venezuelans. It's a parallel alliance against dictators with a military base who are leftist," said Felipe Fontanills, president of the Junta Patriótica Cubana and a chief organizer of the march. (The Miami Herald, 17/1/03)

January 17: José Basulto, founder of Brothers to the Rescue, celebrated a small victory when he won a default judgment against Fidel Castro and the Cuban government in a suit filed over the 1996 shoot-down of two Brothers to the Rescue planes by Cuban MiGs. The lawsuit never went to trial. Basulto won because neither Castro nor his legal representative responded to the legal action. Basulto's blue Cessna was the only one of three planes to return to the Opa-locka Airport Feb. 24, 1996, after Cuban warplanes shot down two other aircraft belonging to the search-and-rescue organization. Four men -- Armando Alejandro Jr., Carlos Costa, Mario de la Peña and Pablo Morales -- were killed in the attack. (The Miami Herald, 24/1/03)

January 21: A group that advocates the forceful overthrow of Cuba's communist government claims that anti-Castro operatives in Cuba pulled off an assassination attempt on a Cuban spy. Rodolfo Frómeta, director of Comandos F-4, a Miami-based paramilitary organization, said

members of the group in Cuba tried to assassinate Juan Pablo Roque early in December in Havana. Roque was wounded during a shootout, which killed one member of Comandos F-4 and a man accompanying Roque, Frómeta said. Roque is a target of the militants because they think he is responsible for the 1996 shutdown by Cuban MiGs of two Brothers to the Rescue Cessnas, in which four Cuban-Americans on board died. Roque, a Cuban spy who joined Brothers to the Rescue in an undercover operation, returned to Cuba the day before the shutdown. "I have never said that I order assassinations from here," said Frómeta, who said he is the highest-ranking member of the organization in the US. The FBI declined comment. (The Sun Sentinel, 22/1/03)

January 24: Painter Hugo Consuegra, who in the 1950s helped spark a movement of abstract expressionism in Cuba, died of cancer at his home in Rego Park, New York. He was 73. Consuegra was born in Havana. He studied at the Academia de San Alejandro, and graduated from the University of Havana as an architect. In 1953, he became one of the founding members of The Eleven, a group he described in a recent interview as "young artists attempting forms of expression different from the Havana school represented by René Portocarrero, Mario Carreño and others." (The Miami Herald, 28/1/03)

January 26: A group representing several moderate Miami organizations met with officials in Havana to voice their recommendations for topics to be included in the agenda of the third "Nation and Emigration" conference to be held in April. Conference organizer Benigno Pérez said the event will bring together Cubans from as close as Miami and Mexico and as far away as Australia, with a special emphasis on second and third generation Cuban Americans. "We felt it was important before we came over for that conference that our point of view was heard," said Alfredo Duran, a Miami lawyer and Bay of Pigs veteran. "We feel there's a serious effort at establishing dialogue and getting input from the Cuban community outside. This process did not occur during the last two conferences." The Cuban American National Foundation has denounced the event as "a chorus, not a conference." "These conferences could be helpful if they brought up real issues, not a debate between handpicked people overwhelmed by apologists for the regime," said Joe Garcia, the foundation's spokesman. (Sun Sentinel, 26/1/03)

January 27: Antonio "Tony" Calatayud, a prominent Cuban exile activist and longtime AM radio personality, has been arrested on charges that he bilked the state out of more than \$290,000 in Medicaid prescriptions that were never filled, officials said. Calatayud remained in the Miami-Dade County Jail. (The Miami Herald, 27/1/03)

January 28: A dedication ceremony for the Roberto C. Goizueta Pavilion, the new home of the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection, took place close to the Otto G. Richter Library. The 10,000-square-foot space on the second floor of the library is named after the late Goizueta, the Cuban-born CEO of Coca-Cola Co. The Cuban Heritage Collection includes materials documenting the Cuban exile and Cuban-American experience as well as the largest repository of cultural Cuban materials outside of Cuba. (Sun Sentinel, 28/1/03)

January 31: In a bid to participate in Cuba's political future, exile leader Jorge Mas Santos offered to discuss a democratic transition on the island with any of three specific Cuban government officials, eliciting mixed but emotional reactions from Cuban Americans. Though Mas Santos excluded Fidel and Raúl Castro from the list and has not made an official move to open a dialogue, it was the first time the Cuban American National Foundation chairman has publicly named Cuban officials with whom he is willing to talk -- a very public signal that Cuban exiles are staking a claim in a future political transition. Mas Santos -- the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, CANF's founder -- said he was ready to sit down and talk to Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon or Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. "They're the face of the regime now," Mas Santos said. "The fact that we have named these individuals is for them to know that in a change toward a democratic and free Cuba, they also have a place." (The Miami Herald, 31/1/03)

January 31: Cuba might drastically change its migration policies this year, eliminating many of the entry/exit obstacles that affect Cubans on the island as well as those residing abroad. During a meeting of Cuban Americans that this took place in Miami, the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, said via radio that would be one of the topics to be dealt with at the meeting that will take place with émigrés in April. Among the complaints of Cubans residing abroad is the 'entry permit' they require to visit the island. They are also asking for an increase in the weight of goods allowed to be brought into Cuba from its current maximum allowance of 20kg plus 10kg of medicines. (Radio Miami, 1/2/03)

