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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: The 13th International Havana Book Fair is inaugurated in Havana. Dissident organizations release new documents on the island's situation. The Cuban Council of State appoints a new Tourism Minister. Ten Cuban officials are prosecuted under corruption allegations. Cuban scientists disapprove of cloning for reproductive purposes.

Economy: Chilean magnate Max Marambio starts to move his business focus to Chile. The National Biopreparations Center establishes a new record in the manufacture of Anti-hepatitis B vaccines. Cuba rises to eighth place among tourist preferences in the Americas. More than a third of the audits conducted on Cuban companies in 2003 uncovered irregularities. Russia presents Cuba with proposals to settle Cuba's debt to the former USSR and its outstanding debt to Russia. Cuba announces its intention to become an associate member of Mercosur trade bloc.

Exile Community: Cuban-American congressional leaders and members of exile organizations unveil a comprehensive proposal of how to proceed with a transition to democracy. Most Cuban natives living outside the island can visit their country without a visa.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba accuses the EU of "complicity" with the US, at the inauguration of the Book Fair. A French Member of Parliament asks permission to visit political prisoners. A United Nations envoy publishes a scathing report on Cuba's treatment of political dissidents in prison. First exchange of experiences organized by the International Police (INTERPOL) on the struggle against drugs in Havana. Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister tours South America. Mexican delegations visit the island. A Canadian businessman charged with violating the US embargo against Cuba is sentenced to a year's probation.

Security: Cuban military units begin their defence preparation year.

US-Cuba Relations: French Pernod Ricard and Cuban Havana Club win over US Bacardí in a long-standing dispute. Fidel Castro accuses the US government of preparing the ground for an invasion of the island, and George Bush of attempting to assassinate him. The Bush administration forbids 10 foreign companies from doing business in the United States. The US Treasury Department announces that it would impose further restrictions to remittances to the island. The top US diplomat in Havana says Cuba is fabricating a threat of invasion by the United States. President George W. Bush steps up restrictions on boats traveling between US ports and Cuba.



Domestic Affairs

February 1: Palabra Nueva Catholic monthly in its latest edition has asserted that "a good many Cuban families do not enjoy at present good spiritual, moral, and even psychological health. The article acknowledges that "different social programs implemented in the past four decades provided solutions to many family problems but created others." In that respect, it said that the universalization of education "brought relief to a considerable number of families," but the mandatory boarding program of many schools caused "the disruption of family structure, weakened parent-children relations, undermined family traditions." It explained that the boarding school is not bad in itself, but the moral and ethical patterns that structure human coexistence in such places are. Cuba needs integral people and families, more than people and families with an integral education." (*AFP*, 1/2/04)

February 1: Cuba began 2004 with a serious shortage of condoms, especially in Havana, where many pharmacies were out of stock, although sales of the much-in-demand product have resumed recently, according to the official Juventud Rebelde newspaper. Public Health Ministry National Epidemiology Service director Rigoberto Torres said the shortage of condoms "was due to delays in entry of imports of this necessary article, coming from faraway markets, which accelerated the shortage." (*EFE*, 1/2/04)

February 2: Nearly 2000 delegates from Cuba and 70 other countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America have gathered in Havana for the Fourth International Congress, "Universidad 2004". Providing an opportunity to discuss many different aspects of higher education, the Congress will run through four days. According to organizers of the meeting in the Cuban capital, one of the main objectives of Universidad 2004 will be to find sustainable solutions to social and economic problems related to university education. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/2/04)

February 3: The daughter of Cuba's late revolutionary hero Ernesto "Che" Guevara says she is trying to stop capitalists from exploiting her father's famous image. "It cannot be that they are using it on bottles of vodka, bottles of rum," Aleida Guevara said in reference to the prevalent use of the "Che" image by businesses for advertising and profit-related ventures. "It must be a respected image (...) we are going to defend it," Guevara told reporters. Guevara said she and other relatives are currently going through legal channels to prevent businesses and organisations from using her father's image without the family's consent. She did not elaborate. (*News.24*, 4/2/04)

