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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Dissident and human rights groups warn about an increase of repression and of the number of jailed for political reasons.

Economy: Fidel Castro announces an “energy revolution”, the ending of blackouts, and an increase in minimum wages from 100 to 225 pesos for 2006. Cuba receives 12 locomotives and 80 buses from China.

Exile community: Cuban-American community activists and politicians lambast the US government’s decision to repatriate 15 Cubans picked up from the base of an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys. Two of the Bush administration’s top Cuba policy makers meet with South Florida’s top exile community leaders. After a dramatic hunger strike carried out by Ramon Saul Sanchez, head of the Democracy Movement, the Bush administration accepts a discussion on the “wet-foot-dry-foot” policy.

Foreign Affairs: Amid a marked strengthening of relations, the Cuban government stresses Iran’s right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Newly inaugurated Bolivian President Evo Morales begins his historic, five-year term by meeting with leaders from Cuba and Venezuela. Cuba begins diplomatic activities toward the Summit of the Non Aligned Movement to be held in Havana, in September 2006. Cuba pays tribute to the late Salvadorian leader Schafik Handal.

US-Cuba Relations: A German documentary raises controversy on Cuba’s role in the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy. A husband and wife who worked at a Florida university are accused of being covert agents for Cuba. The US government allows Cuba to participate in a 16-nation baseball tournament in the US. The US Interest Section in Havana disseminates news and messages about human rights on an electronic public billboard across the facade of US diplomatic offices. Fidel Castro accuses the US of trying to torpedo relations and calls for a protest in front of the US diplomatic mission.



Domestic Affairs

January 1: Priests of Afro-Cuban religions, Santeria, called on islanders to be wary of diseases, broken agreements and corruption as they issued their much-anticipated predictions for the New Year. Although the annual "Letter of the Year" is vague enough to be interpreted in a variety of ways, Cubans anxiously look forward to it each January. Several competing groups of Santeria priests, or babalaos, gather every New Year's Eve for religious ceremonies that include chanting and animal sacrifices. Predictions are announced in the first days of the New Year. The group said that the Santeria orishas, or gods, ruling 2006 will be Obatala, god of wisdom and justice represented in the Roman Catholic faith as Our Lady of Mercy, and Ochun, the goddess of maternity and newborns, whose representation is Cuba's patron saint, the Virgin of Charity. The priests predicted that Cubans will need to watch out for cerebrovascular problems, stomach disorders, hormonal ailments and unknown diseases. Society as a whole can expect an increase in crime, particularly corruption; broken agreements, including international accords, and a risk of drought and other natural disasters. A different Santeria group, the Yoruba Association, which is more closely allied with Cuba's communist government, had similar predictions with some variations and said that the orishas ruling 2006 would be Oggun, associated with St. Peter in Roman Catholicism, and the Virgin of Charity. (AP, 2/1/06)

January 3: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá lamented that Cuba had reverted to the "darkest days of intolerance and restriction" in 2005, with a renewed rejection of any progress toward a brighter future. Aside from the denial of basic legal rights, the most "serious and dangerous" phenomenon was the renewed rejection of any progress, Payá said in his annual report on the island's political climate. Payá leads the Christian Liberation Movement, which has sought a national dialogue on Cuba's future. In the past, it has launched a door-to-door campaign to deliver documents on initiatives for political change, including the Varela Project, which petitioned for a referendum to relax some of the Communist island's stricter laws. (AFP, 3/1/06)

January 5: Sixty percent of primary care doctors in Cuba have been sent to Venezuela and other international missions, triggering a crisis across the public health programs of the island, said a high-ranking Cuban health care official who defected in Mexico. "The Cuban health care system has remained subordinated to the relation with Venezuela." According to Dr. Alcides Lorenzo Rodríguez, ex-chief of the national family medicine group of Cuba, out of 31,000 doctors working at offices of the so-called family doctor program in 2003, the majority have been enlisted as part of a 26,000-strong contingent of Cuban health care professionals currently deployed in Venezuela. (El Nuevo Herald, 6/1/06)

January 7: Children of imprisoned Cuban dissidents gathered for a holiday party to receive gifts paid for by a powerful exile group in Miami. But the wives of jailed activists who organized the party said it comes at a time when those opposing the Cuban government have little to celebrate on the island. "I'm feeling very hopeless," said Dolia Leal, whose activist husband Nestor Aguilar is serving a 13-year prison sentence. "Every day there is more repression, and I don't see any sign that the prisoners will be released." The wives of political prisoners organizing the party bought the children's gifts with money from the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation, a lobbying group which opposes Castro's regime. More than a dozen Havana children received dolls, toy guns and cars in the living room of the party's hostess Laura Pollán, the wife of prisoner Hector Maseda. Pollan talked to those gathered about Jesus and the celebration of the January 6 "Three Kings Day." Pollan said gifts for a total of 77 sons and daughters of prisoners were distributed across the island for the holiday. (AP, 7/1/06)

January 8: Cuba celebrated the 47th anniversary of Fidel Castro's triumphant entry into this capital after toppling dictator Fulgencio Batista. The event was commemorated with a political and cultural ceremony attended by hundreds of children and students at the Ciudad Libertad school, which used to be the Columbia military barracks, the island's largest base prior to Castro's revolutionary triumph on January 1, 1959. The ceremony, which the now 79-year-old Castro did not attend, was presided over by Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gomez and Higher Education Minister Fernando Vecino Alegret, as well as by Communist Party Central Committee official Roberto Montesinos and Julio Martinez, the head of the Union of Communist Youth. (EFE, 8/1/06)

January 8: In recent weeks, the Cuban government has made a series of rare public comments urging Cubans to embrace the revolution -- or risk its future. "This country can self-destruct," Castro warned during a five-hour speech on November 17. Castro's comments were followed by a December 23 speech at a National Assembly session by Pérez Roque, a former Castro aide who represents the younger generation of Cuban officials. "The fact that we have resisted all these years as we have resisted and battled, doesn't in itself guarantee we will be victorious in the future," Pérez Roque said. "I think we should pay all our attention to the call made by Fidel". "That phrase has never been said publicly in the history of the revolution: This revolution can be reversible, and not by our enemies who have tried everything possible, but by our own mistakes." Experts agree that Pérez Roque's comments are important. "I am surprised this kind of stuff is spoken of this openly," said Mark Falcoff, author of "Cuba, The Day After". "It suggests two things: Castro's health may be as bad as the CIA says it is, and the [communist] party leadership recognizes they are going to have a rough time when he's not there." Falcoff said the recent comments are particularly important because they contradict the standard rhetoric in Cuban government circles that the revolution has been "institutionalized." The government, he said, is admitting it failed to capture its young. "Nothing that happens in Cuba is an accident, above all anything these people say and say publicly," said María Dolores Espino, an expert on Cuba at St. Thomas University. "They are positioning themselves for the aftermath. Castro wants the survival of the revolution to be his legacy, and they are preparing for that." [[Intervención de Felipe Pérez Roque ante la Asamblea Nacional](#)] (*The Miami Herald*, 8/1/06)

January 9: The Cuban government has closed down at least three Protestant churches following new "harsh legislation" on house churches, a religious rights group said. UK-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) told the press it has learned that "two of the churches, in the western provinces of Guantánamo and Holguín, were forcibly closed." CSW said that "the first was confiscated by local authorities in August and the other threatened with demolition at the end of 2005." A third church, in a suburb of Havana, was demolished while church members looked on at the end of 2005, CSW added. All were allegedly accused of being "illegal constructions" by the authorities to justify the closures. The new legislation, Directive 43 and Resolution 46, was reportedly announced in April following Pope John Paul II's funeral, and required all house churches to register with the authorities. Under other new measures, services that have not been "authorized" are reportedly banned, while only one house church of any denomination can exist within two kilometers (1.25 miles) of each other. Foreigners cannot attend house churches in mountainous areas and require permission to attend them elsewhere. Violations will lead to the closure of the church and fines of up to \$1,000, said human rights group Forum 18 recently in an investigation. [[CSW Press Release](#)] (*BosNewsLife* , 9/1/06)

January 11: The 3rd Biennial International Seminar Complexity 2006 continued sessions in Havana with workshops on philosophic, epistemological and methodological implications of complexity theory. The meeting is attended by the prestigious French professor Edgar Morin, from Paris University, and by some other 300 professionals from United States Spain, France, Venezuela, Israel, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/1/06)

January 11: The number of Cubans jailed for political reasons increased to 333 last year and new repression is expected in 2006 as discontent with Cuba's Communist system grows, the island's main rights group said. The nongovernmental Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said the number of political prisoners rose from 294 at the end of 2004, while 15 jailed dissidents were released on medical parole. The number of people in jail for their political views could be higher, but there was no way of knowing because Cuba does not allow the International Red Cross access to its "enormous" penal system of more than 200 prisons and internment camps, the group's annual report said. The commission accused Fidel Castro of encouraging "acts of repudiation" or hostile demonstrations outside the homes of dissidents to intimidate his critics. "We can expect a further worsening in the situation of civil, political and economic rights in Cuba this year, because popular discontent will continue to grow," said the head of the rights group, Elizardo Sanchez. [[Continúa aumentando el número de presos políticos en Cuba](#)] (*Reuters*, 11/1/06)

January 11: The highest-profile Cuban dissident on the Communist-ruled island said that the 47-year-old Castro regime became more repressive and "Stalinist" last year, partly due to support from oil-rich Venezuela. Oswaldo Paya, winner in 2002 of the European Parliament's Sakharov Award for Human Rights and promoter of the pro-democracy Varela Project, took part by telephone from Cuba in the Madrid presentation of three reports by dissidents on the island discussing the deterioration of basic liberties on the island. Also participating in the event, organized by the Spanish Association for Cuba in Transition and the Ibero-American Association for Freedom, were poet and former political prisoner Raul Rivero, who spoke about the Castro regime's growing maltreatment of political prisoners and their families. Paya and Rivero agreed that Havana has felt "much stronger" in recent months due to the energy supplies, mainly petroleum, which it has received from Venezuela. "There's a regressive environment, where the regime feels supported, with more petroleum, and closes the door to the future," said Paya, who added that dissidents and their families are suffering constant death threats from Cuban officials. He described "a regressive environment in the Stalinist style." (*EFE*, 11/1/06)

January 11: Two members of an opposition trade union party imprisoned during the repressive wave against political dissent in March, 2003, were transferred to prisons relatively nearer to their place of residence. Alfredo Felipe Fuentes, a delegate of the Unitary Council of Cuban Workers (CUTC) in the province of Havana, was moved from Guajamal prison, in the central region of the country, to a penitentiary facility in Agüica, Matanzas, a location somewhat closer to Artemisa, Pinar del Río, where he resides. Iván Hernández Carrillo, a member of the National Independent Workers' Federation of Cuba (CONIC), who was serving a prison sentence in the provincial jail of Holguín, was transferred to a penitentiary facility known as "El Pre," in Santa Clara. (*InfoLux Press*, 1/1/06)

January 14: A blind Christian human-rights activist in Cuba has suffered severe harassment for several days, Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported. Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, who will complete a 4-year prison sentence on March 12, believes the harassment is a bid to make him leave the country after his release. Juan Carlos, who has spent the last two years of his sentence under house arrest, says the government stops him from going out and denies him basic necessities such as water and electricity. He also says that crowds gather round his house chanting pro-government slogans and playing loud music at all hours of the day. His wife Maritza has left Cuba to go into exile in the US because he feared for her emotional and physical welfare. Juan Carlos is determined to continue to campaign for human-rights improvements while remaining in Cuba, despite the threats. Juan Carlos was arrested in March 2002 after staging a protest in a hospital over the mistreatment of a journalist who had been beaten up by the Cuban police. Juan Carlos was badly beaten before he was arrested and needed four stitches for a blow on the head. He was imprisoned without trial for two years before being sentenced in April 2004 to four years of house arrest after a summary trial. He was convicted of "disrespect against the Head of State" along with other charges of "public disorder, disobedience, and resisting authority." (*Encuentro en la Red*, *CWNNews*, 16,17/1/06).

January 16: The Episcopal consecration of the auxiliary bishop of Havana, Mons. Juan de Dios Hernández Ruiz, designated by the Pope Benedicto XVI, was held in the Cathedral of Havana. In a rarely seen move by the official media, the provincial newspaper "Tribuna de la Habana," released a short biographical note outlining the highlights of the newly appointed bishop's life. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 16/1/06)

January 18: The independent journalist Oscar Mario González was moved to a San Miguel del Padrón prison referred to only by the designation number 1580, said his wife Mirta Wong. Oscar Mario has been held without charges since July 22, 2005. (*Cubanet*, 20/1/06)

January 20: Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello, president of the illegal Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), announced in Havana the date for the Congress of Independent Libraries. In the press release, Roque Cabello indicated that the appointed date will be October 10, 2006, and that all independent libraries under the APSC umbrella will participate. (*Cubanet*, 20/1/06)

January 22: A violent “act of repudiation” took place at the family home of the Sigler Amaya family in Matanzas. The home, located in Pedro Betancourt, Matanzas, serves as the national headquarters for the peaceful dissident group Movimiento Independiente Opción Alternativa. Confidential reports indicated that Communist Party officials and State Security agents had, for days, been organizing the event in order to prevent a dissident meeting. January 22nd marks the sixth anniversary of a violent attack on the family home as they and several supporters held a fast in support of political prisoners. (*Netfor Cuba*, 23/1/06)

January 26: Writers from Peru, Cuba, Brasil and Guyana received awards at a ceremony for the 2006 edition of the Casa de las Americas Literary Awards, in Havana. Cuban writer Ángel Santiesteban won in short story with his book, “Dichosos los que lloran”. (*AFP*, 26/1/06)

January 26: According to Fidel Castro supporters protesting outside the home of political dissident Marta Beatriz Roque, president of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), a US diplomat was prevented from entering the residence. "A diplomat from the USIS (US Interest Section) came and we did not allow him to enter. We blocked his way (...) but he was neither insulted nor assaulted," said Marta Maria Sánchez, who lives next door to Roque in the Santos Suárez neighborhood. Approximately 25 local neighbors took position across from the building where Roque's apartment is located to prevent any dissidents' access to the place. Félix Bonne, a leader of the APSC, was not allowed to enter either. (*AFP*, 26/1/06)

January 26: Political prisoners Randy Cabrera Mayor, Luis Cabrera Ballester, Frank Pérez Carlitos, Julio Inza Góngora, Adolfo García García and Alfredo Domínguez Batista joined a hunger strike at Holguin’s provincial prison, in the northeastern part of the island. The hunger strike was initiated by political prisoner Nelson Vázquez Lima who has been claiming to be transferred to a prison closer to his home town in the central province of Villa Clara. Vázquez Lima’s mother, who is disabled, hasn’t been able to visit him since he was imprisoned due to the long distance between Villa Clara and Holguin and prevailing difficulties in transportation. (*Cubanet*, 30/1/06)

January 28: People from the City of Havana and Havana province benefit from the opening of “Habana” television station, the fifth channel in Cuban television. The opening coincided with ceremonies to pay homage to Cuban National Hero Jose Marti. The station has an informative and cultural profile. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/1/06)

Economy

January 2: The Cuban government's announcement that Cuba's gross domestic product (GDP) had grown by 11.8 percent in 2005 came as a surprise to a good many Cubans, who had just lived through a year of hardships provoked by a severe energy crisis, a continuing drought, several hurricanes and the stepping up of US sanctions against this socialist Caribbean island nation. Cuba experienced high growth and finished the year with a balance of payments surplus of 800 million dollars, but in order for this to translate into development, the country needs to expand its productive base in order to create more jobs and provide better salaries, said an economic researcher who spoke with IPS on the condition of anonymity. One of the reasons for these impressive results is the fact that the Cuban government began in 2004 to include expenditures on social services like education and health in its GDP calculations. These sectors are normally excluded, because they do not generate revenues, but Havana devotes considerable resources to providing these services free of charge to all of the country's 11.2 million inhabitants. Moreover, this year's GDP calculation included a sizeable amount for the "export of social services to a number of countries," particularly Venezuela, commented sources from ECLAC (UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). (*IPS*, 2/1/06)