Foreign Affairs

January 1: President Abdelaziz Buteflika, expressed Algeria's solidarity with Cuba "no matter what" in a message addressed to Fidel Castro on the occasion of Cuba's independence day. (EFE, 1/1/03)

January 1: Eighty-seven Cuban doctors are expected to arrive in Zambia this year, disclosed Cuban embassy charge d'affairs Carmelina Rodriguez. Rodriguez said the long awaited doctors would finally be in the country as the Cuban and Zambian governments had now finalised everything. She said the Zambian government had committed itself to meeting the conditions required for the Cuban doctors to work in Zambia. "The Zambian government also agreed to pay for the air tickets for them to come," Rodriguez said. (All Africa Global Media, 1/1/03)

January 2: Fidel Castro met with members of Brazilian President Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva's cabinet. Accompanied by writer and priest Frei Betto, the leader of the Cuban Revolution spoke with Brazilian Minister of Education Cristobal Buarque, whose ministry's priority will be to guarantee access to education for the 19 million children who are not attending school. Fidel Castro also met with Health Minister Humberto Costa and Food Security Minister Jose Gracian, who is in charge of putting into practice the program "Hambre Cero" (Zero Hunger). (Prensa Latina, 3/1/03)

January 7: South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana C. Dlamini-Zuma concluded her visit to Cuba, after being decorated with the Friendship Medal and meeting top officials. Dlamini-Zuma met with her Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. Both ministers expressed their willingness to strengthen historic ties between the two peoples. (Prensa Latina, 7/1/03)

January 7: The family of a Canadian man languishing in a Cuban jail was waiting at the prison's gates, frightened and worried over the oilfield worker's health as he enters his second week of taking neither food nor drink. "Physically he's doing horrible," said Perry King's sister Carmen Frunchak. "Mentally, I was told by my doctor it could be called dehydration deliriousness where he goes in and out of very bad mood swings." King, 40, has been held since the summer on accusations of sexual contact with a minor, but he has never been charged and no trial is in sight. The hunger strike, his second since being arrested, is an attempt to get some action on his case. Cuban officials detained King in August to investigate allegations he had sexual contact with a minor about two years ago, but his family says he is innocent. Under Cuban law, King can be held in jail indefinitely until an investigation is complete or a trial scheduled. That's standard practice in Cuba, said the spokesman of Canada's foreign affairs Reynald Doiron. Canadian officials in Cuba are in almost daily contact with prison officials regarding King, Doiron said. (Canadian Press, 7/1/02)

January 8: Japan and the United Nations have donated more than \$1 million to support AIDS control and prevention system on the island, considered by many international health authorities as one of the most effective in the world. According to a dispatch from Tokyo, the donation was channelled through the UN Human Security Fund and is aimed at reinforcing control and prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). (World Data Service, 8/1/03)

January 8: Dissident leader Oswaldo Payá greeted John Paul II at the end of a general audience at the Vatican. Payá, founder of the Christian Liberation Movement, spoke with the Pope and regarded his meeting as a "symbolic message to the Cuban people and the Cuban Church to which a belong." "More could not be expected from an unplanned visit", said Payá, who referred to his brief contact with the Pope as "very positive." (EFE, 8/1/03)

January 8: Fidel Castro has awarded the medal of friendship to Colonel of Staff Dr al Mutasim Bilah Muammar al Qathafi, the son of Muammar al Qathafi, the Syrian Leader. The decoration ceremony was attended by Raúl Castro, General Commander of the Armed Forces and Defense Minister, as well as high officers of the Cuban armed forces. (Jamahiriya News Agency, 8/1/03)

January 9: Cuba blasted critics of a controversial oil agreement with Venezuela, insisting it was no give-away, as the first crude arrived from the South American country since a general strike began there on December 2. The Foreign Ministry characterized as a "gross fascist lie," charges by those trying to oust Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez that the World's No. 5 oil exporter sells Cuba cheap crude to prop-up the communist-run Caribbean island. (Reuters, 9/1/03)

January 9: Princess Cruise PLC's official endorsement of Carnival Corp.'s \$5.22bn takeover bid will eventually mean the end of the company's winter trips to Cuba. The London firm will now have to "comply with US laws relating to doing business with Cuba," according to Carnival representative Tim Gallagher. The ship's Cuban voyages will end in March, which is the same time the Miami-based firm takes full control of the sea liner. (Wall Street Journal, 9/1/03)

January 12: The Governor of the Brazilian state of Acre, Jorge Viana, is on a visit in Havana exploring new business opportunities with the island. "I have come to meet several ministers, particularly in the areas of health, sports and education as well as to visit economic and tourist sites of interest", said Viana to the press. (World Data Service, 12/1/03)

January 12: The inhabitants of five Tawahka Indian communities who live southeast of the Rio Platano Biosphere, in Honduras, were provided with electricity and television at the end of last year, thanks to a donation by the Cuban government. Fidel Castro sent the tribe five solar panels for generating electricity, three computers, televisions, educational programs and animated videos, as well as some 1,000 children's toys. (EFE, 12/1/03)