February 4: A Church symposium on the family has already been held, and a national congress on the topic is scheduled for December, wrote the Cuban bishops' conference spokesman Orlando Márquez in the publication Palabra Nueva. Workshops will be held during the year at the parish, regional and diocesan levels. National and foreign speakers will address topics such as the role of the family in building a healthy society. "How important is it to dedicate a year to reflect, pray, think and rethink about the family in Cuba for a Church lacking influence outside its own perimeter, not listened to and disregarded by the authorities on this and other issues?" Márquez asked in his article. (*Zenit*, 4/2/04)

February 5: Cuban citizen Orestes Álvarez was arrested by members of the Cuban state security while planning to flee the island on a hot-air balloon. Since 1996, Álvarez said, he had been building the balloon to fly to Florida. (*NotiCuba Internacional*, 22/2/04)

February 5: The 13th International Havana Book Fair was inaugurated in Havana with the participation of 250 publishing houses from 24 countries. The fair is being held in the old San Carlos de La Cabaña fort and is dedicated this year to German culture and the Cuban poet Carilda Oliver Labra. Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto, Vice President Jose R. Fernandez and Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gomez attended the initial ceremony along with

other cultural affairs officials, teachers and heads of educational institutions, as well as foreign diplomats based in Havana. At the fair, 37 German publishing houses will set up in a 170-meter-wide (550 feet) pavilion. (*EFE*, 5/2/04)

February 6: "El éxito del tigre" (The Tiger's Success), a novel by Cuban writer Luis Manuel García, was launched in Havana as part of the International Book Fair. The author, however, did not receive clearance from Cuban authorities to attend the event. García was not invited due to his collaboration with "Encuentro", a journal published in Madrid, Spain. In Cuba, García won the 1990 Casa de las Américas Award for his novel "Habaneceer", as well as the 1992 Critics National Award. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 9/2/04)

February 9: The Ernesto Che Guevara monument complex was declared a national monument, at the 45th anniversary of Che being granted the status of a Cuban citizen. Nilson Acosta, executive secretary of the Cuban National Monuments Commission, read the resolution approving the initiative. From October 1997 to the present day, more than 1,060,000 people have visited the memorial-museum in Santa Clara, which houses Che's remains as well as those of his comrades who fell in Bolivia. (*Granma International*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Cuban authorities defended their human rights record, saying much of the criticism directed at the communist island has come from groups whose only aim is to bring down the government. "Even those who say they are friends, while pointing to Cuba as a model in the application of economic, social and cultural rights, criticize us in terms of what they call civil rights," said deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno during the presentation of a new government-sponsored book on the subject. Fabio Raimundo Torrado, author of "Human Rights in the Cuban Political System," told reporters that the contemporary concept of "human rights" is based more on political and cultural points of view -- "a European fruit, born of the Bourgeois revolution" that governments then began imposing on the rest of the world. (*AFP*, 10/2/04)

February 10: A leading dissident group unveiled a list of proposals to achieve peaceful change in Cuba, calling for free speech, private business ownership and the formation of labor unions. The 36 demands were announced by Vladimiro Roca, a former military pilot who broke with the socialist government more than a decade ago. Roca, spokesman for the opposition United For All Movement, said he plans to submit the proposals to the local district representative, the lowest level of government, in hopes they will reach the National Assembly. According to Roca, the text has already been seen by more than 30,000 people, and is not a proposal for the post-Castro transition, but rather an initiative to mobilize the population, because "until the people mobilize, no change will be possible." At the moment, he added, "there are indications that unrest could cause a social explosion, which appears to be what the government is betting on." "The government is trying to provoke a social explosion (...) with possible consequences like a mass exodus of Cubans to the United States," he said. "The intention is to mobilize people using the (government) mechanisms that they have available to them," Roca said. Roca said the proposals are a step toward the goal of achieving peaceful change on the communist island. [[Propuesta de Programa](#)] (*AP*, *EFE*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Cuban scientists have developed a drug to control anemia. The medicine, Trofin, produced in the island's National Bio-preparations Center, is made from all natural materials and has no negative side-effects. Last year it won the Grand Prize at the IV Food and Nutrition Congress. Production of the new tablet began in 2003 and since then the Center has increased production and lowered cost without affecting quality. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/2/04)