January 2: Fidel Castro heralded 2006 as the "year of the energy revolution", although he has yet to provide details of his energy revolution. Several pointers have been given, including an increase in exploration for and production of crude oil. Spanish-Argentinian oil company Repsol YPF has said that it intended to make another effort in 2006 to make a commercial find in Cuban territorial deep waters. A year ago, Canadian companies Sherritt and Pebercan reported the discovery of a 100-mil bbl deposit of crude oil in shallow waters off northern Cuba. Sherritt is responsible for much of Cuba's current 67,000 b/d production of crude--all of it very heavy--which is about four times what the country produced a decade ago but well short of consumption of about 211,000 b/d, much of it now supplied by Venezuela. Other elements that Castro has indicated would be part of his energy revolution are the closing of power plants that date from the Soviet era and construction of new ones to run on gas produced in association with crude oil. Punitive tariffs are also to be imposed on large volume domestic consumers of electricity so as to cut back sharply on demand in an effort to eliminate the blackouts that have plagued Cubans for years and whose increased frequency led in 2004 to very rare--if limited--outbreaks of public protest. (*Platts Commodity News*, 2/1/06)

January 2: More than a year after the Cuban government replaced the US dollar with a convertible peso, the greenback remains in the hearts and hands of the Cuban people. Prices for most goods are still listed in dollars. Tens of thousands of families still get handouts from US relatives in dollars, much of it funneled in by visitors to skirt the Cuban state bank's 10% cut for conversion. Taxi drivers, private restaurants and those with rooms to rent still accept payment in US currency. "We have more trust in dollars," said a partner in an Old Havana paladar, one of the private but heavily regulated eateries some Cubans are allowed to operate in their homes. Anyone who can afford to save money does so in US dollars, he added. (*Los Angeles Times*, 2/1/06)

January 3: Cubadeportes (Cuban Sports) closed the year 2005 with more than 6,300 sports trainers working in 52 countries in America, the Caribbean, Asia and Europe. Alberto Puig, Cubadeportes general manager, told local reporters that Mexico, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela are among the most favored nations, and the most requested specialities include baseball, boxing, track and field, and combat sports in general. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/1/06)

January 4: Cuba began this year's sugar cane harvest which, according to officials and operators, is expected to match the historical minimum of 1.3 million tons of raw sugar processed in 2005. It was not clear, however, whether the harvest had already begun in any other of the island's 13 sugar cane-farming provinces. (*Reuters*, 5/1/06)

January 4: Cuba is negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) by virtue of which the island could become an associate member of the South American bloc. The agenda of the negotiation, scheduled to begin in March, was drafted by Uruguay, which held the MERCOSUR presidency for the last six months. (*Reforma*, 4/1/06)

January 5: Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro said it was necessary to exploit more land near urban areas for agricultural production, provide incentives for these farmers and balance out the prices of these farm products. The brother of Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, said during a meeting with the largest urban agricultural producers that, considering the fact that 75 percent of the Cuban people live in cities, it makes sense for food to be grown on land in and around those urban areas, the Granma official daily reported. The urban-area harvest of vegetables, herbs and spices in 2005, including urban farms, intensive gardens, plots of land and family gardens, totaled 4.1 million tons, according to official figures. (*EFE*, 5/1/06)

January 6: Venezuela plans to keep oil sales to Cuba steady at roughly 90,000 barrels a day this year because the island has discovered petroleum of its own, Venezuela's oil minister said. "We expect to keep that level of sales unchanged given that Cuba is discovering more oil and that's a good thing," Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez said. Venezuela, the world's fifth largest oil exporter, increased oil sales to communist-led Cuba to 90,000 barrels a day last year, up from roughly 53,000 barrels during previous years. (*Business Week*, 6/1/06)

January 6: A gross misappropriation of state funds by local government officials was uncovered in the Cuban province of Holguín, in the easternmost end of Cuba. The fraud case involved the forgery of official documents that allowed those implicated to steal over 6 million Cuban Pesos, roughly US\$300 thousand. According to Juventud Rebelde, the official newspaper that first ran the story, the scam was carried out more than two years ago by managers of the state-run Municipal City Maintenance Company of Holguín, “who made several bogus purchases of ornamental trees, only to appropriate of the funds.” (*World Data Service*, 6/1/06)

January 9: Cuba has received 12 locomotives and 80 buses from China as part of a government plan to improve the communist island's transportation service, the official daily Granma reported. The 2,500 horse power, DF7G-C diesel-electric locomotives arrived in Havana's port over in a 15 million dollar deal with the Asian giant, Granma said. It was the first time China exported locomotives to Latin America. The Chinese buses join pressure cookers, light bulbs, refrigerators, TVs and bikes in the deluge of Chinese products flooding Cuba. From exporting appliances to investments in Cuba's nickel and oil, China is becoming a big player on the island — its second-largest trade partner as of September, up from fourth place in 2004, according to Cuba. (*AFP, The Seattle Times*, 9/1/06)

January 11: Cuba received substantial rainfall during tropical storms in 2005 but that doesn't mean the problem of drought is over. There is an overall trend of less rain, especially in the eastern part of the country. Ramon Perez, director of the National Climate Center of the Meteorology Institute, warned that drought is becoming more frequent. He cited Camaguey and Guantanamo as the provinces where this natural phenomenon is most evident. Perez notes that several regions of the country have recorded a deficit in rainfall for several consecutive years. In May 2005, the water level at the nation's reservoirs dropped to 26.7 percent capacity. As a result, 2.6 million people —over 20 percent of the country's total population— had to be provided with water through tanker trucks during the worst moments. Losses in agriculture and other sectors of the economy as a result of the drought amounted to 1.35 billion dollars in 2005. (*Granma*, 11/1/06)

January 13: The number of Czech tourists who traveled to Cuba in 2005 was 7,427, a dynamic increase according to Cuban diplomatic sources in Prague. "As compared to the previous year's figures, the Czech Republic became the world's country with the highest dynamic growth rate in terms of the number of tourists visiting the island," added the sources. Cuba also registered a high number of visitors from Poland and Hungary. (*EFE*, 13/1/06)

January 15: China became Cuba's second-largest trading partner after Venezuela in 2005, but Chinese companies worry about collecting payment for their increasing sales of durable goods to the island, a Chinese diplomat said. A \$500-million (US) Chinese investment in Cuba's nickel industry, announced more than a year ago, is still under negotiation, China's commercial counsellor in Havana, Yang Shidi, said. China's growing influence on the Cuban economy is evident on the streets and in the shops, where Chinese goods such as toys, clothes and sports equipment have replaced imports from other countries. Spanking new air-conditioned buses made by China's Yutong Bus Co. Ltd., the first of 1,000 sold to Cuba, make a sharp contrast with the vintage American cars still motoring along Cuban streets. China is selling Cuba television sets, electric cookers, rice steamers and light bulbs. Cuba wants to buy one million Chinese refrigerators as part of its energy-saving plan to replace decades-old household appliances. Twelve diesel locomotives arrived by ship from China a week ago to upgrade Cuba's railway system. "Two-way trade has reached record levels and we hope it will continue to expand steadily," Mr. Yang said. The sales to Cuba are financed with millions of dollars in credits extended largely by the exporting companies themselves, Mr. Yang said. "China is a market economy and the companies take their own decisions and risks (...) The worry the companies have is how they will get paid for the growing sales," he said. (*Reuters*, 16/1/06)

January 15: Fidel Castro thanked China for new locomotives and buses that will help improve local transportation on the island, emphasizing the increasingly close ties between the two countries. Castro said the locomotives are a symbol of friendship between Cuba and China, adding that China has become the "principal locomotive" of economic development in the world, according to Cuba's Communist Party daily Granma. The arrival of the 12 new locomotives

and the 80 buses purchased from China was reported by Cuban media. Of those buses, about 300 will be used for tourism and transport of construction workers, students and social workers from one province to another, Castro said. The remaining 700 will be for inter-province travel for the general population. Castro said that it had been impossible to devote money to the island's railway system during the 1990s, but that dramatic improvement in the Cuban economy allowed for the recent purchase of the Chinese equipment. The Cuban leader said the Chinese locomotives were superior to those manufactured in the United States and much more affordable. Each Chinese locomotive cost 37 percent of what a similar one from the United States would have cost, Castro said. Castro pointed out some "malicious concerns" of international press agencies over China's trade relations with Cuba, aimed at distorting the increasing presence of Chinese products in the national market. (*AP, Prensa Latina*, 15/1/06)

January 17: Fidel Castro unveiled a network of small power generators in Pinar del Rio province, the first step in a vast plan to overhaul Cuba's inadequate electricity system and end chronic outages. "The new system has been installed (...) Pinar del Rio will not have power outages again," Castro said in a speech in the capital of the western-most province, the first to be equipped. The new strategy is part of an ambitious plan that also calls for replacing millions of inefficient electric stoves, refrigerators and other household appliances, some of them made in the United States and in use since before Castro's 1959 revolution. Cuba has bought generators from Spain's Grupo Guascor for 100 million euros (\$120 million). It has contracted 4,158 generators with a combined capacity of 712 megawatts, Castro said. Last year it ordered 344 diesel generators from Hyundai Heavy Industries Co., South Korea's largest shipbuilder, in two contracts worth \$460 million for delivery by the end of 2007. In another effort to save energy, Cuba's communist government raised heavily subsidized electricity rates by as much as 333 percent in December. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*Reuters*, 17/1/06)

January 18: A Cuban Health Care Ministry report announces that the biotechnology industry, as well as vaccine and health care service exports to other countries, will soon become the main revenue sources for this country. The report maintains that medical exports are about to exceed the US\$1,800 million generated annually by the tourist industry, until now the principal source of foreign currency for this nation. (*BBC*, 18/1/06)

January 19: A blackout that paralyzed most of Havana for barely 24 hours, made Fidel Castro cancel a TV broadcast where he was supposed to talk about the electricity crisis that the island has been experiencing since last year. Two days before, the Cuban leader announced an "energy revolution" in Cuba at the inauguration of the first emergency power generation project in Pinar del Rio. Cuban official media published a brief note explaining the cancellation of Castro's attendance to the official TV program "The Round Table". (*AFP, La Jornada*, 19/1/06)

January 20: Fidel Castro underscored the value of the energy revolution underway in Cuba during the official TV show "The Round Table". In an address broadcast on nationwide radio and television, the Cuban leader gave a detailed explanation of the government's strategy to increase power generation efficiency while steadily reducing the costs. "Thermoelectric plants are prehistoric," he said. As an example he cited the difficulties that surrounded the construction and start-up of the Antonio Guterres plant located in the western province of Matanzas. The plant costs approximately 100 million dollars a year to keep operating. Castro recalled the serious failures at the huge power plant during 2004, noting that it went off the power grid 22 times. Castro reassured the people that by May 1, all Cuban families that receive electricity services—over 95 percent of the population—will no longer use kerosene or liquid gas to cook. "We will keep that promise," said Castro. (*Periódico 26*, 20/1/06)

January 21: Fidel Castro called on Cubans to conserve electricity as part of his government's new program to cut energy spending by \$1 billion a year. Castro took to the airwaves for a second consecutive day, using a roundtable television show to discuss the island's energy situation. "We cannot falter in this. At this time, the main task is to save energy," Castro said. During his more than four-hour appearance on national television, the Cuban leader said his "energy revolution" program, slated to take effect May 1, would focus on replacing old generators at power plants and introducing more energy-efficient domestic appliances in Cuba. Castro also discussed the blackout that paralyzed most

of Havana, barely 24 hours after he inaugurated the first emergency power generation project in Pinar del Rio, where he announced plans for an "intensive research project and the development of the use of wind and solar power." The government's new energy plan envisions a 60 percent increase in the Cuban thermo-electric power system's 2.94 million kilowatts per hour of generating capacity. Most of the island's electricity is currently generated with obsolete technology that had been provided by the former Soviet Union. (AFP, 22/1/06)

January 22: Fidel Castro announced that the minimum wage will be increased from 100 to 225 pesos as of May 1st. The Cuban leader made the statement at a special TV appearance before Communist Party, union and grass-roots leaders and Revolutionary Armed Forces and Interior Ministry members. Castro announced that the minimum wage hike will benefit one million 657 thousand workers who earned from 100 to 224 pesos. The new moves builds on the pension hike announced recently and will benefit more than 3 million retirees, pensioners and low salary workers. Fidel Castro also revealed that pensions will likely be raised more than once in the future as well as the value of the Cuban peso and the convertible Cuban peso until the day in which the ration book will disappear. He added that retirees will not lack any of the household appliances that the Cuban government is purchasing to improve the people's quality of life and to save electricity. (Radio Habana Cuba, 22/1/06)

January 24: The presence of illegal vendors who loiter at and around the front of some foreign-currency-only stores in Havana was denounced by the official weekly *Trabajadores*, which called upon the population to confront them "anytime, anywhere." Among the steps taken to fight the black-market transactions, the management of the "Ultra" store-chain, in the densely-populated district of Centro Habana, has implemented an "employee watch" system to keep the vendors at bay during service hours. (EFE, 24/1/06)

January 30: Cuba is planning to take advantage of current high sugar prices in the world market with an increase of its sugar production of over 1,3 million tonnes for 2006. "They are planting 150,000 acres (60,705 hectares) in an intensive way, and for the first time in years buying appropriate amounts of fertilizers and herbicides", a source said. "The Sugar Ministry announced that the process of reducing the number of sugar mills is over and are planning to use at least 70 sugar factories for 2007," the source added. (Reuters, 30/1/06)

January 30: Prime ministers from six nations signed a declaration formalizing their entry into the Caribbean Single Market Economy, an agreement designed to allow goods, services and skilled workers to move more easily throughout the region. Prime ministers from Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad officially launched the agreement during a ceremony at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies in the capital, Kingston. Member nations will have access to bilateral free-trade agreements the Caribbean Community has already made with Colombia, Cuba, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. Leaders from St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Antigua and Dominica signed a declaration of intent, which will see their countries joining the single market by the end of March. (AP, 30/1/06)

Exile Community

January 8: For 15 refugees who completed the treacherous crossing from Cuba to the Florida Keys, the difference between freedom and being returned to their homeland may come down to having landed on the wrong bridge piling. The group remained aboard a US Coast Guard cutter awaiting word on whether they will be admitted to the United States under the government's increasingly controversial "wet foot/dry foot" policy. By a curious twist of fate, the 15 migrants reached the bridge -- which is part of the United States -- but the section of the bridge they touched is no longer connected to land. As a result, US authorities have for now concluded that the migrants may not be covered by the policy's dry-foot component. "We are asking the government not to [repatriate the migrants] because the bridge is a part of the United States," said Ramón Saúl Sánchez, leader of the Democracy Movement, an organization which

advocates the interests of Cuban migrants. "If the bridge is not part of the United States, then the Statue of Liberty isn't, either." The migrants, which included four women and two children, left Matanzas Province in Cuba late on January 2 or early next day aboard a homemade raft, said Miguel Angel Guerrero of Hialeah. His cousin, Elizabeth Hernández, 23, her husband and 2 ½-year-old son Michael are among the migrants, Guerrero said. Local advocates are fighting for the group on a number of fronts. Sánchez has started a one-man hunger strike, directed not at the Coast Guard, but at policymakers in Washington in a bid to persuade them to reconsider the "wet foot/dry foot" policy. The hunger strike "will not end until they are released or I am dead," Sánchez said. Under the policy, Cubans who reach US soil generally get to stay, while those intercepted at sea are generally repatriated. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/1/06)

January 8: Cuban film maker, artist and illustrator Constante "Rapi" Diego passed away in Mexico City at the age of 56, following a protracted battle with skin cancer. His only son, 28-year-old Ismael, was allowed to travel from Havana to be with him in the final hours. Born in Havana from a family with a long intellectual pedigree, "Rapi" began studying Art History and Industrial Design which he later gave up to pursue his artistic passion for drawing and the illustration of children's books. His father was the renowned poet Eliseo Diego (1920-1994), who also died in Mexico. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/1/06)