January 12: A Cuban TV news broadcast showed Venezuela's President, Hugo Chávez, standing up at a public rally for what he calls the unselfish support that Cuba gives to Venezuela in areas like public health. "We sell oil to Cuba under the same conditions we sell it to other Caribbean nations, we are not giving her anything for free, we rather do get a lot free from Cuba", added Chávez. He referred to the free medical attention that Cuba provides to ill Venezuelans, "even paying for accompanying relatives, for which I am very grateful to Commander Fidel," he pointed out. (World Data Service, 13/1/03)

January 13: Cuban Professor Yuri L. Rangel died in a plane crash in the Amazonian region. Rangel arrived in Peru to participate as an expert in a training course for Peruvian teachers organized by the Peruvian Teaching Department. (Prensa Latina, 13/1/03)

January 13: Fidel Castro met with visiting Chinese Trade and Economic Cooperation Minister Shi Guangsheng. Castro and his Chinese visitor discussed the economic situation on the island, as well as the recent measures taken in Cuba's sugar industry to increase efficiency and production. (Radio Havana Cuba, 14/1/03)

January 14: A training course for 17 future African baseball coaches was launched in Havana. The students are from 12 African countries and most of them have previous baseball experience. (EFE, 14/1/03)

January 14: Leading Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá met with Mexican President Vicente Fox and other political leaders with the aim of rallying support for his efforts to bring about democratic changes on the island. Fox praised the Varela Project and reiterated the commitment of his government to "defending human rights on the island and anywhere in the world". (EFE, Proceso, 14,18/1/03)

January 14: Fidel Castro arrived in Quito to attend the inaugural ceremony of Lucio Gutierrez as the next President of Ecuador. (Prensa Latina, 14/1/03)

January 15: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá met with Jorge Castañeda and praised the outgoing Mexican foreign relations secretary for his often critical stance toward the Cuban government. Payá said Mexico's policy toward Cuba "should continue growing in the direction of recognizing diverse sectors of Cuban society -- which I believe has been thwarted by barriers put up by the Cuban government." (AP, 15/1/03)

January 16: Fidel Castro participated in a breakfast offered by his counterpart Lucio Gutiérrez for public figures attending the Ecuadorian president's inauguration. Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo and Ecuadorian vice president Alfredo Palacios were also present. Shortly afterward, the leader of the Cuban Revolution met at his hotel with several Ecuadorian indigenous leaders including Ecuadorian Confederation of Indigenous Nations president Leonidas Iza, Pachakutik National Coordinator Miguel Llucio, and Ricardo Ulcuango, a deputy from the Pachakutik movement. (Prensa Latina, 16/1/03)

January 16: Leaders of President Vicente Fox's conservative National Action Party (PAN) lauded Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, comparing his push for nonviolent change in Cuba with their own long effort for true multiparty democracy in Mexico. "The struggle of Oswaldo Payá without doubt is a struggle that is very similar (...) to that of National Action," said Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, president of the PAN. (The Miami Herald, 16/1/02)

January 16: Cuba and the Brazilian state of Acre signed three agreements strengthening bilateral economic, technical-scientific, and social cooperation. (Prensa Latina, 16/1/03)

January 16: Cuba and China signed in Havana an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, under which China provides a 6-million-US dollar grant to help with Cuba's education. Chinese Foreign Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng and Cuban State Minister Ricardo Cabrisas signed the agreement at the end of a joint economic and commercial session between the two countries. Chinese and Cuban firms also signed contracts on China's purchase of Cuban nickel and sugar, and a letter of intention on Chinese investment in Cuba. (People's Daily Online, 16/1/03)

January 16: The international department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea hosted a friendly meeting at Pyongyang Koryo Hotel on the occasion of the New Year. Invited to the meeting were Esteban Lobaina Romero, Cuban Ambassador to the DPRK, and staff members of the Cuban embassy. (KCNA, 17/1/03)

January 17: In Havana, the 200 participants attending the second Regional Conference to Control Drugs in the Caribbean are concluding with a call to unify efforts in the anti-drug fight. Representatives from international organizations, like Interpol, countries including Canada, Britain and Spain, and the US Coast Guard, are participating in the Conference. (Prensa Latina, 17/1/03)

January 17: Fidel Castro called on the island's delegation to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to denounce what he termed the "fascist aggression against the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela". Speaking during a televised Round Table program, Castro praised the social forum and the importance of the Cuban delegation's participation in the event. A large

delegation headed by Cuban Communist Party official, Jose Ramón Balaguer and Culture Minister Abel Prieto will participate in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. (Radio Havana Cuba, 18/1/03)

January 18: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, closed Havana's 2nd Regional Conference on Drug Control in the Caribbean and reiterated the island's willingness to continue fighting drug trafficking. (Radio Havana Cuba, 18/1/03)

January 18: The special envoy of Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Michael P. C. Cheok, expressed the intention of favoring an exchange with Cuba on biotechnology, when highlighting the Island's scientific development. Cheok expressed this interest to Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, to whom he talked about a number of mutual international interests. (Prensa Latina, 18/1/03)