February 10: The Colección Cultura Cubana book series, created by a Puerto Rico-based publishing house for Cuban writers, whether living in or outside this socialist-run country, is one of the main attractions of the International Book Fair under way in Havana. The editor of the collection, Patricia Gutiérrez, says the fundamental aim of the Plaza Mayor publishers is to offer and encourage "respect for differences". The shelves of Plaza Mayor's booth at the Havana fair hold books by Carmen Duarte, who lives in the US city of Miami, Pedro Pérez Sarduy, resident of London, and John Kirk, who lives in Canada. Not without some grumblings by officials, the publisher brought to Cuba "Mi vida sexual" (My Sexual Life), by Paquito D'Rivera, a provocative autobiography of the Cuban child prodigy saxophone and clarinet player who emigrated to New York. Gutiérrez is the daughter of Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, who returned to Cuba

in the middle of last year and has been trying -- unsuccessfully -- to convince the authorities to grant him legal residence. (*IPS*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Relatives of the 75 prisoners of conscience sentenced to long prison terms last April are collecting signatures in support of an amnesty for all political prisoners in the country. According to article 63 of the Cuban Constitution, 10,000 signatures are needed for any such initiative to be considered. (*Cubamet*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Presided over by Manuel Cuesta Morúa, the dissident organization Arco Progresista has released a comprehensive study of the political situation on the island. [[Informe a la Nación](#)] (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/2/04)

February 11: Javier Sotomayor's band "Salsa Mayor" plays the matinee show at the Casa de la Música in downtown Havana, to a crowd of rhythmically gyrating dancers. "I'm the godfather of the band," Sotomayor says. He put up some of his prize money from athletics to buy instruments and his friend and former wrestler Roberto Despaigne, who plays guitar and writes the songs, selected the players, all professionals. The salsa band is more than a hobby for Sotomayor. The athlete turned budding musical impresario is looking for a recording company while doing gigs for tourists at a hotel on one of Cuba's sun-bathed Caribbean keys. (*Reuters*, 11/2/04)

February 11: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá said he is "constantly threatened" by Cuban government agents and at present "the likelihood of being killed is very high." Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, believes his life is up to a "decision" by Fidel Castro, he said to the French daily *Le Figaro*. (*Encuentro en La Red*, 11/2/04)

February 11: The Cuban Council of State appointed Manuel Marrero Cruz as the country's new Tourism Minister, replacing Ibrahim Ferradaz García, the *Granma* newspaper reported. Architect Manuel Marrero Cruz was before the Executive President of the Gaviota Group, a tourism and services corporation. He had worked for more than a decade in investment projects, hotel management and held several public posts. Without providing further details, *Granma* says Ibrahim Ferradaz "will be assigned to other tasks". (*Prensa Latina*, 11/2/04)

February 11: Cuban police inspected a house and several auto repair shops in a neighborhood where residents recently converted two 1950s cars into boats that refugees used in attempts to reach the United States. The search came a day after eight residents of the Diezmero neighborhood in Havana were returned to Cuba by the US Coast Guard, after their converted 1959 Buick was spotted floating off Key West, Florida. (*The Seattle Times*, 12/2/04)

February 11: A family of four intercepted at sea while trying to get to Florida in a floating 1959 Buick returned home to jubilant relatives and cheering neighbors after Cuban authorities released them. "We feel good. They treated us as well as could be expected," Marcial Basanta said as he hugged and kissed the friends and family who gathered for his return to Havana's Diezmero neighborhood. (*AP*, 12/2/04)

February 11: After a restructuring of the "Manuel Sánchez Herrero" Institute of Independent Economists, Dr. Francisco Pijuán Rodríguez was appointed acting director. Former members of the Institute's board, Martha Beatriz Roque and Arnaldo Ramos, have been in jail after last year's crackdown on dissidents. (*Cubamet*, 11/2/04)