January 9: Ofelia Fox, once known as the first lady of the Tropicana nightclub in Havana, where Hollywood stars mingled and performers like Nat King Cole ruled the stage, died in Burbank. She was 82. The cause was cancer and complications of diabetes, said Rosa Sanchez, her companion of more than 40 years. In her memoir, "Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub," written with Rosa Lowinger and published last fall, Ms. Fox recounted life at the casino and dance club owned by Martin Fox, whom she married in 1952. After Fidel Castro took possession of the club, Ms. Fox and her husband fled to Miami. Ms. Fox's husband, Martin, suffered a stroke and died in the mid-1960's. Born Ofelia Suarez in Havana, the youngest of four, she published several books of poetry while she lived in Cuba. In Los Angeles, several of her bilingual plays were staged by the Cuban Cultural Club in Monterey Park. (*The New York Times*, 11/1/06)

January 9: Cuban-American community activists and politicians lambasted the US government's decision to repatriate 15 Cubans picked up from the base of an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys. An attorney for the families of the migrants said he planned to file a suit asking a federal judge to allow the group to return. The migrants were sent back to Cuba after US officials concluded that the section of the partially collapsed bridge where they landed did not count as dry land under the government's policy because it was no longer connected to any of the Keys. US Senator Mel Martinez, Republican-Florida, called the government's decision an example of "the complete and utter failure" of the wet-foot, dry-foot policy. "Because they reached an old bridge and not a new bridge, is there a judgment they didn't reach American soil? The semantics used to return these men and women -- who have risked so much to reach freedom and are now returned to an uncertain future -- are an embarrassment," Martinez said in a statement. US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Republican-Miami, called the decision absurd. "If any crime would have been committed on that bridge, the perpetrators would have been arrested and charged with violating US laws," she said in a statement. (*The New York Times*, 10/1/06)

January 10: When 15 Cubans fleeing their homeland landed on an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys, they inadvertently found themselves in an uncomfortable legal spotlight. The plight of the immigrants has reopened the bitter debate over the government's immigration policy and angered South Florida's heavily Republican Cuban exile community. "This will have an effect of reducing the numbers of Cuban-American voters that would blindly follow a Republican candidate," Cuban American National Foundation President Pepe Hernandez said. Cuban-American activists said they hoped the latest incident will spark a review of the wet-foot, dry-foot rule, which was established in 1995 as a way to stem a massive wave of Haitians and Cuban immigrants, while still offering a safe harbor for Cubans who reached US shores. Ramon Saul Sanchez, head of the Democracy Movement, a Cuban-American group, said he began a hunger strike that would not end until George Bush agreed to hear Cuban exiles' views on the wet foot/dry foot policy. US Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart said he is launching a lobbying campaign to convince the Bush

administration to change the "wet-foot, dry-foot" rule that is the cornerstone of US-Cuba immigration policy. (*AP, The Miami Herald, The Guardian*, 11/1/06)

January 10: Attorneys for the relatives of Cubans who were repatriated after they reached an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys filed suit against federal officials. They are asking a judge to clarify what constitutes US soil and to force the Department of Homeland Security to allow the 15 Cubans into the United States. "It's clearly against their own rules," said attorney Wilfredo Allen. "By their own definition, piers, bridges and rocks are US soil. They were wrong and we hope to prove that in court." The federal suit filed in Miami, which names the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies as plaintiffs, was brought by family members of the repatriated Cubans and the Cuban exile group Democracy Movement. (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/1/06)

January 11: Two of the Bush administration's top Cuba policy makers went to Coral Gables for a friendly lunch with South Florida's top exile community leaders -- and wound up on the receiving end of an outpouring of frustration. The visit by the US State Department's Stephen McFarland, director of the Office of Cuban Affairs, and Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry came amid an uproar over the repatriation of 15 Cuban migrants this week. The pair used the luncheon organized by Florida International University to promote Bush administration policy -- a tough line against Cuba until the day there are democratic elections there. But exile participants, among them moderates as well as traditional hardliners, used the opportunity for primarily one purpose: to vent. "The Cubans have a dictator, and we have to get rid of him," said Luis De Varona, a board member of the Cuban American National Foundation. "When are you going to wake up to the reality? (...) We need to get rid of Castro. That is the root of all our problems." (*The Miami Herald*, 12/1/06)

January 15: Fallout from the Florida International University spy scandal is spreading throughout segments of Miami's Cuban-American community, sparking concerns that the affair is fostering a climate of fear among exiles who favor dialogue with communist Cuba. Already, several of those people have refused to comment publicly about their concerns, and others have expressed alarm that the arrest of FIU employees Carlos Alvarez and his wife, Elsa Prieto Alvarez, could prompt pro-dialogue exiles to be less willing to voice views. "This opens the door to a witch hunt," said Bernardo Benes, who helped bring about an era of rapprochement in the late 1970s when the Fidel Castro regime allowed exiles to return for family visits. "Only those who are doing something illegal should be worried about the U.S. government's actions," said Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami, which gets federal grants and has no contact with Cuban government institutions. Ninaska Pérez-Castellón, president of the Cuban Liberty Council and a popular Spanish-language personality on conservative Radio Mambí, said there was no witch hunt, just a deep concern among the anti-Castro right that others in Miami might also be spying for Cuba. "The last five years, there have been 21 Cuban spies convicted," she said. She added that among them was Ana Belén Montes, of Puerto Rican descent, who worked at the Pentagon and was convicted of spying for Cuba. "These two were at a well-known public university, [allegedly] serving as agents for Castro," Pérez Castellón said, referring to the Alvarazes. "Where is the witch hunt?" (*The Miami Herald*, 15/1/06)

January 16: Ramon Saul Sanchez, head of the Democracy Movement, a Cuban-American group, said he would not end his hunger strike until George Bush agreed to hear Cuban exiles' views on the wet foot/dry foot policy. In a statement to the press, Sánchez prohibited that "any person, entity or government institution including the paramedics" remove him from the Monument of the Martyrs of the 2506 Brigade, in Miami, or force him to end the strike. "I humbly ask that my will be respected in this prohibition and determination", the statement reads. "This prohibition will be instantly lifted in the event in which the President of the United States, or whom he designates, proves in writing or gives public Testimony that the United States government is willing to meet with the Commission that represents the Cuban Community". Sanchez has been on hunger strike for over five days. The protest has prompted behind-the-scenes talks between Cuban exile leaders and Governor Jeb Bush's office aimed at finding a way to persuade Sanchez to end his hunger strike. A deal could be announced soon (*NetforCuba, The Miami Herald*, 16/1/06)

January 17: White House spokesman Blair Jones told the press that the Bush administration has agreed to meet with exile leaders to discuss the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy -- the most controversial aspect of US immigration policy toward Cuba. "The administration has reached out to representatives of the Cuban-American community to express our interest in hearing and understanding their concerns about US migration policy toward Cuba," Jones said. "We have agreed to meet with appropriate representatives of the community, and we are discussing the date for such a meeting and are committed to holding it as soon as possible." Told of the White House declaration, hunger striker Ramón Saúl Sánchez said he would start eating if the promise becomes official. "I think it's a great step and I am very happy to hear that, and as soon as I see that formalized by their side in a statement or in writing, I will stop the hunger strike," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/1/06)

January 18: Cuban exile activist Ramón Saúl Sánchez gave up his 12-day hunger strike -- a day after the White House promised talks with exile leaders long upset by the US "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy. Sánchez said that the White House statement given to *The Miami Herald* -- coupled with a call from a lawyer involved in the case of 15 repatriated migrants -- was enough to compel him to end the strike. The lawyer, William "Willy" Sánchez, told him the White House would make good on its promise, and said his own sources had confirmed the planning of a meeting. "I feel very happy. I feel that a principle right of citizens to ask the government to be heard has been granted, and the first victory is the government's for having listened to us," Ramón Saúl Sánchez said. A date has not yet been set for the meeting, however. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/1/06)

January 22: Rival groups who either loath or support Cuban exiled militant Luis Posada Carriles conducted small, although rather boisterous, demonstrations in front of a federal building in the North-East end of Miami. Approximately 30 activists urged the government of the United States to deport Posada Carriles, accused of terrorism by the governments of Cuba and Venezuela. Some 20 yards away, a smaller but noisier crowd of Cuban exiles was conducting another protest, hurling insults at the other demonstrators. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/1/06)

January 23: Cuban writer Justo Vasco died at 62 in the Spanish city of Oviedo, Asturias. The Cuban author was widely regarded by literary critics as one of the most important voices within the black genre in Cuba. (*EFE*, 23/1/06)

Foreign Affairs

January 1: The international relations secretary of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), Trinidad Jiménez, admitted in an interview with the press that not much progress has been achieved with Cuba in the last two years under the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Nevertheless, the socialist official asked herself: "Have we seen any progress in the last 25 years?" and replied "The same thing is happening now, there has not been much progress in the last two years either. It is not new or a surprise". "The Castro regime", she added, "has now lasted the years it has lasted and the democratization attempts which there have been have occurred over the years with minimal results. Therefore it is no surprise that we have not seen substantial changes now either." Jiménez recalled that initially the release of 13 of the 75 dissidents sentenced to prison in April 2003 was achieved, including "a person who had become a symbol" - the writer and journalist Raúl Rivero. The government is now waiting "for some other gestures to occur". Anyway, it is clear to the Spanish government that this will only be achieved "with smooth diplomatic relations and what it calls a critical dialogue". "We never thought that the fact that the Spanish government was maintaining a certain pressure in one direction or another could produce immediate effects, much less that it would make the regime change. Thinking that is simply naive", she said. (*Europa Press*, 2/1/06)

January 2: Mexican port authorities and a US boater rescued 18 Cubans from a rickety, homemade boat off Mexico's Caribbean coast. The boat, made of doors, planks and other materials, was first spotted by an American sailing off Isla Mujeres in a sailboat. He alerted Mexican officials on a radio frequency, and port personnel from Isla Mujeres were

sent to take charge of the Cubans. "We were looking for three people who had been reported missing, when we got word of Cuban rafters who had been rescued by an American," said Jose Luis Ibarra, port captain of Isla Mujeres. (*AP*, 2/1/06)

January 2: In a meeting with the Cuban Ambassador to Tehran Fernando N. Garcia, Iran's Expediency Council Chairman Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that people in Latin America are regaining their previous anti-imperialistic spirit, so Cuba is not alone any longer in the American continent. He described the recent wave of anti-US developments in Latin America as a sign of the revolutionary spirit of the region's people challenging the global arrogance. Rafsanjani stated that Iran and Cuba pursue independent foreign policies, which has led to an expansion of ties, adding that cooperation between the two countries in international fora and organizations can act as a determining instrument in countering the unilateral stances adopted by major powers. The ambassador said the two countries enjoy ample potential for expanding ties, noting that pressure on Tehran and Havana by major powers, especially by the United States, would positively affect Iran-Cuba ties. (*MNA*, 2/1/06)

January 3: The Secretary General of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), Rubén Silié Valdez, began an official visit to Cuba to foster regional projects with the island's authorities. Silié was welcomed by Deputy Foreign Minister Rafael Daussá at the airport, where he said his visit aims at consolidating the Cuban governments support, solidarity and enthusiasm to boost common ACS programs. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/1/06)

January 3: Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales clearly set Washington's fiercest Latin American critics as his models, praising Castro and Chávez. "We are here to resolve social problems, economic problems," Morales said in Caracas. "This movement is not only in Bolivia; Fidel in Cuba and Hugo in Venezuela are logging triumphs in social movements and leftist policies." "We are going to change Bolivia, we are going to change Latin America," Morales said. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez referred to the three leftist leaders as "an axis of good" -- a play on US President George W. Bush's reference to North Korea, Iran and prewar Iraq as an "axis of evil." (*CNN*, 3/1/06)

January 3: Reporters Without Borders condemned the use of threats by state security agents on 29 December against 21-year-old Liannis Meriño Aguilera, the editor of the independent Youth without Censorship news agency. "We again protest against the constant harassment of independent journalists by the Cuban authorities, which is often the prelude to arbitrary arrests and heavy prison sentences," the press freedom organisation said. "We call on the authorities to let Meriño and her team of young journalists work freely." Meriño was arrested at her home in Banes, in the eastern province of Holguín, by two state security agents, who took her to the local fire brigade centre and held her there for two hours. The agent in charge of combating the opposition in Holguín ordered her to stop working as an independent journalist. He also accused her of reporting false information, which is punishable by imprisonment. (*RWB Press Release*, 4/1/06)

January 4: Mexican Ambassador to Cuba Carlos Piña Rojas said he is confident that Cuba-Mexico relations will improve in 2006, the last year of President Vicente Fox's term in office. The diplomat indicated that the government of Mexico is taking steps to ensure that the relation with the island "keeps on flowing and may improve." He also revealed that the Cuban government has not yet replied to a request for the videos of businessman Carlos Ahumada Kurtz's declarations during his stay in the Caribbean country. (*Notimex*, 4/1/05)

January 4: Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad spoke on the phone with the leftist presidents of the Latin American countries of Cuba and Venezuela and the president-elect of Bolivia. In the conversation with his Cuban counterpart Fidel Castro, Ahmadinezhad stressed Iran's desire to cooperate with popular governments especially those of the South American region. Ahmadinezhad said that continued friendly relations between Iran and Cuba will be in the interest of both states and nations. Fidel Castro said that closer relations between Tehran and Havana has been benefiting the whole world especially the Latin American countries. Stressing Iran's right to nuclear energy for peaceful

ends, Castro said, "Like any other country, Iran has right to produce atomic energy for peaceful purposes." (*Mehr*, 4/1/06)

January 4: Association of Caribbean States (ACS) Secretary General Ruben Silié Valdez, on an official visit to Cuba, held talks with Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. Silié Valdez also dialogued with Foreign Trade and Tourism ministers, Raúl de la Nuez and Manuel Marrero, respectively, as those industries along with transport and disasters are issues of interest for the ACS collaboration. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/1/06)

January 4: Cuban officials reaffirmed the island's commitment to the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in its efforts toward regional integration and sustainable development. Upon welcoming the ACS General Secretary Ruben Silie Valdez, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage reiterated Cuba's interest in the issue by asking Silie Valdes, "How can we help?" Silie said Cuba's support is crucial to achieving the integration goals of the Association of Caribbean States, made up of 25 member nations and which is now eying large-scale development projects. (*AIN*, 5/1/06)

January 4: According to a report issued by Reporters Without Borders, Cuba has become the "world's second biggest prison for journalists" with 24 in jail, the group wrote. Only China, with 115 times the population of Cuba, imprisons more, with 32. (*AP*, 4/1/06)

January 5: Fidel Castro appears on the guests' list for the swearing-in of Honduran President-Elect Manuel Zelaya. Roberto Flores, general coordinator of the Presidential Handover Commission, said that the Honduran government has invited all the presidents of the countries with which Tegucigalpa maintains diplomatic relations. (*ACAN-EFE*, 5/1/06)

January 6: Bolivian president-elect Evo Morales said in Madrid that Fidel Castro is not a dictator. During a breakfast hosted by the Real Instituto Elcano, surrounded by researchers, representatives of the patrons of the institute and members of the administration, Morales said that it is not difficult for him "to say that I greatly admire Fidel Castro, who taught us to govern with dignity". "Fidel is not a dictator because in Cuba one can only govern with 50 per cent plus one of the votes. And Fidel has them", Morales said. (*ABC*, 6/1/06)

January 8: A family of thirteen Cubans, including three children, arrived in Honduras on their way to the United States. The islanders set out on December 24 from their birth town of Santa Cruz, south of the Camagüey province, and arrived at La Ceiba, 350 km north of Tegucigalpa, on the Honduran Atlantic coast. "They said that they were fleeing the repression of the Cuban government and that their destination was Miami," said police spokesman Marcelino García. (*AP*, 9/1/06)