January 19: Fidel Castro believes that the group of countries called "Friends of Venezuela" would be an interventionist and supranational body that would pass over a legally constituted government, that of Hugo Chávez. During a talk to national and foreign press Castro said that the Group would be working under the aegis of the "rulers of the world", that is, the United States. (World Data Service, 19/1/03)

January 21: Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Euro-American Affairs Ali Ahani arrived in Havana for a three-day official visit at the invitation of the Cuban deputy foreign minister for the Middle East and Africa affairs. Ahani is to confer with Cuban officials on expansion of mutual cooperation during his visit to the country. Prior to Ahani's visit to Cuba, Iran's Ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrisiyan conferred with the Cuban Education Minister on expansion of educational cooperation between the two countries. (IRNA, 22/1/03)

January 21: Cuba wants the 114 member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to find ways to enhance cooperation in trade, economy, politics and other relevant fields. This was conveyed by Cuban Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Abelardo Moreno, to Deputy Foreign Minister, Datuk Dr Leo Micheal Toyad when visiting Wisma Putra. Asked if Fidel Castro would attend the 13th NAM Summit to be held in February, Toyad said that it has yet to be confirmed. (Bernama, 21/1/03)

January 22: Bolivian Minister of Education, Isaac Maidana, stressed the importance of Cuban collaboration with his country after announcing a contest for 65 new scholarships to study medicine on the island. (Prensa Latina, 22/1/03)

January 22: Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Minister, Seyoum Mesfin, concluded a four-day stay in Cuba. Mesfin met with Cuban officials to evaluate and strengthen bilateral relations. The two countries will enhance bilateral projects in industry, construction, trade, education, investment, health, agriculture and engineering sectors. (BBC, Prensa Latina, 22, 28/1/03)

January 22: President Vaclav Havel met in Prague Castle with Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, presidential spokesman Ladislav Spacek told the press. Payá, who was invited to Prague by the humanitarian organisation People in Need, will also meet with other public officials, such as the chairmen of the Chamber of Deputies, Lubomir Zaoralek, and the Senate, Petr Pithart. Havel endorsed Payá as worthy candidate for the Nobel peace award. (EFE, 23/1/03)

January 23: Arrangements are in top gear to have the Nigerian contingent for the 8th All Africa Games to embark on a training tour of Cuba. The training tour, which has been designed to expose the athletes to modern facilities and the technical assistance of Cuban experts in various sports, is to involve coaches and athletes in all sports that Nigeria will compete for medals at the games. (Daily Trust, 23/1/03)

January 23: Cuba has formally filed its request to join the Cotonu Agreement -- a cooperation accord between the European Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group. According to Cuban diplomats in Brussels, official letters were given to the Council of Ministers of the ACP Group and the European Union. Countries that form part of the Cotonu Agreement receive preferential treatment from their former European colonial powers. (Radio Havana Cuba, 23/1/03)

January 23: Speaker of Slovakia's Parliament Pavol Hrusovsky received distinguished Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas in Bratislava. The meeting was attended by head of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee Laszlo Nagy, and head of the ruling Christian Democrat (KDH) caucus Frantisek Miklosko. Payá told journalists after the meeting that "our goal is, as it was with the Slovak people in the past, to have a right for the rule of law". (TASR, 23/1/03)

January 23: A delegation of Mexican legislators is in the Cuban capital to participate in the International Conference on World Balance, organized on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Cuban National Hero José Martí's birth. The visiting delegation is headed by the president of the Executive Board of the Mexican Parliament, Eric Villanueva, who met with Ricardo Alarcón, President of the Cuban Parliament. (Radio Havana Cuba, 25/1/03)

January 24: Health authorities in the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas have announced that Cuban medical teams might be coming to the region to offer health care to indigenous communities. A Health Secretariat spokesman told the press that a Cuban Health Ministry delegation had been in the state since last week "touring Indian communities to assess their major health problems." The delegation, made up of four experts headed by Cuban Deputy Health Minister Gonzalo Estévez, is evaluating health needs to determine the number and type of physicians that would be required in Chiapas. (EFE, 25/1/03)

January 24: Slovakia's current prime minister, its speaker of parliament and a former president are among the public figures who think that Cuban human rights campaigner Oswaldo Payá deserves to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Radio reports said Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda, former president Michal Kovac and parliamentary speaker Pavol Hrusovsky all support the idea of Nobel recognition for Payá, who has been in Bratislava for talks with political leaders. (EFE, 24/1/03)

January 27: The UN high commissioner for human rights has appointed a Frenchwoman to monitor the degree to which Cuba fulfills the world body's recommendation that it improve respect for human rights on the island. The appointment of French Supreme Court Justice, Christine Chanet, is the result of a decision adopted last April by the UN Human Rights Commission, said High Commissioner Sergio Vieira de Mello. An expert in criminal law, Chanet was the first woman appointed to head the UN Human Rights Committee. Chanet is to present a report on basic human rights in Cuba at the upcoming session of the commission. Cuba has never allowed a UN human rights envoy to visit the country and has not granted independent inspections of its prisons since 1989. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (EFE, AFP, 27/1/03)