February 11: After two months of meetings, the November 30 Democratic Party "Frank País", emerged stronger and closed its ranks in the island. Ada Kaly Márquez, National Coordinator in function of the illegal partisan organization, reported that as per agreement of the party's Executive Committee, the New National Directors Committee board members are: Juan Hernández Herrera, Maite Vázquez González, and Alfredo Reynaldo Castro Rodríguez, in charge of Public Relations, Labor and Social Matters and Attention to the Political Prisoners and of Consciences respectively. (*Puente Informativo*, 11/2/04)

February 12: A book by Fidel Castro was launched at Havana's Book Fair. Cuban publishing House "Abril" compiled a group of Castro's speeches between July 2001 and September 2002 aimed at children. The President of the "Jose

Martí Children Organization, Miriam Janet Martín, presented the book and underscored its usefulness at school, the library or at home. (*AIN*, 12/2/04)

February 12: Cuba's national labor federation has called on Cubans to participate in demonstrations island-wide on May 1, International Workers Day. National Council of the Cuban Workers Confederation, CTC, issued a statement convening activities nationwide as a "united response to threats of measures and aggressions against us by the current US Administration". (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/2/04)

February 13: A colloquium on Carl Marx's economic and philosophic thinking was held at Havana's International Book Fair. Participants stressed the validity of Marxist doctrine under current world conditions. Argentinean scholar Nestor Kohan underscored the revitalization of Carl Marx's legacy in his country. (*AIN*, 13/2/04)

February 13: At a press conference, the President of the Cuban Olympic Committee, Jose Ramón Fernández, ratified the island's aspiration to organize the 2012 Olympic Games. (*AIN*, 13/2/04)

February 13: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya is among the record number of nominees for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. Mr. Paya, who was also nominated for the award in 2003, heads the so-called Varela Project. The movement aims to bring democratic change to communist Cuba through a referendum on political and economic reforms. (*VOA*, 13/2/04)

February 15: The 13th International Book Fair came to an end in the Cuban capital, but opened to the rest of the island. The annual fiesta of books included workshops, lectures, roundtables and concerts. More than 450,000 people visited the fair in Havana, that will now continue on in another 33 Cuban cities. At the closing ceremony, Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón said the International Book Fair is a social event of special importance, "a space where culture and liberty merge." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/2/04)

February 16: More than a half million Cuban children will receive doses of oral polio vaccine at the end of this month, according to the Ministry of Public Health. During the first stage more than 400,000 children from one month to three-years-old will receive the first oral dose. A second and final stage will be administered and over 150,000 nine-year-old children will have their vaccination reactivated. This is the 43rd polio vaccination campaign carried out across the island since 1959. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 16/2/04)

February 17: Sources from the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Trade (MINCEX) confirmed that after a long police investigation about ten officials are being prosecuted under corruption allegations. Among those involved are Gabriel Villar, director of foreign negotiations at MINCEX; Arnaldo Vega, a CIMEX executive, the largest business group on the island; and Iván Esteva, Cuban manager of the Spanish firm Provimar S.A. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/2/04)

February 18: A new airplane for Fidel Castro, replete with an office, conference room and bedroom, will be built by a Russian aeronautical firm based in the city of Voronezh, about 400 kilometers (some 250 miles) south of Moscow. The aircraft will be one of two similar planes commissioned by Cuba's official aviation firm and will replace the one custom-built for Castro 30 years ago, identical to the plane former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev used in his day. Castro's new plane will be like that currently used by Russian President, Vladimir Putin, based on the VIP model of the Il-96-300M. The plane outdoes the standard model with a more luxurious interior, chairs specially designed for comfort, satellite television and Internet access. (*EFE*, 18/2/04)

February 19: Cuban traffic authorities have suspended 18,000 drivers so far this year. They announced they would continue applying severe measures against offenders. Only 225 were suspended last year. The official daily *Granma* published a note from the Traffic division of the Ministry of Interior in reply to criticism from drivers. (*World Data Service*, 19/2/04)

February 20: As a goal achieved for its upcoming 8th Congress, the Federation of Cuban Women reported a record membership of four million in more than 40 years of foundation. Founded in 1960, the FMC is the only women's organization in the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/04)