January 10: The mayors of Havana and Lima have signed a deal which will provide more than 66,000 Peruvians with the Cuban literacy program, Yo Si Puedo (Yes I Can), the director of Havana municipality's educational department said. Peru was particularly interested in the audio-visual teaching method used in the program, Isabel Maria Quintana said. The program consists of 65 classes of 30 minutes each, enabling the illiterate to read and write in only three months. Yo Si Puedo, created three years ago, was introduced first to Venezuela, where more than 1.5 million people received the training. It is also being used in Mexico, Paraguay, Haiti, Honduras, Brazil, Argentina and New Zealand. Lima officials were preparing the details to get the campaign under way, including training teachers, drawing up timetables and purchasing the necessary teaching equipment. (*Xinhua*, 10/1/06)

January 11: Cuban youth who are touring Mexico to honor Julio Antonio Mella, founder of the Cuban Federation of University Students (FEU), are slated to meet with students from Bauer College. On their third day in Mexico, where Mella was slain in 1929, the Cuban delegation, including members of the Young Communist League and the Federation of Junior High School Students, will hold talks with students and teachers at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Members of the Cuban representation briefed Mexicans about the Operation Miracle, under which thousands of Latin American people with eye afflictions have been operated on, and the Bolivarian Alternative

for the Americas, which is promoted by Cuba and Venezuela to help the region and contribute to its integration. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/1/06)

January 12: After a lengthy delay, the Venezuelan government put in effect legislation whereby it will be possible for Cuban citizens sentenced in this country to serve their prison terms in Cuba and vice versa. The law, published in the "Judicial Gazette" last December 27, expressly stipulates that the transfer can only take place with the inmate's prior consent and only after final judgment has been passed in the country where the sentence was given. According to the law, convicts might avail themselves of amnesties and pardons in the country in which they serve the sentence, as well as of the local legislation in case the term to be served is shorter than what is provided by the laws of the country where the crime was committed. The law sanctions an agreement signed by Castro and Chávez in October, 2004. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/1/06)

January 12: The Chinese Parliamentary delegation which arrived January 9 in Havana to foster bilateral cooperation in the legislative and judicial fields, is winding up its visit to Cuba. The aim of the trip is to learn about the Cuban judicial system, as well as broaden collaboration in this and the legislative field. The Chinese lawmakers visited the Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry, the General Attorney's office, the People's Supreme Court of Cuba and Havana University. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/1/06)

January 12: Congo's Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism Jean Claude Gakosso is kicking off a six-day visit to Cuba, to sign an exchange and cooperation agreement. Gakosso's agenda also includes visiting sites of historic and cultural interest like the Castle of San Severino del Morro, the Museum of the Slave Routes, in western Matanzas province, the Jose Marti National Library and the Fine Arts Palace. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/1/06)

January 13: India will host an Asia-Pacific solidarity conference with Cuba in Chennai, capital of southern Tamil Nadu state, attended by 300 national delegates and 15 regional states, it was reported. A. Vijayaraghavan, coordinator of the Indian National Committee of Solidarity with Cuba, told the press in Havana that the aim of the meeting is to condemn imperialist aggressions against the Cuban people and foster solidarity movements in the region. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/1/06)

January 13: A third group of 120 Panamanians traveled to Cuba as part of the "Operation Miracle" eye-surgery program. The patients received a send off at Tocumen International Airport by First Lady Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos, who coordinates Panama's participation in the program. In a press release of the Panamanian presidency, Fernandez de Torrijos highlighted the success of Operation Miracle and noted that Cuba has allotted Panama 12,000 operations per year. Under the project, the Panamanian government helps low income patients receive free medical care at the Ramon Pando Ferrer Ophthalmology Hospital in Havana. The wife of President Martin Torrijos encouraged underprivileged Panamanians on surgery waiting lists for cataracts, strabismus, sunken eyelids or other eye ailments to report to their nearest health center to sign up. The first two groups of Panamanian patients were treated in Cuba at the end of 2005. The new group is from San Miguelito and Panama Este and includes 11 children, 88 adults and 16 people accompanying them (*EFE, Granma*, 13/1/06)

January 14: Cuba is rarely thought of as a hotbed of crime, but the Department of Foreign Affairs is warning tourists that increasing numbers of Canadians have been victims of pickpocketing, theft and assault — especially in Havana's Old Havana, Centro Havana, the Malecon, and Vedado and on the beaches of Playas del Este and Varadero. Those who are mugged and stripped of identification and money should contact the Canadian embassy before the local cops may just toss them in jail until their identity is confirmed and their solvency restored. (*The Globe & Mail*, 14/1/05)

January 14: Lebanese Youth and Sport Minister Ahmed Fatfat is visiting Cuba to strengthen cooperation, especially in boxing and track and field. "I think my visit will be very fruitful in both, politics and sports," asserted Fatfat. The

Lebanese minister is slated to sign a sport agreement with local officials on January 17, before leaving for his nation. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/1/06)

January 15: Ecuadorian President Alfredo Palacio highlighted Cuba's support to his country in public health, saying that 474 people have undergone operations performed by Cuban surgeons in 2005 to cure them of eye afflictions. At a congressional presentation in Quito, Palacio said that about 5,000 people with ophthalmologic diseases have been treated through "Operation Miracle", 474 of them operated free on the Caribbean island. The statesman praised a plan to build in Quito this year two specialized centers, donated by Cuba, where 150 people could be operated daily for free. Cuba and Ecuador signed an agreement last October, aimed at expanding Operation Miracle, which was initially conceived for Venezuela, but has included other Latin American nations. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/1/06)

January 15: Cuban physician and health official Alcides Lorenzo, who had been held in Mexico since December, was allowed by the Mexican government to travel to the United States, a relative told the press. The Mexican immigration service confirmed that its office in the state of Quintana Roo granted a travel permit to Lorenzo. The 43-year-old Lorenzo was the head of a national family health program in Cuba and the island's representative to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The doctor had been held at an immigration processing center in Chetumal, in the southeastern Mexican state of Quintana Roo, since December 10. Lorenzo used a stopover in Cancun on a flight to Havana to defect and request political asylum. (*EFE*, 15/1/06)

January 16: In a letter remembering his struggle for the release of 75 dissidents incarcerated in Cuba in the spring of 2003, the Ladies in White sent their "warmest congratulations" to Chilean President Elect Michelle Bachelet. "Since March, 2003, we face the unjust imprisonment of 75 prisoners of conscience (...) They and our families are submitted to permanent repression and psychological torture. But, difficult as it may seem to attain a luminous future, we know that we women, with our perseverance and dignity, will be able to achieve it," they wrote. (*CubaEncuentro*, 16/1/06)

January 16: Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has seen off a group of students leaving for the Republic of Cuba where they are to study Comprehensive Community Medicine. The ceremony was held in the Ayacucho Hall of Miraflores Palace, with the presence of 150 students representing the 3,479 who are leaving for Cuba. During President Chávez's message to the students, a telephone call was received from Fidel Castro, who sent his greetings to the future doctors and was applauded by those present. Through the Venezuelan president, Castro expressed the emotion he feels about Cuba hosting these students, whom he called "a Battalion for Life". He said that Cubans are ready to welcome them in the island's best facilities, including the Salvador Allende School in Havana and the Latin American School of Medicine, prior to their being located in definitive medical school locations. (*World Data Service, Granma International*, 16/1/06)

January 16: Twelve exhausted Cubans drifting on a barely-afloat raft 90 miles north of the port of Río Lagartos were rescued by fishermen from the Yucatan community of Progreso, Mexico, after a fishing boat sighted the raft with nine males and three women onboard. The Cubans had fled the island in an attempt to reach the coast of Florida. (*CubaEncuentro*, 18/1/06)

January 18: The UN's much derided Commission on Human Rights, slated to be replaced soon by a proposed new council, formally opened its 2006 session with Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe and several other accused rights abusers assuming their seats on the 53-nation body. According to a report released by UN Watch, a Geneva human rights monitoring organization, more than half of the incoming members of the 2006 Commission fail to meet accepted democratic standards, with 30% constituting regimes where basic political rights and civil liberties are systematically denied. "It's scandalous," said Hillel Neuer, executive director of UN Watch, after attending the meeting in Geneva's Palais des Nations. Neuer objected to the latest UN draft's proposal to allow members of the existing Commission to automatically become the first members of the new Human Rights Council. "Replacing the word 'Commission' with

the word 'Council' does nothing for the dozens of journalists suffering in Fidel Castro's prisons, or for the victims of mass rape in Sudan," said Neuer. (EFE, UN Watch Press Release, 18/1/06)

January 18: Russia supports the Cuban population's call for a cessation to the unfriendly actions against their country and attempts to fuel anti-Cuban sentiment, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said. "Cuba remains one of Russia's priority partners in the Latin American region," Grushko said at a ceremony in Moscow marking the 47th anniversary of Fidel Castro's revolution. "Russia has always called for an end to the American embargo and to other sanctions against Cuba." "The two countries have managed to overcome a decline in their relations in the late 1990s", he said. "The process of adapting Russian-Cuban relations to today's political and economic realities has been completed successfully," Grushko added. (Interfax, 18/1/06)

January 18: The Council of State of the Republic of Cuba has appointed Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary (Embajador Extraordinario y Plenipotenciario) and permanent Cuban representative to the United Nations, Gramma newspaper reported. Before his appointment, Malmierca was Cuban ambassador to Belgium. (Prensa Latina, 18/1/06)

January 18: Lawmakers from Cuba and Venezuela will take part in a parliamentary hearing in Havana to discuss the conceptual basis and development of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). Osvaldo Martínez, National Assembly chair of the Permanent Committee on Economic Issues, told journalists that legislators will discuss challenges to be faced by Latin America at a political moment marked by the Bolivarian Revolution and the triumph of Evo Morales in Bolivia. The Cuban congressman highlighted current reality with the emergence of anti-neoliberal governments in Latin America, and the need to back them by building an alternative to US plans. (Prensa Latina, 18/1/06)

January 18: Human Rights Watch said in its World Report 2006 that Communist-ruled Cuba "remains a Latin American anomaly: an undemocratic government that represses nearly all forms of political dissent." New York-based HRW said that Fidel Castro, after 47 years in power, "shows no willingness to consider even minor reforms. As a result, Cubans are being systematically denied their basic rights to freedom of expression, association, meeting with their fellows, privacy and freedom of movement, HRW said. HRW devotes a chapter of its 2006 report to the Communist island in which it emphasizes that the country's legal and institutional structures are at the root of all the rights violations, adding that although Cuba's government framework is, in theory, one of separation of powers, "in practice the executive retains clear control over all levers of power." The report recalls that in early July 2005 the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation - a prominent dissident group - released a list of 306 persons being held in prison for political reasons. HRW also mentioned the US embargo on Cuba, stating that the unilateral measure "continues to impose indiscriminate hardship on the Cuban people and to block travel to the island." [[HRW's World Report 2006: Cuba](#)] (EFE, 18/1/06)

January 18: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque received Uruguay's Social Development Minister Marina Arismendi, who is visiting the island at the invitation of the government and the Cuban Communist Party. Arismendi, also general secretary of the Uruguayan Communist Party, said that Operation Miracle, by which Cuba provides medical attention to other countries of the world, is something of great interest for her country, as is trading medications and vaccines to Cuba in exchange for food from the South American nation. The Uruguayan minister also spoke of the future use of the Cuban literacy method in Uruguay. (Prensa Latina, 18/1/06)

January 18: The Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party has called on politicians at the Political Committee of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to reject a proposal on the need for condemnation of former communist countries crimes. According to a statement, the document entitled the Need for International Condemnation for Communist Crimes is scheduled to be presented to the ongoing Parliamentary Assembly by the

European Council. The communist party has condemned the document, which it says has been concocted in the European Council chambers. (*Lusaka Post*, 25/1/06)

January 19: The Ladies in White, wives and relatives of political prisoners in Cuba, sent a letter congratulating Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for her recent election as first woman president of Liberia. "We convey to you our warmest congratulations for your inauguration as President of Liberia, and first woman president in Africa", the letter said. "You have brought great hope to the impoverished and long-suffering people of your country, who deserve a democratic environment enabling a sustained development for the well-being of all", the letter added. The letter explains that The Ladies in White are the "wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts" of political prisoners, "who have been seeking their immediate and unconditional release" since their imprisonment, thus they are facing "repression and harassment by the government". "You are an example of the possibilities for us, women, when we are determined to strive for a just cause". (*AFP*, 19/1/06)

January 20: Evo Morales, who became President of Bolivia, sent a special greeting in the name of his people and Bolivian popular and indigenous movements "to the Cuban people and their president, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro, who have taught all Latin Americans how to live and govern with dignity." The message was sent by the leader of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) during a conference with the Cuban press covering events related to Morales' inauguration ceremony. "I want to thank the Cuban people for the strength of their example. Now —he said— we can take part in this anti-imperialist struggle, not just from our union leadership position but also from that of the presidency." The Cuban delegation, headed by Carlos Lage, vice president of the Council of State, was received among waving Cuban flags and solidarity banners expressing affection towards the Cuban people and Fidel Castro. Lage returned the warm welcoming by saying, "I bring you an embrace from Fidel and the Cuban people; to the Bolivian people our love. The Comandante has not been able to come due to work commitments. We have come to reconfirm our admiration for Evo; his triumph is a victory for all Latin Americans." (*Granma*, 22/1/06)

January 21: US diplomats arranged for Cuban dissidents to get a pep talk from former Polish President Lech Walesa in the latest chapter of Washington's long-running ideological battle against Fidel Castro's communist government. "The system will fall because nobody believes in communism," said Walesa, the founder of Poland's Solidarity movement which toppled Poland's communist government and led to the collapse of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. "You are close to your goal," he said in Warsaw in a videoconference with dissidents gathered at the Havana home of the top US diplomat in Cuba, Michael Parmly. (*Reuters*, 22/1/06)

January 21: Fidel Castro expressed concern about the nuclear dispute between Iran and countries including the United States and France, urging all nations to refrain from using nuclear weapons. The Cuban leader chided France for recent comments by President Jacques Chirac that the European nation could respond with nuclear weapons against any state-sponsored terrorist attack. Castro also accused the United States of searching for an excuse to attack Iran. "It is very worrisome that this alliance of countries is proclaiming the right to use nuclear weapons against 'terrorist' states," Castro said in a live appearance on the daily Cuban TV public affairs program "Mesa Redonda," or "Round Table." "What's being spread is fear," he added. (*AP*, 21/1/06)

January 22: Bolivian president Evo Morales announced that he would bring in Cuban and Venezuelan intelligence teams to clear government offices of hidden microphones and guard against "imperialist intervention." "We would ask Cuba and Venezuela to assist us with our security", Morales said in a public address to his supporters on his inauguration day as president of Bolivia. "How would we know if there are hidden microphones or cameras there [in the presidential office]?", Morales added. "They [Cuba and Venezuela] have a lot of experience concerning security issues". According to a Bolivian security official who worked together with the Cubans, Cuban agents were allocated discreetly close to Morales during his inaugural day. Cuban advisers manage the personal security team around Morales, which is composed largely of members of the MAS (Movimiento Al Socialismo) "syndicate police," originally created to protect coca growing interests. An estimated 10,000 MAS militants are studying in Cuba on

medical and other scholarships. A Bolivian intelligence officer, until recently assigned to the Joint Task Force, said many of the Bolivian students also are receiving military and security training to form a special militia or "parallel police" that the government is creating. (*Grupo Reforma, The Washington Times, 24, 31/1/06*)