January 27: Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell re-iterated the UK's support for Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá's project for peaceful political change. Bill Rammell met the Nobel Peace Prize nominee in London. Mr Rammell said: "I want to congratulate Oswaldo Payá for encouraging political, economic and civil freedoms in his home country of Cuba in a peaceful way through the Varela Project. Mr Payá and I discussed today how the UK's policy of constructive engagement with Cuba can help to achieve a better human rights record and peaceful democratic change. "The UK continues to support the Varela Project. We and the EU continue to urge the Cuban Administration to recognise the project and publish a response." (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 27/1/03)

January 30: The signing of an agreement between representatives from Cuba and the European Commission (EC) to establish an European Union (EU) office in Havana was confirmed by Cuban Embassy adviser to Belgium, Vilma Reyes. Reyes said that EC Foreign Affairs director, Guy Legras, and Cuban Ambassador to the EU, Rodrigo Malmierca, were present in Brussels for the signing of the document. Malmierca recently explained that the EU office will be led by a charge d'affairs, who arrive in Cuba in early February. (Prensa Latina, 30/1/03)

January 30: With Cuban collaboration, Grenada has opened a 270-bed hospital that will allow patients to undergo complicated operations, such as double bypass surgery, previously unavailable on the island. The four-story building has five operating theaters, a recovery room, an intensive care unit and a medical and surgical ward. (AP, 31/1/03)

January 30: Fidel Castro called for the use of ideas and the raising of consciousness to face the sophisticated, destructive weapons that intend to submit humanity to an unjust, irrational and unsustainable economic and social order. At the close of the three-day international conference for World Equilibrium, held in Havana, Fidel Castro affirmed to the academicians from 40 nations that there is no military arsenal powerful enough to halt the course of history. The Head of State asserted that the great power centers, particularly the United States, would not be able to use its powerful weapons to eliminate billions of people because they provide the world's riches. [See also Domestic Affairs.] (Prensa Latina, 30/1/03)

January 31: Representatives of Masonic lodges from over 10 countries of Latin America and Europe are meeting in Havana to pay homage to José Martí, who was one of its most prominent members. This year marks the 150th anniversary of Martí's birth. (AFP, 31/1/03)

January 31: Dominican President, Hipólito Mejía, received in his Santo Domingo's residence Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá. Payá was accompanied by U.S. Ambassador to that country, Hans Hertell. President Mejía praised the Cuban dissident for "carrying Cuba to an atmosphere of respect and democracy". (EFE, 2/2/03)

Terrorism

January 4: Spain has not yet received a formal reply from the Cuban government regarding its request that the island stops harbouring members of the terrorist group ETA, according to statements at a press conference by Spain's Foreign Minister, Ana Palacio. (AFP, 4/1/03)

January 16: The president of Cuba's parliament says that the sale in Florida of a small plane taken from the island by a defector was just the latest example of the United States aiding and abetting terrorism. "The sale (...) is another demonstration of the US authorities' engagement with anti-Cuban terrorism," Ricardo Alarcon said at a Havana news conference. (Reuters, 16/1/03)

January 17: Cuban Parliament president Ricardo Alarcón has revealed that information on terrorism that Havana delivered to the US's FBI in 1998 had been gathered by five Cubans wrongly accused and convicted of spying against the US government - and the five were arrested shortly after the information was made available. The documents contained information on terrorism carried out against Cuba by the Cuban American National Foundation and its leaders who provided funding while at the same time coordinating such acts. (Radio Havana Cuba, 17/1/03)

January 19: The Cuban government has released a list of people it calls terrorists, most of them living in Miami. The list, containing 64 names, was released by the Cuban Government and printed in the state controlled newspapers. On it are the names of persons the Cuban Government regards as terrorists -- people who have participated in actions against the island in attempts to topple the Castro government. (NBCNews, 21/1/03)

US-Cuba Relations

January 2: Cuba allowed 905 US students to visit during the 2000-01 school year, a 64 percent increase over the year before. The number is expected to grow the next time figures are released as students increasingly turn to the only communist nation in the Western Hemisphere. "It's sort of forbidden fruit," said University of Nebraska senior Shane Pekny, part of a contingent of 12 communications majors who will visit Cuba this month. (AP, 2/1/03)

January 3: The Bush administration brushed aside suggestions that Brazil's new leftist president is ready to form an alliance with leaders from Venezuela and Cuba. Responding to the suggestion of an axis unfriendly to the United States being formed, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said, "Let's get serious. These are three different leaders with different nations and different interests." "We have an excellent relationship with Brazil, and we look forward to building on that relationship," Boucher said. He also said both Venezuela and Brazil share the democratic values enshrined in hemispheric agreements. In contrast, he said, "Cuba remains a stark exception to those values." (AP, 3/1/02)

January 4: A survey of dissidents living in Cuba shows an overwhelming majority like the news they hear on America's Radio Martí, but barely half believe the broadcast service to the communist-controlled island represents Cuban society. The survey, conducted by a group called the Cuba Commission, involved secret interviews with 343 Cubans, and some of the survey results were withheld because the commission said survey participants feared retribution by the government of Fidel Castro. Cuba Commission officials said in a statement that 93 percent of those surveyed think Radio Martí's Cuba and foreign news is "credible" and has the "right focus." But, the dissidents were more closely split on the question of whether Radio Martí represents Cuban society. Fifty-two percent said Radio Martí well represented Cuban society while 40 percent said it did not completely represent Cuban society. The remaining eight percent said it did not represent Cuban society at all. (CNSNews, 7/1/03)

January 4: Trade between the Tampa Bay area and Cuba was slated to resume after 40 years with a shipment of animal feed bound for the southern Cuban port of Cienfuegos. The shipment of 3,150 metric tons of dicalcium phosphate will take less than three days aboard the 330-foot vessel Frigga. (AP, 4/1/03)

January 5: The new head of the US Interest Section in Havana, James Cason, helped set the tone for US policy toward Cuba at a time when the Bush administration and Congress are increasingly split on the fate of the four-decade-old economic sanctions and travel ban. "This is a 'Freddy the Freeloader' economy," he said of Cuba's poor credit rating, warning American business executives not to seek financing for food sales to Cuba, which are now legal on a cash-only basis. He argues an end to the travel ban will not lead to democratic reforms, but rather bolster Cuba's faltering economy with much-needed tourist dollars. "Europeans have been coming here for decades," Cason said. "So if tourists are supposed to have some impact on the political system I say where's the proof?" (Sun Sentinel, 5/1/03)

January 6: During 2002, the US Coast Guard intercepted 931 Cubans at sea, the highest number since 1999. Actions against human smugglers doubled compared to the previous year. "The Attorney's Office has been at its busiest time since stricter actions were taken against smugglers of Cubans", said Jacqueline Becerra, spokeswoman of the City of Miami's Attorney's Office. However, during the fiscal year 2002 –which closed on September 31– the Coast Guard Patrol reported the arrival of 1,335 Cubans. (El Nuevo Herald, 6/1/03)

January 6: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, who captained an island-wide pro-democracy petition drive last year, said change in Cuba can come about only from within the country, not from outside forces. Payá, speaking to reporters after a morning meeting with Secretary of State

Colin Powell, said his campaign crossed an important threshold even though it did not bring about his objective of a national referendum to ensure the protection of human rights. He said he discussed the US embargo against Cuba with Powell, affirming his view that he does not see that four-decade old measure as a "factor for change" on the island. The Cuban people seek from the United States and other countries "solidarity and moral support," Payá said. "It's important to de-Americanize the problems of Cuba," he added. "We must bring change about through our own means." (The Washington Post, 7/1/03)

January 6: US Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed admiration for Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá, after a closed-door meeting with the renowned dissident. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the meeting enabled Powell "to hear directly from courageous people who are involved in trying to bring about peaceful democratic change in Cuba and to offer our support and encouragement." (EFE, 6/1/03)

January 8: A pair of Key West boaters were arrested by Cuban authorities for allegedly carrying 600 pounds of marijuana inside their sailboat and are now awaiting prosecution, authorities said. Kevin Bolman and Duane Townson were arrested after Cuban border officials who boarded their 36-foot sailboat, Dulcinia, allegedly found 221 bales of marijuana, US Coast Guard spokesman Luis Diaz said. (AP, 9/1/03)

January 9: The White House announced that President Bush will nominate Roger F. Noriega, the US representative to the Organization of American States, to be assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs. Mr. Noriega will replace Otto J. Reich, whose own nomination to be assistant secretary was blocked by Senate Democrats in 2001 and who served in the position under a temporary "recess appointment" that expired in November. (The New York Times, 10/1/03)

January 8: Cuba will continue to purchase US agricultural products for cash at current levels of expenditures, but will not increase purchases unless there are "significant changes" in US law, Dagoberto Rodriguez Barrera, the chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington told the press. Rodriguez Barrera said it is Cuba's "intention to keep buying" at current levels, "but for significant increases we will need to see significant changes" in US law such as "trade financing or lifting the travel ban." (DTN, 8/1/03)

January 11: A group of 19 Cubans landed on the Florida coast. US authorities have arrested two individuals under suspicions of having smuggled them into the US. (EFE, 11/1/03)

January 12: Cuban importers began an inspection visit of North Carolina food producers as the communist country tries to expand trade ties for American agricultural goods. There are characteristics of the crops that we don't have in Cuba," said Máximo R. Martínez Rodríguez, director of vegetable and fruit quarantine for the Cuban government. "It is our intent to adjust the regulations to avoid diseases." Mike Blanton, a deputy state agriculture commissioner, said North Carolina hopes to increase the sale of agricultural products to Cuba. "We can be competitive," said Blanton. "It's a country close to us and offers the Cubans a savings in transportation costs." (AP, 12/1/03)

January 13: Chucho Valdés, whose jazz piano concert at University of North Carolina was canceled last fall because of visa difficulties under new federal security guidelines, will perform on campus after all. The Cuban Grammy award-winning musician's concert originally scheduled for October will be held in February in the Hill Hall Auditorium. (The Herald Sun, 13/1/03)