January 23: Newly inaugurated Bolivian President Evo Morales began his historic, five-year term by meeting with leaders from Cuba and Venezuela. Morales woke before dawn, then sat down with Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, who attended the president's inauguration. The men discussed how Cuba, which has exported thousands of teachers around the world, can help Morales' government fight illiteracy, which runs about 20 percent in the impoverished, Andean country. Morales didn't specify whether he reached any agreements with Lage. Lage, who heads the delegation that attended Morales' swearing-in, is accompanied by Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Minister Martha Lomas, Foreign Vice Minister Rafael Daussa, Ambassador Luis Felipe Vazquez and Deputy Jorge Gonzalez. (*The Miami Herald, Prensa Latina, 24/1/06*)

January 24: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage visited Santa Cruz de la Sierra's Hospital for Children to officially donate medical equipment to its intensive care room. The Cuban vice president recalled the recent signing of bilateral agreements during Morales' visit to Cuba in December. The agreements signed by Evo Morales and Fidel Castro include 5,000 free scholarships for Bolivian students to study medicine in Cuba. During his visit to Santa Cruz, Lage also met with 30 Cuban specialists and 25 Bolivian physicians recently graduated in Havana that work at the National Ophthalmology Institute, as part of "Operation Miracle" to restore vision to hundreds of thousands of Latin American and Caribbean people. (*Prensa Latina, 24/1/06*)

January 24: Iranian Parliament Speaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel is to visit Cuba and Venezuela in mid-February. Haddad-Adel's visit to the two states are to take place at the invitation of his Cuban and Venezuelan counterparts. (*Teheran Times, 24/1/06*)

January 24: A Cuban identified as 34-year-old Lázaro Ulloa Borges, has been stranded for 11 days in a Costa Rican airport where he arrived on a fake travel visa and requested political asylum. An echo of the plot of the Tom Hanks vehicle "The Terminal," the foreigner has had no choice but to spend his nights in the waiting areas adjacent to the boarding gates at the Juan Santamaría international airport, 19 kilometers north of San Jose, while his request for asylum is processed. (*EFE, 24/1/06*)

January 24: An Ottawa-area man detained at a Cuban resort for breaking the ankle of his wife's masseur says he is hoping Canadian Embassy officials can help get him out. But the government can do little for Clyde Carriere besides ensure his rights are respected, a Foreign Affairs spokesman said. "We can't interfere with local justice," said Rejean Beaulieu. "There's not much we can do." Embassy officials can only "make sure his rights in this case are taken into account," he said. Cuban authorities will decide Carriere's fate, Beaulieu said. Carriere, who has consulted a Cuban lawyer, said he's been told he might face a fine and have to pay damages, but wouldn't likely have to go to jail. Carriere is being held at the all-inclusive Sol Club Cayo Coco following a scuffle with a man he hired to give his wife a massage. Carriere is paying a discounted rate of about \$50 a day to stay at the hotel while police investigate. Lynne Carriere alleges the masseur touched his wife's breast, kissed her and told her she was beautiful. (*Canadian Press, 24/1/06*)

January 25: Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations Felipe Perez Roque praised in Havana the trend of increasing bilateral ties with Iran in all fields, and called for further cooperation. At a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Cuba Ahmad Edrissian, Perez Roque promised he would pay a visit to Iran in the near future. Perez Roque said that he would be bringing with him an invitation to his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, from Fidel Castro, to attend the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that is to be held in Havana in 2006 at a date still to be fixed. (*IRNA, 26/1/06*)

January 25: Activists at the World Social Forum held in Caracas called for decisive actions against poverty, an immediate end to the war in Iraq and a radical shift away from free trade. Those attending included more than 800 participants from Cuba, Venezuela President Hugo Chavez's close ally. Cuban Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon called for a campaign across Latin America to rid the region of US troops, including from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the US territory of Puerto Rico. He said young Americans "don't want to go to unjust wars," mentioning Vietnam and now Iraq. (*CNN*, 25/1/06)

January 25: Norway will resume dialogue with the Cuban authorities, frozen since 2003 when the Norwegian embassy in Havana invited representatives of the Cuban opposition to an event celebrating Norway's national day. "The government will resume dialogue with the Cuban authorities. Norway supports a democratic development in Cuba," said the Norwegian Secretary of State, Jonas Gahr Store. (*EFE*, 25/1/06)

January 25: Czech supermodel Helena Houdova took a break from the catwalk to visit communist Cuba and was arrested for taking photographs in a slum, she said. The former Miss Czech Republic 1999 runs a foundation in New York that supports disadvantaged children in nine countries, and she wanted to see what she could do to help in Cuba. But on January 23, Cuban security police detained Houdova and her travel companion, Czech psychologist Mariana Kroftova, while they were taking photographs in the poor Havana neighborhood of Arroyo Naranjo. The two women were held overnight in police custody and not allowed to call the Czech Embassy. They were released 11 hours later after signing a letter vowing not to engage in "counter-revolutionary" activities, the model said. (*Reuters*, 25/1/06)

January 26: The current, former and incoming heads of the Non-Aligned Movement began a two-day meeting in Hermanus, South Africa, to prepare for an upcoming summit. South African Foreign Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the group's former chairperson, was hosting her counterparts from Malaysia, the current head, and Cuba, who will lead the movement next, after the next summit in September, in Cuba. The meeting of the so-called troika, chaired by Albar, comes ahead of a bilateral meeting between Dlamini-Zuma and Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. A Foreign Ministry statement said the talks would include: economic and political ties, developments in the Middle East and Latin America, conflict resolution in Africa, disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control, including Iran's row with the International Atomic Energy Agency. The 114-member Non-Aligned Movement remains the largest political grouping of countries outside the United Nations. (*Mail & Guardian Online*, 26/1/06)

January 26: Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban Parliament, called on the peoples of the world to support the Venezuelan and new Bolivian governments in statements made at the 6th World Social Forum (WSF) taking place in Caracas, Venezuela. Alarcon stressed that backing the processes underway in Latin America, headed by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and by Evo Morales in Bolivia, is a way of helping to make a better world. (*World Data Service*, 26/1/06)

January 26: In a congratulatory message to Chilean President Elect Michelle Bachelet for his electoral victory of last January 15, the Cuban social-democratic opposition group Progressive Arch advocated a "broad-reaching exchange" with the head of state. "As part of the emergent civil society in Cuba, the Progressive Arch expresses to you our wish to establish in the near future a broad-reaching exchange on topics of mutual interest such as democracy, human rights, social justice and political ethics," the text read. (*AFP*, 27/1/06)

January 26: Vice-President Abd-Rabuh Mansur received an invitation for president Ali Abdallah Salih to take part in the non-aligned movement conference which would be held in the Cuban capital, Havana, 15-16 September. The invitation was handed over by Cuban deputy foreign minister and presidential envoy Marcos Rodriguez during his meeting with the vice president. The Cuban official highlighted level of the bilateral relations between Yemen and Cuba calling for further cooperation in various fields, especially the medical and academic fields. (*Saba*, 26/1/06)

January 27: The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples opened a book of condolence for the death of Schafik Handal, leader of the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador. According to Granma website, Cuba remembers him with affection for tirelessly defending the island's revolution. The renowned leftwing leader died on January 24, after suffering a heart failure at the Comalapa airport, returning to El Salvador, after attending Evo Morales' inauguration in Bolivia. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/1/06)

January 27: Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki made a surprise visit to South Africa where he appeared to win the guarded support of this country, Cuba and Malaysia to oppose Western plans to refer Iran to the United Nations Security Council about its nuclear programme. European powers are planning to report Iran to the United Nations Security Council this week because they suspect it is preparing to build nuclear weapons. Iran insists it only wants to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes as it is entitled to do under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Mottaki went to Hermanus to lobby Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and her counterparts, Malaysia's Syed Hamid Albar, and Cuba's Felipe Perez Roque. They had just held a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) troika to prepare for the September NAM summit in Cuba. Mottaki seemed to win partial support from the NAM troika, judging by a joint statement issued by the foreign ministers. It "urged all parties concerned to exhaust all efforts through dialogue and negotiations", and also insisted that the issue of Iran's nuclear programme "should be resolved within the framework of the (International Atomic Energy) Agency". This seemed to imply that the issue should not be taken up by the UN Security Council. The NAM troika statement also stressed "the basic and inalienable right of all states party to the NPT to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes". But the NAM ministers also pointedly reminded Mottaki of the "principled position of NAM concerning disarmament, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy". (*Cape Times*, 30/1/06)

January 27: The legislature of the European Union will approve a resolution stating that the EU's policy of dialogue with Cuba has done nothing to increase freedom on the island, and asks member nations to "take action as a consequence." The resolution has been promoted in the European Parliament by the conservative European People's Party (EPP), but its content has already been agreed with socialist and liberal parties. The working document relates the European Parliament's disappointment that "Cuban authorities have not given any significant indications that they will respect fundamental liberties, and particularly for freedom of expression and political association, which the European Union has demanded." The resolution charges Cuba with "an intensification of repression," an increase in the number of political prisoners, and "forbidding" the Ladies in White - relatives of jailed dissidents - to travel to Strasbourg, France, in December to accept the Sakharov Prize from the EuroParliament". "(Parliament) states that these facts betray the hope of improving relations between the EU and Cuba, the principal reason for the changes introduced by the Council in January of 2005 to its previous policy, and asks the Council that it take action as a consequence," says the text that will be voted on in a full session set for February 2. (*EFE*, 27/1/06)

January 27: Cuban charge d'affaires to the Czech Republic Aymee Hernandez will be explaining why Czech supermodel Helena Houdova and psychologist Mariana Kroftova were detained in Havana, Richard Krpac from the Foreign Ministry's press section told the press. "The Foreign Ministry has invited the Cuban charge d'affaires to explain the incident," said Krpac. He added that Czech diplomacy would primarily like to know why the women had been detained over taking pictures and why the Cuban authorities had not allowed them to contact the Czech embassy. Cuban police detained both Czech women when they were taking photographs of a slum in Havana. Houdova said that she had left for Cuba to find out how she could help children in this communist country. However, Houdova and Kroftova were detained by the Cuban secret police. Both Czech women spent 11 hours in police custody without being able to contact the Czech embassy. They were released after they pledged in writing that they would not join any "counter-revolutionary activities" in the country, Houdova said. (*CTK*, 27/1/06)

January 29: The World Social Forum (WSF) wrapped up in Venezuela after six days of debate on globalisation, poverty and war, and some concern over the dominant role played by Venezuela's leftist president and Cuban officials. There were some grumblings within the forum, where some participants complained over the dominant role played by

Mr Chavez, and to a lesser degree by Cuba, which deployed an 800-strong state delegation to the non-governmental event. "It's a little invasive," said Olivier de Marcelus, 62 a civil servant and a delegate from a small Geneva-based anti-globalisation group. "We need to concentrate on finding other avenues than the form of socialism that has been tried in Eastern Europe and Cuba," he said. (*ABC*, 30/1/06)

January 29: High-level Cuban and South African officials discussed bilateral relations, the situation in Africa and other international issues, and called for increased cooperation at a meeting in the city of Hermanus, in the South African southwestern region. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and his South African counterpart, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, met for two days to discuss a wide range of issues and seek ways to bolster bilateral cooperation, the South African Foreign Ministry said in a communique. Iran's nuclear ambitions was one of the issues discussed at the fourth South Africa - Cuban Consultative Forum. The discussions were held after a two-day gathering among officials from Cuba, South Africa and Malaysia to prepare for the upcoming Non-Aligned Movement meeting. Cuba takes over chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in September. (*AFP, SABC News*, 29/1/06)

January 29: Fidel Castro sent his condolences to the family of late revolutionary leader Schafik Handal and the leadership of the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador. "Schafik was a great captain for workers, a great revolutionary leader, an extraordinary human being," highlights the letter read by Jaime Crombet, member of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee, during Handal's funeral rites. "The world is paying tribute to one who has always lived with dignity, faithful to his principles, without giving up his ideas," says Fidel Castro's message, that was read to a crowd of over 800 people gathered at El Salvador University's Faculty of Law. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/1/06)

January 30: Five Cuban castaways found adrift 20 days after their raft sank were picked up by a Mexican fishing boat from the Yucatan peninsula, and handed over to the National Institute of Migration, where they requested political asylum. The raft-people left the island on January 7 aboard a home-made raft that sank some days later. They were suffering from dehydration when they were rescued. (*El Universal*, 30/1/06)

January 30: Hundreds of thousands of Cubans, particularly children and pregnant women, receive food under projects by the UN World Food Program, the agency's new representative to the island said. The program has invested some US\$234 million (euro194 million) over four decades in the projects, which focus on food for vulnerable groups -- primarily in the island's eastern regions -- and emergency help after natural disasters like hurricanes and drought, said Myrta Kaulard. Cuba's main nutritional problem is a lack of vegetables in a diet too rich in grains and oils, Kaulard said. Frequent hurricanes and a hot, sometimes dry climate also challenge Cuba's ability to properly feed all people year-round. A program to fight anemia benefits some 600,000 Cubans in the island's east, at the cost of US\$5 million (4.1 million euro) per year. An emergency project to feed Cubans affected by drought reached 773,000 children in 2005, according to agency figures. Despite Cuba's challenges, it has become a donor to the World Food Program in recent years, sending crackers to Haiti and sugar to countries including Jamaica, Honduras and North Korea, Kaulard said. (*AP*, 30/1/06)

January 30: Czech top model Helena Houdova, who was arrested in Cuba while taking photographs of Havana's slums, told journalist that she will display the pictures she took at an exhibition portraying the island not only as a tourist paradise but also as a land of political oppression. Houdova, Miss Czech Republic 1999, spoke to journalists after returning from Cuba. "The revolution's watchmen rose up because I was taking pictures of something they do not like," said the top model, referring to the fact that the Communist regime of Fidel Castro denies the existence of slums on the island. (*CTK*, 30/1/06)

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asylum. The raft-people left the island on January 7 aboard a home-made raft that sank some days later. They were suffering from dehydration when they were rescued. (*Notimex*, 30/1/06)

January 31: Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba has assured the visiting Cuban foreign affairs minister, Felipe Perez Roque, a special envoy of Fidel Castro, that he will attend the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit scheduled for September in Havana. The head of state confirmed his attendance when the special envoy delivered the special invitation to him at State House in Mamibia's capital. President Pohamba, who was flanked by the Foreign Affairs Minister Marco Hausiku, Finance Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, and the Namibian ambassador to Cuba, Grace Uushona, welcomed the special envoy, accompanied by the Cuban ambassador to Namibia, Cipriano Castro Saez. (*Namibian Broadcasting Corporation*, 31/1/06)

January 31: Cuba's Armed Forces Minister, Army General Raul Castro, congratulated Mexican Antonio Conde Pontones, known as "El Cuate", for his decisive contribution to the Granma yacht expedition. The Cuban minister sent a congratulatory letter to Conde on his 80th birthday. El Cuate, who in the 1950's helped organized the Granma expedition from Mexico to the island, was conferred the Order of Solidarity from the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba, an award signed by Fidel Castro. The decoration was presented by Cuban ambassador Jorge Bolaños at a ceremony at the island's embassy in Mexico City. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/1/06)

January 31: The Czech nonprofit NGO People in Need was not granted UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consultative status when the ECOSOC Committee on Non Government Organizations accepted Cuba's proposal to reject its application, Pravo wrote. The committee supported the Cuban proposal by nine votes against four with four abstentions, the daily wrote. Pravo said that the US delegation allegedly tried to postpone the debate on the Czech application by procedural objections before the decisive vote was taken. "It is an important victory for our people," Cuban Ambassador to the UN Rodrigo Malmierca commented on the Cuban proposal's approval, Pravo wrote. Malmierca connected People in Need, that he said is financed by the United States and whose supervisory board is headed by Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar, to "subversive activities" in Cuba. "It has taken illegally to Cuba promotion material and money from the US State Department and from the USAID," Pravo quoted him as saying. According to its web site People in Need, founded in 1992, implements relief and development projects in crisis regions all over the world and supports human rights and democracy in countries with totalitarian regimes. (*CTK*, 31/1/06)