January 14: United States Senator Maria Cantwell (Democrat-Washington) will lead a delegation of food and agribusiness executives from the State of Washington and will speak at the US-Cuba Business Conference being held in Cancun and Havana in February. The US-Cuba Business

Conference is the third major business event involving talks about trade with Cuba to take place in the last year. (PRNewswire, 14/1/03)

January 14: There are now a total of 108 committees in 51 countries around the world, organized to work for the immediate release of five Cubans that belonged to the Wasp Net. According to the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People (ICAP), Spain, Mexico and the United States are the countries with the largest number of groups to "Free the Five". (Radio Havana Cuba, 14/1/03)

January 15: Cuba is on a path to continue its current communist system even after the death of Fidel Castro, a panel of scholars and specialists agreed. Given the Cuban government's preparations, people in the United States who want to see Cuba make the transition to a different form of government must begin preparing now, Cuba scholar Jaime Suchlicki said. (Sun Sentinel, 16/1/03)

January 16: The US people would benefit most benefited if an agreement between Cuba and the US to fight drug trafficking is signed, confirmed Cuban minister of Justice Roberto Díaz Sotolongo. The signing of an agreement would also include advantages for the Caribbean, affected by the trafficking of drugs to the US and Europe, the world's main markets, Díaz told the press. (Prensa Latina, 16/1/03)

January 16: Members of the Center for National Policy (CNP) Cuba Policy Advisory Group heads to Cuba. The bipartisan group, led by former Ambassador to Mexico, James R. Jones, consists of individuals with special knowledge of the politics and a personality at play in US-Cuba policy and includes representatives from the business and academic world. The group has representatives from different areas -geographical, occupational, and political and includes individuals with knowledge of substantive issues specific to the U.S.-Cuba relationship, such as drug policy, national security, and travel/tourism. (Center For National Policy, 16/1/03)

January 16: President Bush has suspended for another six months a provision in a 1996 law that would allow legal action against foreign firms using confiscated US properties in Cuba. Mr. Bush formally notified Congress of his decision to again suspend the Title III provision in the 1996 Helms-Burton act. The president said the waiver is necessary in the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba. (VOANews, 17/1/03)

January 17: Cuba's highest-ranking diplomat in Washington did some important networking in Tampa. Dagoberto Rodríguez Barrera, head of Cuba's Interest Section in Washington, held a round of informal meetings with business people, including a number with ties to the port and local agricultural interests. (St. Petersburg Times, 17/1/03)

January 17: US Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, sent a message to Cuban dissident Oscar Elías Biscet, praising him for his "fight for the freedom of Cuba" and calling for his "immediate release from prison". (EFE, 18/1/03)

January 19: Mel Martínez, United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who fled to the U.S. with other Cuban refugee children as part of Operation "Pedro Pan", believes that the Varela Project is a commendable effort and the most important step taken by Cuba's internal opposition to achieve significant changes on the island. (EFE, 19/1/03)

January 18: Senate Republicans, flexing their new political muscle on Capitol Hill, have quietly killed language in a sweeping spending bill that would have effectively ended the ban on American travel to Cuba. The full House and the Senate Appropriations Committee voted last year to stop funding enforcement of the 40-year-old ban, a move that would have permitted Americans to travel freely to the communist state. But the Senate never finished its 2003 spending bills, and when senators wrapped all the unfinished appropriations measures into an

omnibus package the language lifting the travel ban had been removed, according to the offices of Senator Byron Dorgan, Democrat of North Dakota, and several other lawmakers who scanned the bill. (The Boston Globe, 18/1/03)

January 20: A group from the University of Alabama will arrive in Cuba, looking for ways to open relations with the small island nation. The group is made up mostly of deans and professors, who will meet with their counterparts at the University of Havana. The payoff is hoped to be a series of academic exchanges between the two universities and shared ideas about academics and economics. (TuscaloosaNews.Com, 18/1/03)

January 22: Cuba is gaining growing attention from US students looking to study overseas. More than 905 US students were granted permission from the US government to study in Cuba during the 2000-01 academic year, a 64 percent increase over the previous year. This number is expected to continue to rise as the number of interested students increases. (The Badger Herald, 22/1/03)

January 23: A bipartisan advisory group, which includes voices from prominent Miami Cuban Americans, issued a report calling for the Bush Administration, Congress and the Cuban government to begin a 'negotiated normalization' process and recommended several specific steps the US itself should initiate immediately, including allowing more travel and humanitarian sales. "Despite the diverse perspectives of our members, we agree that principled engagement should replace isolation as the core of US policy toward Cuba," former US Ambassador to Mexico James R. Jones, who chaired the Cuba Policy Advisory Group under the auspices of the Center for National Policy in Washington, said. "Our national interest and security require we begin a dialogue with Cuba." (PRNewswire, 23/1/03)