January 31: Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez announced that he will be traveling to Havana on February 2, the same day that a military parade commemorating his seven years in power is being held in Caracas. "If God allows me, day after tomorrow I will be in Havana", Chavez said. On January 27 Chavez said that "in a few hours" he would be making a trip to Cuba to talk with Fidel Castro about "Latin American integration". (*EFE*, 31/1/06)

January 31: A group of education experts from Cuba joined with Bolivian authorities to launch a massive bilingual literacy campaign, with which Socialist President Evo Morales seeks to eliminate illiteracy in the Andean nation. The arrival of 24 Cuban experts will begin the work of educational counseling and support promised by Cuban leader Fidel Castro in a meeting with the Bolivian head of state last December, Education Minister Felix Patzi told the press. "This is the start of a process that will last 30 months," the minister said. (*EFE*, 31/1/06)

January 31: A global press freedom advocacy group said it is "dismayed and outraged" by the Cuban government's "continuing harassment of independent journalists." In a letter to the European Union (EU), the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said independent journalists in Cuba are unable to work freely or defend themselves against the Cuban government's "state repression." Reporters Without Borders said it wrote the letter as the EU prepared to debate the state of its relations with the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. In its letter, Reporters Without Borders calls on the Europeans to "seriously reconsider" their position on Cuba by resuming diplomatic initiatives aimed at supporting human rights and dissidents in that nation. (*US Fed News*, 31/1/06)

Terrorism

January 5: Canadian government officials visited detained terrorism suspect Omar Khadr in December at the US Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba. The "welfare visit" came in mid December, Foreign Affairs spokesman Rodney Moore said in an interview. It was the second time the Canadian government has been granted access to the lone Canadian being held at the tightly controlled American detention facility. (*The Vancouver Sun*, 5/1/06)

January 11: Civil rights lawyers and activists who have come to the US Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba, to observe the military hearings against alleged terror suspects accuse the US administration of violating international law, and say the Canadian government hasn't done enough to protect 19-year-old Omar Khadr. The Toronto-born teenager faces a pre-trial hearing on charges that include murder, for allegedly throwing a grenade that killed an American medic in Afghanistan in July 2002. But critics question the legality of the military process set up by US President George W. Bush's administration to hear cases like Khadr's, and that of Hamza Ali al-Bahlul, a 39-year-old Yemeni accused of being an Al Qaeda propagandist. They say the military hearings should have been postponed until the US Supreme Court rules on their constitutionality. (*The Toronto Star*, 11/1/06)

Security

January 26: The Cuban army general who has been the Pentagon's primary contact with this isolated US Navy base has retired and been replaced by a navy captain, the US commander at Guantanamo said. Brigadier General José Solar Hernández, commander of the Cuban Frontier Brigade deployed around the base, announced his retirement on January 20 at the regular monthly meeting held along the fence that separates the Navy facility from Cuba proper. He was replaced by Cuban Navy Captain Pedro Román Cisneros, US Navy Captain Mark Leary told the press. The United States and Cuba started monthly meetings here a decade ago to avert misunderstandings between US Marines and Cuban soldiers who face off across a 17.4-mile fence. Leary said the new commander, Cisneros, is a veteran navy officer of 37 years who served in submarines. Cuba is believed to have retired its three submarines nearly a decade ago after the loss of Soviet subsidies to Havana. Leary reported that so far there has been a seamless transition from Solar to Cisneros, who already has engaged in a routine e-mail exchange with the base through a special communications link. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/1/06)

January 26: Fidel Castro has cautioned that the planet is in danger because the world's top powers have a monopoly over nuclear weapons. The world is in real danger because the US has a monopoly on nuclear arms and they have the nerve to get upset when another country like Iran wants to produce nuclear energy, said Castro. He pointed out that the US has no right to prohibit Iran from the peaceful use of nuclear energy and added that they are now speaking of attacking this Middle Eastern country on the pretext that it represents a threat. Meanwhile, the US has never objected about the nuclear arms that Israel has, Castro said, recalling as well that South Africa once considered launching a nuclear attack against Cuban troops in Angola. The world will disappear if it doesn't have the courage to condemn the militaristic policies of Bush, who used the appalling 9/11 attacks as a pretext and became so defiant as to speak of the possibility of preemptive attacks on some 60 countries comprised in a list that included European countries such as Holland, Fidel Castro noted. "Not even Hitler said that; Hitler looked for pretexts, but Bush attacks with more audacity and a far greater arsenal; he is a nut and the world is running a real risk. Only the truth will save this species," declared the Commander in Chief. Fidel Castro recalled that Cuba has already faced the threat of nuclear arms that dates back to 44 years ago when the October Missile Crisis cast a "shadow" over the island: "We didn't blink; nobody trembled." "Bush is an out-of-control lunatic, go ahead and be scared, but we are not the least bit afraid of him." (*Prensa Latina, Granma* , 26/1/06)

US-Cuba Relations

January 3: TV and Radio Martí are preparing to hit the skies this spring with a new broadcasting airplane they hope will improve their ability to break through the jamming and the Cuban government monopoly on the island's mass media. The aircraft will replace a Pennsylvania National Guard Commando Solo C-130 that has been transmitting to Cuba for four hours on weekends. The aircraft has also been used to broadcast to Iraq and Afghanistan. TV and Radio Martí usually broadcast from a blimp tethered in the lower Florida Keys, but it was knocked out by last year's hurricanes and has not been replaced. Cuba has been largely successful in jamming the signals since the radio opened in 1985 and the TV station followed in 1990. Supporters say the addition of the mobility and broadcasting strength of the new aircraft, expected to be delivered in the spring, will give the station the technological punch needed to overcome the jamming. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/1/06)

January 3: A German documentary to be aired on January 6 claims to have found new evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald shot United States president John Kennedy on the orders of the Cuban secret services. "It was [Fidel] Castro's vengeance for the CIA bid to assassinate him with a poisoned pen," award-winning German filmmaker Wilfried Huismann said about the film that will be aired on ARD television. Huismann's film, "Rendezvous with Death", features claims by a disgruntled former ally of Castro, Oscar Marino, that Oswald had assassinated Kennedy in a plot hatched by the Cuban secret services in the US state of Florida. The theory of Cuban involvement was mooted after Kennedy was shot dead in Dallas, Texas on November 22 1963, one year after the Cuban missile crisis, but largely dismissed. (*ISI*, 3/1/06)

January 7: Cuba is vigorously denying charges that it had a role in US President John F. Kennedy's assassination and insists the CIA, the Mafia and Cuban exiles were behind the slaying. Official weekly Granma International denied allegations made in German filmmaker Wilfried Huismann's documentary "Rendezvous with Death" that Cuba's spy agency paid Lee Harvey Oswald \$6,500 to assassinate Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. "One of the assassination's collateral objectives was to destroy the Cuban Revolution. But that goal was not achieved, and is the secret reason why the conspiracy continues, 42 years later," Granma International editor in chief Gabriel Molina said in an article. According to the article, the documentary "seeks to divert media attention" from the case of anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles, who is under arrest on immigration charges in El Paso, Texas, and whom Cuba accuses of multiple terrorist acts, including blowing up a Cuban airliner, killing all 73 passengers, in 1976. (*EFE*, 7/1/06)

January 7: International Baseball Association (IBAF) president Aldo Notari said that his organization will not sanction the World Baseball Classic if Cuba is not allowed to participate. "Without Cuba, IBAF will withdraw its approval of the event," Italian Notari stated. "And if the IBAF does that, national federations will not be able to register their teams for the World Baseball Classic." Notari made this statements in Chicago, where he is taking part in the NCAA's Trainers' Convention. "There is an article in the Olympic Charter saying it clearly: any kind of discrimination on political, racial or religious grounds is unacceptable," said Notari before flying to Lausanne, Switzerland. (*ESPN*, 7/1/06)

January 9: A husband and wife who worked at a Florida university were accused of being covert agents for Cuba and feeding information on US government officials and anti-Castro exile groups to Havana for nearly 30 years, according to an indictment. Carlos Alvarez, a psychology professor at Florida International University, and his wife Elsa Alvarez, a social worker at the school, were ordered to be held without bond on charges of acting as foreign agents for Cuba without notifying the US government. "If these two individuals were freed I believe they would go to Cuba," US Magistrate Andrea Simonton said as she refused pleas from their lawyers to grant bail to the graying, bespectacled 61-year-old professor and his wife, who is 55. US authorities said the couple, both naturalized US citizens from Cuba,

admitted in voluntary interviews with FBI agents in June that they funneled information to Cuba's Directorate of Intelligence for decades -- Carlos Alvarez since 1977 and his wife since 1982. (*Reuters*, 10/1/06)

January 10: The Bush administration is cracking down on Americans who have violated the embargo against Cuba, targeting a "solidarity" trip to Havana in July 2005 by the New York-based pro-Castro group Pastors for Peace. The Treasury Department sent administrative subpoenas to more than 100 people who traveled to Cuba last summer with the activist group - a first-step enforcement action that could lead to up to \$65,000 in fines being imposed on each traveler. The founder and executive director of Pastors for Peace and its parent organization, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, the Reverend Lucius Walker, told the press that the subpoenas were sent to most of the people who went on the "caravan," as the annual missions to Cuba are called - a number Rev. Walker placed at more than 100. The letters from the Treasury, Rev. Walker said, consisted of a "wide-ranging" list of questions about the nature of caravan participants' travel to and transactions in Cuba, which are prohibited under the terms of America's embargo against the Castro dictatorship. (*Reuters, The New York Sun*, 10,11/1/06)

January 10: Cuba's government denounced the possibility that US immigration authorities will release anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles, who is accused of terrorism by both Havana and Venezuela. The official Communist Party newspaper Granma said that the decision by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE, to review Posada's status "does not surprise, but does outrage." Another government organ, Juventud Rebelde, described the United States as being "on the verge of another disgrace," saying that if Washington releases Posada it will put itself in the position of a "terrorist, which is what its president calls all those who help those who practice terrorism." Both publications echoed the views expressed by government officials on the night's edition of "Roundtable," the main public affairs program on state-run television. (*EFE*, 10/1/06)

January 10: The US government made an appeal to all Cubans not to migrate by illegal means to the US. "We, again, appeal to the Cubans not to risk their lives on the high seas. The United States remains firmly committed to safe, legal, and orderly migration from Cuba", the US State Department Spokesman, Sean McCormack, said. McCormack was answering questions from journalists after the repatriation of 15 Cuban migrants who made it as far as the 7-mile -- the old 7-mile bridge in the Florida Keys. (*BBC*, 11/1/06)

January 11: Cuba solidarity groups The Venceremos Brigade and the Pastors for Peace Foundation confirmed that US authorities have fined hundreds of their members a total of \$1.5 million for traveling to Cuba. The US Treasury Department contacted 200 travellers associated with those groups and linked them to acts of civil disobedience for their visits to Cuba. In total, the fines issued against the activists add up to over \$1.5 million. (*Axis of Logic*, 12/1/06)

January 11: The most provocative piece of a federal case against a pair of Florida International University employees claims the Cuban government directed the couple to recruit young Americans to spy for Fidel Castro. But three US government sources say they have no evidence Elsa and Carlos M. Alvarez accomplished that part of their mission. The husband and wife confessed last summer that they were asked to become recruiters, but their known help to Castro was limited to collecting information about exile groups, the sources said. Moreover, the indictment against the FIU couple does not accuse them of any recruiting activity despite widespread speculation among exile leaders and some media reports. "There was never any kind of recruitment," said Uvi Shabbel, a 42-year-old Pembroke Pines resident who went on an exchange trip with Alvarez in 2000. Shabbel said she was among six FIU graduates then in their 30s who went to Cuba on a two-week trip Alvarez organized with Puentes Cubanos (Cuban Bridges), that paired young American professionals with their counterparts in Cuba. Shabbel's mother, FIU researcher Uva de Aragon, was also an organizer, as was Cuban Bridges founder Silvia Wilhelm. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/1/06)

January 11: Florida International University President Modesto "Mitch" Maidique urged patience from the community in his first public statement since two of his employees were charged with spying for Cuba. "My personal and

professional interactions with the Alvarazes gave me absolutely no indication of any of the activities outlined in the indictment," Maidique said in a written statement. Carlos M. Alvarez, 61, has been an education professor at FIU since 1974. His wife, Elsa, 55, has worked there as a psychological services counselor since 1999. Federal prosecutors accused them of providing the Cuban government with information about exile groups for decades and not registering as foreign agents. They are not accused of revealing government secrets. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/1/06)

January 11: Hall of Fame manager Tommy Lasorda thinks Cuba will be allowed to play in the inaugural World Baseball Classic. Lasorda, who led the United States to the 2000 Olympic gold medal at Sydney and is an ambassador at large for the event, was in Tokyo to promote the 16-nation, World Cup-style tournament to be held in March. "I think they (the Treasury Department) are just trying to stop Cuba from making money because of sanctions," Lasorda said at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. "Because they [the Cubans] have offered to give their earnings to the victims of Katrina I think they will be allowed to play." (*The Globe & Mail*, 11/1/06)

January 11: Cuba said that the US government prevented American writer William Blum from traveling to the island for next month's international book fair. Blum, according to Cuban media, planned to travel to Havana to present his book "Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II." The writer said in a letter to the head of Cuba's Editorial Oriente publishing company, Aida Bahr, that he would not be able to participate in the book fair, the official daily Granma reported. "The same US government of which I speak is preventing me from attending," Blum wrote. Blum worked for the State Department until 1967, when he resigned to protest the Vietnam War. He is the founder of The Washington Free Press, an alternative newspaper. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 11/1/06)

January 11: Interagency working groups, tasked by the US Department of State's Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba, will prepare a second report for the US President by May 2006. "This new report will include a strategic plan to provide specific US Government support for a democratic transition in Cuba", the spokesman for the Department of State, Sean McCormack, said. "The strategic plan will cover the period from when the President determines that a genuine transition government is in place to the date when free and fair elections are held in Cuba". "The plan will establish the US Government's goal and objectives for supporting Cuba's transition to democracy, and identify the required assistance, resources, and lead US Government implementing agencies and international partners". McCormack added that, "the inter-agency working groups will focus on the following areas: democracy and governance; humanitarian assistance; economic growth and infrastructure; and security and the rule of law". "The Commission will also develop additional recommendations for helping the Cuban people hasten the day when they will be free", McCormack said. (*US Fed News*, 11/1/06)

January 11: A good cigar could be an economic boost for Nebraska, that is the reasoning behind a bill introduced by State Senator Pam Brown of Omaha. Under Legislative Bill 1034, the state could accept Cuban tobacco or tobacco products -- such as those highly prized Cuban cigars -- in payment for agricultural or medical products sold to that island nation. The tobacco products, in turn, would be sold at retail outlets chosen by lottery. Brown said she figures that Nebraska could trade a bushel of corn for two to five cigars at Cuban prices, then turn around and get several times that value at retail. Genuine Cuban cigars are advertised on the Internet for \$20 to \$70 apiece. Brown said she might consider an amendment to allow payment in Cuban rum as well. (*Omaha World Herald*, 12/1/06)

January 12: The Puerto Rican Police informed that a group of eight Cuban immigrants coming from the Dominican Republic arrived at the Carabinero area, in Isla de Mona. According to the authorities, the group made up of six men and two women, was in good health and was taken to the municipality of Aguadilla by US Customs and Immigration Enforcement agents. (*EFE*, 12/1/06)

January 12: Paul Archey, who is Major League Baseball's senior vice president for international matters, returned from a one-day visit to Cuba as part of the bid to have the country included in the World Baseball Classic. "It was a frank and productive meeting," Archey said. Archey would not say why he met with several Cuban baseball officials,

but he was probably gathering information that had been requested by the United States Treasury Department. Major League Baseball resubmitted for a license for the Cubans last month after the first license application was denied because the team would have made United States money from the competition. That violates the embargo against Cuba. (*The New York Times*, 13/1/06)