January 23: Despite a distaste for Fidel Castro, the US should foster better relations with Cuba so the island does not become a hotbed of crime or terrorism once Castro dies, the incoming chairman of the Senate intelligence panel said. Senator Pat Roberts, a Kansas Republican, made the remarks as he endorsed a bipartisan report urging the White House to ease the embargo of Cuba. "I have no illusions about Fidel Castro," Roberts said, adding that Cuba's 11 million people deserve to live in democracy and freedom. But Roberts said Washington should "be ahead of the curve" in preparing for changes and possible turmoil in Cuba once Castro, who is 76, is out of power. "We cannot afford the kind of chaos in a post-Castro Cuba that a terrorist organization or a drug cartel leadership -- let me repeat, a drug cartel leadership -- may bring. That would present additional problems for the US in the region," Roberts said. (The Miami Herald, 24/1/03)

January 24: Fidel Castro spent more than three hours with some 750 US university students and professors who are visiting the island as part of the "Semester at Sea" program. The group traveled to Havana aboard the Universe Explorer ship, under the University of Pittsburgh's "Semester at Sea" program. (EFE, 25/1/03)

January 26: Thirty Cuban migrants intercepted by the Coast Guard five miles from Sugarloaf Key -- and thrown into the sea when their smuggler's boat capsized -- were taken back to the Communist-ruled island, the Coast Guard said. Relatives and activists did not know the Cubans had been repatriated when they gathered in Little Havana to protest what they said was the use of excessive force to stop them. Coast Guard Petty Officer Danielle DeMarino said the migrants are lucky that rescuers were there when the boat capsized. (The Miami Herald, 27/1/03)

January 27: Prosecutors filed misdemeanor charges and offered probation to two Miami men accused of smuggling four relatives and two family friends into the United States by boat. Their 21-foot boat ran out of fuel and was towed to Key West by the Coast Guard in November. Once at dockside, five Cubans scammed from the boat to the dock to establish claims for legal residency. A 14-year-old boy who initially stayed aboard was later allowed ashore, too. The two

counts each against Elizardo Ruiz Alvarez and Martin Mendez cover only the two friends who made the trip and do not claim smuggling for profit. (AP, 27/1/03)

January 28: Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, unhappy about lax enforcement of some parts of the US embargo on Cuba -- including provisions meant to restrict travel to this country by the island's government officials -- sent the White House a letter asking that more pressure be put on Fidel Castro. Among other things, Ros-Lehtinen, a reliable supporter of President Bush, also is unhappy about a proposed cut in funding for organizations that work with independent groups in Cuba to foster democratic change and the continuation of President Clinton's wet foot/dry foot policy, which usually allows Cuban migrants who reach shore to stay in the United States while typically sending back those interdicted at sea. (Sun Sentinel, 28/1/03)

January 29: The United States is urging Cuba to work with a newly-appointed UN human rights envoy and grant her access to the communist-run island. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher called on Cuba to abide by UN guidelines that call for it to accept a special representative. [For more on this, see section Foreign Affairs.] (VOA, 30/1/03)

January 30: Yucatan Express is proposing a humanitarian ferry service from Tampa to Cuba in which relatives of Cuban citizens would pay for their own passage but wouldn't be charged for cargo such as food and clothing. Matthew Hudson, chairman of Yucatan Express, said the company would not charge for shrink wrapping cargo and putting it on pallets. He said the port of Mantanzas on Cuba's northwest coast near Havana would probably be the ferry's destination. The company says it hopes to start the service Feb. 25. The United States allows humanitarian cargo such as food to be shipped to Cuba. Rob Nichols, a US Treasury Department spokesman, did not give a time frame for deciding on the proposal. The Treasury controls commerce between the two countries. (The Tampa Tribune, 30/1/03)

January 30: Fidel Castro, said that it is "widely believed" in the world that the U.S. war plans against Iraq are aimed at "taking control of the third largest oil and gas reserves in the world." In a speech given at the closing of the "International Conference for World Balance", Castro pointed out that the war would be so dangerous for humanity that "no one can know or predict what will happen". "It is already generally accepted that the purpose of the war in Iraq is to take possession of the world's third largest reserve of oil and gas, something that greatly concerns almost all of the other developed countries, such as those of Europe, which import 80% of their energy, as opposed to the United States, which currently imports barely 20% to 25% of the energy it consumes", he added. [For more on this, see Domestic Affairs and Foreign Affairs.] (World Data Service, 30/1/03)

January 30: The National Black Farmers Association is working on a deal to sell Cuba \$20 million in food ranging from chicken to wheat this spring. John Boyd, head of the group, said more than 10,000 black farmers would benefit from the agreement with Fidel Castro. (AP, 30/1/03)

January 30: The US Coast Guard intercepted 79 Cubans who tried to get to the United States and returned them over the weekend, Cuba said. Seventy-five tried to make the journey aboard two smugglers' speedboats, the Communist Party newspaper Granma said. The other four were intercepted in a small boat, it said. Twenty-nine of the migrants had to be rescued when their boat capsized after they refused to stop for the Coast Guard, the newspaper said. (AP, 30/1/03)

January 31: The Senate Government and Veteran's Affairs Committee unanimously approved a resolution in favor of lifting the US embargo on Cuba. It will now go to the full Senate for a vote. The resolution urges the President and Congress to lift the embargo on the Communist nation. (KXMA, 31/1/03)