January 12: Florida Republican Congressmen Mario and Lincoln Diaz-Balart sent a letter to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff criticizing the US Coast Guard for sending 15 Cuban migrants back to Cuba even though they had physically reached the Florida Keys after leaving the communist run island. "These Cubans did in fact reach land by reaching the Seven Mile Bridge," said the letter. "Accordingly, the apprehension of the Cuban refugees by the Coast Guard is uncalled for, inflammatory, and violates US policy and precedent. We respectfully urge you to immediately parole these Cuban refugees into the United States." The 15 migrants, including women and children, were found on an old bridge called the "Seven Mile Bridge", south of Marathon Key in the Florida Keys. But Washington officials decided that the bridge was not connected to land so the US Coast Guard decided to send the Cubans back. (*Human Events Online*, 12/1/06)

January 12: The Bush administration has big plans for the island of Cuba once Fidel Castro is out of power. The designated man to conduct the complicated task is US Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry. As his title implies, McCarry already has a protocol that the United States wants to follow that he believes will ensure the best interest of the Cuban people. "The dictatorship has a succession plan," said McCarry to the press. "The problem is the succession plan does not address the deprivation of the Cuban people." In his interview, McCarry pointed out that different actions are already underway to undermine the current dictatorship, the travel ban being one of them. McCarry says that Americans are traveling dramatically less to the communist island and that has so far prevented approximately \$500 million from reaching the island - money he says goes straight to Castro's coffers. (*CBS4 News*, 12/1/06)

January 12: A federal judge suggested that the US government made a foolish error when it sent back 15 Cubans who had landed on an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys. US District Judge Federico Moreno said he would not rule immediately on the emergency lawsuit filed on the Cubans' behalf, but he questioned the government's reasoning. Under the government's long-standing "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy, Cubans who reach US soil are generally allowed to stay, while those stopped at sea are returned to the communist island. In this case, the government said it sent the Cubans back to their homeland because the bridge no longer connects to land. "So the question is whether this bridge is US territory." Moreno told Assistant US Attorney Dexter Lee. "I'll follow the law, whatever it is (...) but the average person would say that's a ridiculous distinction" of whether the bridge was US land. The judge called the abandoned bridge, built by railroad magnate Henry Flagler and wrecked by a 1935 hurricane, "as American as apple pie." (*AP*, 12/1/06)

January 13: The activities of a Florida International University mental-health counselor accused of operating as a covert agent for the Cuban government came to the attention of Congress as early as 1982 when she worked for the University of Miami, according to congressional records. Florida investigators warned the federal government that several Cuban exiles in Miami, among them Elsa Prieto Alvarez, were providing sensitive information to Cuba's communist government just as Miami was struggling to absorb more than 125,000 Mariel refugees, hundreds of them prisoners with serious criminal backgrounds and patients with severe mental illnesses. Prieto Alvarez's lawyer, Jane Moscovitz, said that her client "never furnished any such records to the Cuban government." Testifying in 1982 before a US Senate subcommittee investigating Cuba-related terrorism in South Florida, Sergio Pinon, then an agent for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, accused Elsa Prieto of sending along to Cuba private information on mentally ill patients at Jackson Memorial Hospital. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/1/06)

January 13: A little-known group of Cuban Americans has emerged as part of the background of one of the two Florida International University employees accused of spying for Cuba. Elsa Prieto Alvarez, 55, was a member of the

Antonio Maceo Brigade -- a controversial organization founded 27 years ago by children of Cuban exiles who fled the Cuban revolution soon after Fidel Castro seized power in 1959. Prieto Alvarez and her husband, Carlos Alvarez, 61, have been accused of providing the Cuban government with information about exile groups and not registering as foreign agents. Prieto Alvarez's membership in the brigade surfaced in congressional testimony by Florida Department of Law Enforcement agents in 1982. Long denounced as Castro agents by die-hard anti-Castro exiles, brigade leaders have described themselves as sympathizers of the revolutionary ideals of a small country unfairly besieged by a hostile United States. Brigade leader Andrés Gómez could not be reached for comment, but over the years he has denied any control by Cuban intelligence officers. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/1/06)

January 13: A US judge has agreed to review a controversial decision by the Coast Guard to deport 15 Cubans who reached a disused bridge in the Florida keys. Cubans who reach dry land are allowed to stay in the US. In this case the group was sent back because the damaged bridge was no longer attached to land. The federal judge reviewing the case in Miami, Federico Moreno, said even these critics would find it difficult to understand the government's decision to repatriate the 15 Cubans. "So the question is whether this bridge is US territory," he told the government's attorney Dexter Lee. Mr Lee said the government would ask the court to dismiss the case. (*BBC*, 13/1/06)

January 16: US Representative Bob Menendez (Democrat-New Jersey) sent a letter to US President George Bush with several recommendations to change current government's "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy regarding Cuban immigrants. The letter expressed Menendez' concern "about the treatment of Cuban asylum seekers intercepted at sea", and recommended "legal counsel from recognized Volunteer Agencies" aboard the Coast Guard vessels that intercept Cuban migrants to the US. "If it is determined that it is not feasible to have legal counsel on board US Coast vessels, all Cuban nationals intercepted at sea should be taken to GITMO for their cases to be properly evaluated and for the refugees to be afforded procedural rights consistent with Cuban nationals who seek asylum on land", the letter said. (*NetforCuba*, 16/1/06)

January 16: A top Cuban official said that the jailing of two Florida academics on charges they spied for Cuba for three decades was "strange" and "worrisome." In the government's first public reaction to the case, Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon questioned the timing of the married couple's arrests, which came as a federal appeals court prepared to rehear arguments in the case of five other Cubans accused of being secret agents of the Cuban government. "This story comes across as strange and very worrisome because the FBI has supposedly known since June what they said about their activities," Alarcon told journalists of Carlos Alvarez, 61, and his 55-year-old wife, Elsa. "So why come out with this case now? Obviously it has to do with something that goes beyond these two people," Alarcon said. "They are trying to create an environment of McCarthyism to influence the Atlanta appeals court," Alarcon said of the newest arrests, referring to the case of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US under charges of espionage. (*AP*, 16/1/06)

January 16: The United States used quotes from civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. as the latest prop in its ideological war with Fidel Castro's communist government. "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up," shone in bright orange letters from an electronic display moving across the top windows of the American diplomatic mission in Havana. The quote from King's famous 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington was followed by articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A spokesman for the US Interest Section said the message, focusing on human rights, spoke for itself. A Christmas display at the US mission in 2004 included a lit-up number 75, in reference to the pro-democracy activists jailed by Cuba in March 2003. The Cuban government retaliated with huge billboards showing pictures of hooded and bloodied prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, a swastika and the words "Fascists: made in USA." The billboards are still up on Havana's Malecon sea-wall opposite the US mission. (*Reuters*, 16/1/06)

January 17: Taking an historic and welcome step toward further normalization of grain trade between Cuba and the United States, Cuba's food buying agency has committed to purchase half a million tons of US wheat in the next calendar year. Representatives from U.S. Wheat Associates, the industry's export market development organization,

traveled to Cuba to meet with the leadership of Alimport, the Cuban government's official food importers. Recognizing the quality of US wheat and related products, as well as the performance of American wheat growers and processors, Alimport agreed to purchase 500,000 metric tons of wheat from American exporters in 2006. (*Primedia Inc*, 17/1/06)

January 17: Communist Cuba signed a memorandum of understanding with the US Grains Council agreeing to buy up to 700,000 metric tons of corn from its members this year. Council chairman Davis Anderson said that his association agreed to work with American growers belonging to the council to come up with individual deals to sell corn to Cuba's food import company Alimport. If completed, those deals could mean more than \$100 million in sales benefiting thousands of growers in states including North Dakota, Ohio, Illinois and Iowa, Anderson said. (*AP*, 17/1/06)

January 17: The National Association of Hispanic Journalists has invited Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's national assembly, to participate in a question-and-answer session with reporters during this summer's convention in Fort Lauderdale. NAHJ Executive Director Ivan Román told the press that the invitation to Alarcón went out in the last few days after a planning committee selected several high-profile Hispanic leaders to invite. "There will be people who will be upset about this in Miami, and we know that, but we are journalists availing ourselves of an opportunity to interview people in power and who are newsmakers, that is what we do," Román said. "Nothing has been confirmed. We don't know if it's even going to happen." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/1/06)

January 18: Democrat Robert Menendez was sworn in as senator for New Jersey, taking over the term of Jon Corzine, who was sworn in as governor this week. Menendez, the son of Cuban immigrants, was the first New Jersey Latino in the state legislature and in Congress. He represented the state's 13th district and was the chairman of the House Democratic caucus. (*CNN*, 18/1/06)

January 17: Pressure is mounting on President Bush to overhaul America's "wet-foot/dry-foot" policy on Cuban migration, as cries from lawmakers in Washington and Florida - and the desperation of a hunger striker in Miami - fuel an intensifying furor over the administration's deportation of 15 Cubans who risked their lives seeking freedom in America earlier this month. At a press conference in Miami, the president's brother, Governor Bush of Florida, said the wetfoot/dry-foot policy "makes no sense," and said he expects it will be reviewed by the president. Wet-foot/dry-foot - implemented in 1995 pursuant to a pact between President Clinton and Cuba's dictator, Fidel Castro - was adopted after Mr. Castro unleashed about 40,000 Cuban refugees in 1994, overwhelming the American Coast Guard. (*The New York Sun*, 18/1/06)

January 17: The government of Fidel Castro has approached Venezuela and Bolivia in an attempt to "counter" international pressure to put an end to its "totalitarian system," said US Undersecretary of State Thomas A. Shannon. "I would say that Castro's government is in its last stages," affirmed Shannon, in charge of Western Hemisphere affairs. He indicated that the Cuban government itself has admitted that it is under "unrelenting pressure to become a democracy, particularly if it goes into a transitional phase." "What we see in the Cuban diplomacy is an effort to find a way to counter this pressure," Shannon told the press. Shannon said that the United States "will continue to focus on the promotion of that democratic transition (...) and there are countries that are already prepared to work with us" when the transition takes place. (*AP*, 17/1/06)

January 17: The US Interests Section in Havana intends to "break the information blockade" suffered by Cubans by publicly disseminating messages about human rights and current news, US diplomatic sources said. The US mission said that it will present messages to the residents of the Communist island on a big, publicly visible electronic screen. The aim of the initiative, US officials told the press is to "break the information blockade that the Cuban people have been subjected to ... (and offer) uncensored information." Cuba's 47-year-old Communist regime runs all the island's media - except for the illegal underground press. The Interests Section, U.S. officials added, "will continue using this means to communicate with the people of Cuba." (*The Daily Journal Online*, 17/1/06)

January 17: Fidel Castro suggested the United States doesn't want to play Cuba in the World Baseball Classic, which is awaiting word on whether the US government will let the island's players take part. "We aren't afraid of anything," Castro said in a wide-ranging speech. "It's very difficult to compete against us in any area (...) not even in baseball do they want to compete with Cuba." Castro's comments appeared to refer to the inaugural World Classic, a 16-team tournament scheduled for March 3-20 and organized by Major League Baseball and its players' union. (AP, 18/1/06)

January 19: A pair of Florida International University employees pleaded not guilty at their arraignment in Miami federal court, and their lawyers later decried their detention in solitary confinement as pretrial punishment. The couple are accused of operating as covert agents for Cuba's communist government for decades, using shortwave radios, numerical-code language and computer-encrypted files to send information about Miami's exile community to Cuban intelligence commanders. Carlos M. Alvarez, 61, a tenured professor, and his wife, Elsa Prieto Alvarez, 55, a mental-health counselor, were denied bond on January 9 by US Magistrate Judge Andrea Simonton. The South Miami couple is charged with failing to register with the federal government as foreign agents. If convicted, they face up to 10 years in prison. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/1/06)

January 19: The head of Cuba's food import company promised to double the amount of Cuba-bound cargo coming through the Texan port of Corpus Christi by year's end after signing an agreement with port officials. Pedro Alvarez, the chairman of Alimport, also signed a letter of intent for the port's first shipment of chicken headed to Cuba. "We're going to do more than double the business with Corpus Christi this year," Alvarez told a news conference. "Eventually we hope to triple, then quadruple, business." The planned intensification comes as some Gulf of Mexico ports, such as New Orleans and Gulfport, Mississippi, are struggling to recover after last year's Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans continues to be one of Cuba's top ports, however, along with Houston and Galveston, Texas, Alvarez said. Some 50,000 metric tons (55,120 tons) of wheat and 20,000 metric tons (22,050 tons) of beans were shipped through the Corpus Christi port to Cuba last year. (AP, 19/1/06)

January 20: The US government has reversed course and will allow Cuba to play in a 16-nation baseball tournament in the United States in March despite broad economic sanctions against Havana, the US Treasury Department said. Treasury last month denied a Major League Baseball request for a license for Cuba to play in the World Baseball Classic, but reversed its decision on the condition that Fidel Castro's communist-run government receive no money. (Reuters, 20/1/06)

January 20: Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly, is considering participating in a question-and-answer session with reporters during this summer's National Association of Hispanic Journalists convention in Fort Lauderdale. An invitation to Alarcón was hand-delivered to him personally by South Florida Sun-Sentinel Editor Earl Maucker in the last two weeks, said NAHJ Executive Director Iván Román. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/1/06)

January 20: Three Cuban-American members of Congress received a letter from the State Department confirming that officials will be meeting to discuss the controversial US-Cuba migration accords. "We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the Migration Accords, and to facilitate discussions with other agencies to discuss other relevant issues," said the letter signed by Jeffrey T. Bergner, assistant secretary of legislative affairs for the State Department. Bergner's letter was prompted by a note that Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Mario Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, all Miami Republicans, sent to top Bush administration officials seeking a meeting to discuss the controversial "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy. (*The Miami Herald*, 21/1/06)

January 22: Fidel Castro invited US citizens too poor to afford eye care to come to his communist country for treatment. Washington's nemesis even offered to send an airplane to Florida to fly patients to Cuba. "I wonder if (the US government) will authorize our plane to pick them up in Florida, or if they prefer that they stay blind," Castro said. Castro said Cuba would be able to perform 150,000 eye operations "for the impoverished people of the United States."

Cuba and Venezuela, which is led by another US irritant, President Hugo Chavez, have included Americans in their "Operation Miracle," which offers free eye treatment to six million Latin Americans over 10 years. (*AFP*, 22/1/06)

January 22: Fidel Castro accused the United States of trying to torpedo relations and harboring Cuban-born terrorists, then called a protest in front of the US diplomatic mission for January 24. Castro, in a three-hour televised appearance, charged that a huge electronic ticker tape mounted across the fifth floor of the US diplomatic mission in downtown Havana aimed to end minimal relations under which each country maintains Interests Sections in the other's capital. "The U.S. government (...) is deliberately trying to force a rupture in the actual diplomatic relations," Castro charged. "The gross provocation by the US Interests Section in Havana can have no other purpose (...) They know no government in the world could allow it," he said, noting his government's diplomatic protests had been ignored. Castro said he was taking measures to insure that food sales from the US were not interrupted, without explaining further. Castro also charged an immigration hearing for Cuban-born (Luis) Posada Carriles was aimed at granting him conditional parole. Posada, 77, has been held by the United States since May for illegally crossing the border into Texas from Mexico. "On January 24, when the status of the ferocious terrorist will be reviewed, the people of the capital will march with all their exemplary revolutionary discipline and unity in front of the interests Section of the fraudulent and bastardly government of George W. Bush," Castro said. [[Fidel Castro's remarks during his TV appearance](#)] (*BBC, The New York Times*, 22/1/06)

January 22: The head of the United States Interest Section in Havana, Michael Parmly, rejected Fidel Castro's accusations about alleged Washington plans to break the bilateral migratory agreements. "It is not anything that we have thought of," said Parmly to representatives of the foreign press. Castro accused Washington of planning to break the current migratory agreement between both countries signed in 1994, after the so-called "Raft-people Crisis." (*EFE*, 22/1/06)

January 23: The former head of the Cuban State Security Service, Fabián Escalante, accused the German film maker Wilfried Huismann of "baseless" slander, after Huismann speculated in a documentary that he was somehow tied to the murder of John F. Kennedy. After the premiere of the documentary, Huismann claimed to have interviewed Escalante in Cuba in May, 2005 and asked him why he had traveled to Dallas on November 22, 1963, the day that Kennedy was murdered. According to Huismann, Escalante refused to answer. (*La Jornada*, 23/1/06)

January 24: Havana's billboard war saw more salvos fired as the US and Cuban governments stoked their decades-old confrontation with competing messages. Fidel Castro shepherded about one million people to a protest outside the US diplomatic mission in the Cuban capital in one of his government's periodic immense protests against Washington. But just as the 79-year-old leader was about to speak to the masses, American diplomats couldn't resist taking advantage of a captive audience and lit up the electronic ticker-tape billboard recently erected on the side of the building. "To those who may want to be here, we respect your protest. To those who don't want to be here, excuse the bother," the sign declared in a reference to strong government pressures that ensure attendance at such protests is high. The sign was the latest in a public relations battle between Cuba and the diplomatic mission, officially known as the US Interests Section, each using billboards and displays to mock the other. "To help Cubans shuck off their propaganda strait jacket, we have creatively used new measures to dialogue with them -- and the streaming, electronic billboard is just our latest initiative," US Interests Section chief Michael Parmly said. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/1/06)

January 24: Fidel Castro accused the United States of seeking to rupture the minimum remaining diplomatic ties with his country, addressing tens of thousands of Cubans before starting a march outside the American mission in Havana. "The rude provocations that have been undertaken from its Interests Office in Havana does not, and could not, have any other goal," Castro said from a podium before the sea of cheering people stretching out along Havana's Malecon coastal highway ahead of the government-organized march. "Bush: fascist! Condemn the terrorist!" the marchers chanted, most of them waving little red, white and blue Cuban flags and signs equating US President George W. Bush with Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles, whom Castro accuses of a series of violent actions against the island. "Cuba will triumph!"

they shouted. Among those Castro greeted before his speech was former Nicaraguan president and Sandinista Party leader Daniel Ortega. Also seen in the crowd was Castro's wife Dalia, his older brother Ramon and his eldest son Fidel Jr., along with top Communist Party leaders. The marchers included Elian Gonzalez, the boy at the center of an international custody battle in 2000, and his family, as well as relatives of five Cuban agents imprisoned in the United States. [[Key remarks by Fidel Castro](#)] (AP, 24/1/06)

January 24: With both sides claiming politics is interfering with justice, another deadline came and went in the custody battle over Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles. He remains in federal detention in El Paso, Texas. Posada's lawyer, Eduardo Soto, said he doesn't expect a decision in the next days on whether Posada, 77, will be released and allowed to stay -- as he hopes will happen -- in the United States under supervision or in another country, if another country can be found to take him. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is reviewing the case. A federal immigration judge in September barred the government from extraditing Posada to Cuba or Venezuela because he might face torture. A decision now is expected by April. "ICE is moving forward to carry out Mr. Posada's removal from the United States," ICE spokeswoman Barbara Gonzalez said in a statement. "An immigration judge granted Mr. Posada deferral of removal to Cuba and Venezuela based on the Convention Against Torture. However, that doesn't impede ICE from removing Mr. Posada to a third country." (*The Miami Herald*, 25/1/06)

January 25: Fidel Castro confirmed that his country would play in the World Baseball Classic in Cuba's first official reaction to the US government's decision allowing the communist country to participate. "We will be there, but I would never have thought I would have to answer that question," Castro told reporters who questioned him during a surprise visit at night to a construction site outside the US Interests Section in Havana. Still, Castro warned, "that is if (the Americans) don't start in on messing around with not giving the visas, or if they go crazy." The Cuban leader said his country's team "will play clean (...) to win or lose battling over there," during the inaugural World Baseball Classic. "We're not going to say that we're the best," Castro said. "They have taken away a lot of the best pitchers offering them millions of dollars," he added, referring to Cuban players who left for big-paying jobs in the Major Leagues. (*The New York Times*, 25/1/06)

January 25: Fidel Castro visited a mysterious new construction site outside the US Interests Section, but kept mum over what was being built in front of the mission -- a growing flashpoint for US-Cuba relations. Dressed in his olive green uniform and surrounded by security men, Castro made the nighttime visit one day after directing a massive march past the building to protest recent US actions aimed at Cuba, including a new electronic sign streaming news and human rights messages. "If I tell you, it will ruin the surprise," Castro told reporters who asked what workers were building. The Cuban president said he was there primarily "to greet the workers." Castro indicated he had no intention of breaking already limited relations between the two countries. "It is (the Americans) who will decide what happens to this Interests Section," he said. (AP, 25/1/06)

January 25: Fidel Castro says Cuba is not afraid of an eventual rupture of the remaining tenuous diplomatic relations it has with the United States, something he claims is the objective of what he describes as recent US "provocations." "Cuba fears nothing," said the 79-year-old leader during a visit to the construction site in front of the US Interests Section in Havana. "When they decided on this nonsense (the electronic billboard) ... they cannot have had any other purpose than a provocation to destroy these tenuous ties (with Cuba)," the aging strongman said of US officials. The United States, Castro said, "has the aim of provoking the rupture of those minimal links of diplomatic relations." But he stressed that "if the relations are interrupted, we would lose absolutely nothing." "We are taking all the appropriate steps, all precautions to guarantee the supplies this country needs, to avert contingencies," he said, accusing Washington of seeking to destroy the budding trade between Havana and US farmers and ranchers who sell food to Cuba. Despite the 45-year-old US economic embargo against the Communist-ruled island, the Bush administration, citing humanitarian reasons, in recent years has allowed Havana to purchase foodstuffs and medicine for cash from US suppliers. (EFE, 26/1/06)

January 25: Bulldozers dug up a street in front of the US diplomatic mission in Havana apparently preparing to block the view of an electronic billboard carrying human rights messages that has angered Fidel Castro. Brigades of workers began the task hours after Castro and hundreds of thousands of Cubans marched past the mission to protest against the five-foot-high (1.5- meter) ticker that streams messages across the facade of the US Interests Section. US diplomats said Cuba's communist authorities were building a concrete wall or screen to obstruct view of the ticker, which displays messages to the Cuban people, news headlines like "Conservatives win elections in Canada", and quotes from Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi and Lech Walesa. "It is very clear that the Cuban government is building a wall to cut off dialogue," a spokesperson for the Interests Section said. Cuban officials said they were extending an open-air stage that has been the main venue for political rallies against the United States since 2000. "We are expanding the Anti-Imperialist Stage," an official overseeing the work said as an excavator ripped up the asphalt. Another said flag masts would be erected on a new square. (*Reuters*, 25/1/06)

January 25: Carlos M. and Elsa Alvarez spied on Florida International University President Modesto "Mitch" Maidique, giving details in at least one report to their Cuban intelligence handlers about a White House invitation Maidique received, according to a government affidavit. FBI agents executed a search warrant at FIU on January 12, and seized the Alvarezes' computers from their respective offices. That search was a follow-up to the FBI's discoveries in the Alvarezes' home computers, which were linked to those at their offices, according to an FBI affidavit. The document offers a first glimpse at the information the FBI believes the Alvarezes -- charged with failing to register as foreign agents -- provided to Cuban intelligence agents over the last three decades. The affidavit also attempts to link the professor's recruitment efforts to Puentes Cubanos, or Cuban Bridges, a nonprofit group that is not affiliated with FIU. "Moreover, in 2002, the DI [Cuba's Directorate of Intelligence] assigned Carlos Alvarez to begin screening and evaluating students, some of them at FIU, that would be traveling to Cuba as part of an exchange program known as Puentes Cubanos," the affidavit said. "The DI was interested in which of these exchange students would be amenable to recruitment by the DI. Although Carlos Alvarez stated that he never received a follow-up request for actual names of potential recruits, he has stated to FBI agents that he would have provided that information if asked." (*The Miami Herald*, 25/1/06)

January 25: Two convicted Cuban immigrants were escorted into a federal courtroom, fully expecting a judge to put them behind bars for six years for their roles in a smuggling operation that ended in tragedy. But US District Judge K. Michael Moore delayed his decision, saying six years was not enough punishment under federal sentencing guidelines because a young boy drowned in the October 13 illegal crossing of the Florida Straits. Moore said he will make up his mind next month on the fate of Alexander Gil Rodriguez, 25, and Luis Manuel Taboada-Cabrera, 28, whose relatives and friends cried outside the courtroom. The two Miami men had reached quick plea deals in November on migrant smuggling offenses with federal prosecutors, who said they didn't have enough evidence to charge them with the death of 6-year-old Julian Villasuso. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/1/06)

January 26: Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban Parliament, denounced the torture carried out on hundreds of prisoners at the illegally occupied US Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba, in a debate about demilitarization in the Americas, during the 6th World Social Forum (WSF) taking place in Caracas, Venezuela. Alarcon demanded the elimination of all US military bases in Latin America and alerted that, since the US military is spread thin, Washington could hire mercenaries in the region to do its dirty work. We must do something so that the people of the United States reassume their massive anti-war campaign during the Vietnam War, said Alarcon. "That would force the Bush administration to withdraw the US troops from Iraq and prevent a similar situation in Latin America," he added. (*World Data Service*, 26/1/06)

January 26: A search has been launched for 15 Cubans aboard a homemade wooden vessel that was spotted in the Florida Straits a day earlier, the Coast Guard said. Coast Guard personnel in a helicopter spotted the migrants about 46 miles southeast of Marathon in the Florida Keys. The Blackhawk crew lost contact with the vessel due to poor visibility and bad weather. The boat has not been located since. The helicopter crew reported the wooden vessel had no engine

and was approximately 15 feet to 20 feet in length. The sea-state at the time was 4 to 6 foot seas and getting worse. It also reported all people on the vessel appeared to be wearing life jackets. Search efforts through the night included aircrews from Miami and Islamorada. At first light, a jet, a helicopter and a Hercules aircraft were launched to assist in the search. (*Sun Sentinel*, 26/1/06)

January 26: The US Treasury Department began a crackdown on illegal travel to Cuba, suspending the license of one of South Florida's largest Cuba travel agencies -- La Estrella de Cuba. The move could affect tens of thousands of people who have been searching for ways to travel to Cuba from the United States in the wake of the Bush administration's tightened travel restrictions imposed in 2004. Treasury Department spokeswoman Molly Millerwise said that the Office of Foreign Assets Control is conducting on-site audits at agencies that do business with Cuba, aiming to complete 25 audits this year. ``Instances of serious license violations may result in license suspension, cease-and-desist orders or penalties imposed under the Trading With the Enemy Act." (*The Miami Herald*, 27/1/06)

January 26: An electric sign streaming news and human rights messages across the facade of US diplomatic offices in Havana will stay put despite objections by the Cuban government, the top US envoy to the island said. "We will continue to communicate to the Cuban people using all sorts of methods (including the sign)," US Interests Section chief Michael Parmly told journalists at his Havana residence. Parmly said that the messages were not intended to be provocative, adding that the United States did not intend to break ties either. "I prefer not to talk of breaking relations," he said. "We have the intention of continuing our presence here, as long as they let us." In response to the sign, Castro launched a massive protest march past the Interests Section, then started a mysterious construction project directly in front of the offices the next day. Castro himself paid a surprise visit to the site, though he kept mum over what was being built. "Yes, I've noticed that something's being built in what used to be (our) parking lot," Parmly said. "It looks rather massive, with significant construction equipment. I can only wonder what's happening to construction elsewhere in the city, but that's not my affair." Parmly said his staff had started taking bets on what the structure was going to be, but he declined to share the theories. The Cuban government also surrounded the American mission with several billboards in reaction to the electric sign. "Someone's got a vivid imagination," Parmly said of the signs, calling others that used foul language "crude" and "disappointingly insulting to the Cuban people." (*AP*, 26/1/06)

January 26: Human rights organizations and the co-chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus protested a decision by the Bush administration to back a measure introduced by Iran denying two gay rights groups a voice at the United Nations. Among countries with which the United States sided were Cuba, Sudan and Zimbabwe, nations the State Department has cited in annual reports for their harsh treatment of homosexuals. (*The New York Times*, 27/1/06)

January 26: Despite the state's dry conditions, Oklahoma wheat is still valuable enough to spur a \$4 million deal with Cuba. Officials from the state Agriculture Department recently returned from Cuba with a verbal commitment that the Caribbean island will purchase nearly 1 million bushels of wheat from the state. Mark Hodges, executive director of the Oklahoma Wheat Commission, said though this year's crop may be a challenge, state wheat growers will be able to produce enough for the sale. (*Tribune Business News*, 26/1/06)

January 26: Cuban officials may ask the United States to grant visas to the island's two Grammy nominees so they can attend the February 8 awards show in Los Angeles, a request that will likely be denied. Mayito Rivera was nominated in the best salsa and merengue category for "Llego la hora" and Manuel "Guajiro" Mirabal was nominated in the traditional Latin tropical music category for "Buena Vista Social Club Presents Manuel 'Guajiro' Mirabal". "I think it's sad because artists have nothing to do with the disaster of politics," said saxophonist César López, who leads the popular jazz group Habana Ensemble, which visited Miami and New York in 1998. (*Sun Sentinel*, 26/1/06)

January 30: The current state of Cuban affairs, the sale of Spanish planes to Venezuela and the new political landscape in Bolivia were some of the issues that US Undersecretary of State for Latin America Tom Shannon tackled with Spanish Foreign Affairs officials. After Madrid, Shannon will travel to Brussels, Paris and Rome. (*AFP*, 31/1/06)

January 30: Cuba's Communist regime was progressing rapidly with a construction project designed to block citizens' view of pro-democracy messages and news items scrolled across huge screens on the fifth floor of the US diplomatic mission. Dozens of giant masts went up opposite the US Interests Section in Havana, apparently intended to support banners that would obstruct the line of sight from the square to the "offending" messages. The capital has buzzed with rumors about the nature of the project since work got under way at the site, but the appearance of the construction points to the creation of a field of flags on what used to be a parking lot for US diplomats. (*EFE*, 30/1/06)

January 30: The President of the People's Power Assembly (Parliament), Ricardo Alarcon, considered the process against the terrorist Luis Posada Carriles in the US a farse. According to Alarcon, Bush cannot act correctly in this case since he is stained by his collaboration and relations with assassins as part of his historical plans to attack Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/1/06)

January 31: The organizers of the World Baseball Classic have resisted publicizing Cuba's 60-man roster for the 16-team tournament because the country has still not completed its agreement to compete in March. But the Cubans released the names to the news media in Havana. The Cubans have a roster that is familiar to anyone who saw them win the 2005 World Cup in the Netherlands. Of the 24 players who were on that team, 23 are on the roster for the World Baseball Classic, which runs March 3-20. The Cubans have to trim their roster to 30 players by March 2. (*The New York Times, Globe & Mail*, 1/2/06)

January 31: A Cuban top official lamented the death of Coretta Scott King, the widow of late human rights leader, Martin Luther King, and said that it was an "irony" that such loss happened when the US president was to address the nation. "I don't know what the emperor will say in his State of the Nation address in a day like this one that brought the sad news of the passing away of Coretta Scott King", the president of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, said. "Black people in the US will not be listening to him, but paying respect to Coretta", Alarcon added. (*AFP*, 31/1/06)

January 31: Cuban energy sector officials are scheduled to meet with an unspecified number of US business people from the oil sector in a Mexico City hotel over several days, according to Cuban government sources. The meetings, which will be open to reporters, are slated for February 2-4 at the Maria Isabel Sheraton. The Cuban sources believe the director of the island's state oil company Cuba Petroleo may attend. But it is believed none of the big US oil companies will be represented. The sessions are being organized by Washington D.C.-based Alamar Associates, which claims to have consulted with "hundreds of US corporations, organizations and media outlets interested in pursuing business in and with Cuba." (*Platts Commodity News*, 31/1/06)