February 20: A book containing thousands of letters to the five Cubans imprisoned in the US by Cuban children was launched at the "Marcelo Salado" elementary school, where Elián González attends. (*AIN*, 20/2/04)

February 22: Havana Assistant Bishop Monsignor Salvador Riverón Cortina died from an intestinal blockage caused by a tumor. Cardinal Jaime Ortega, lead bishop in Havana and the island's top Roman Catholic churchman, officiated at a funeral Mass for Riverón at the cathedral in Old Havana. Pope John Paul II named Riverón to the post of assistant bishop in 1999, one year after the pontiff's historic visit to the communist-ruled island. (*EFE, The Miami Herald*, 22/2/04)

February 22: On the first anniversary of the last wave of repression against the Cuban internal opposition in March and April of 2003, the School of Independent Educators of Cuba announced a symbolic fast on the 18 and 19 of March in favor of the liberation of the Cuban political prisoners and those of conscience. "We cannot allow this date to pass without condemning these acts, because we would be leaving our brothers in prison without a voice", said to Lux-Info-Press Soledad Rivas Verdecía, wife of Roberto de Miranda Hernandez, president of the School of Independent Educators of Cuba and Director of the Varela Project, unjustly serving a sentence of 20 years in prison. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/2/04)

February 23: With fireworks exploding over an old Spanish fort on Havana Bay, Cuba's Habanos Festival opened, drawing hundreds of foreigners for the annual tribute to the island's world famous cigars. Several hundred people gathered on the grounds of La Cabaña fort, where they were invited to try a special San Cristóbal brand cigar made for the sixth annual Habanos Festival. About 500 cigar merchants and other foreigners were expected at the event, said Miguel Campoy, an executive of Habanos S.A., the Cuban-Spanish firm that is the festival organizer and that markets the island's cigars abroad. Classic Harley-Davidson motorcycles from the 1950s were on display. Unlike past years, no foreign celebrities or high-ranking government officials were seen at the opening event. (*AP*, 23/2/04)

February 23: The prisoner of conscience Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara was transported in critical health condition from the Canaleta prison, in the central province of Ciego de Avila, to the Julio Trigo hospital, in Havana. Valdés Guevara, director of the Independent Library Martyrs of the Tug Boat "March 13", was arrested last March in Manzanillo as part of last year's repressive wave and later sentenced to 20 years in jail. (*Puente Informativo*, 23/2/04)

February 23: "I don't think it is worth commenting on them," says Alicia Alonso about the five young dancers who bailed out of her Ballet Nacional de Cuba tour last fall and defected to the United States. She then proceeded to comment anyway on the actions of Cervilio Amador and Gema Díaz, of Adiaris Almeida, Violeta Serrat and Luis Valdés, the latest protagonists of a Cuban ballet diaspora that has been going on for nearly half a century, including 20 in 2003. "Of course it affects us," says Alonso, founder and head of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. "Not as a company, because we have 110 beautiful dancers, and we have more coming up each year through our school. But as human beings, I wish they had waited to develop a little more, to be better formed. Those young people who left may not believe this, but I worry about them." (*Sun Sentinel*, 23/2/04)

February 23: Cuban independent economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence, is "gravely ill" and the doctors who are treating him "are contributing to his death", declared his mother, Clara Chepe Núñez. Espinosa Chepe's mother, who is 95 years old, sent a letter to the foreign media to report the prison conditions in which her son is being held. He is in a State Security cell in the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital in Havana. (*BBC*, 23/2/04)

February 23: The 13th International Book Fair is moving on to 11 cities in Cuba's central region – from Villa Clara to Camagüey – in a further extension of one of the country's most important cultural events. (*Granma International*, 23/2/04)

February 25: The International Habano Festival surprised its participants with a tribute paid to Sir Winston Churchill in the Hotel Nacional in the presence of his granddaughter, and the opening of a new Floridita restaurant in London. The former Minister's heir Jenny Reppard was given a humidor of Cuban cigars from Cuba's foremost grower Alejandro Robaina, who received a bronze bust of her granddad from Reppard in the event. She even tried a cigar for the first time, in homage of her illustrious ancestor, who visited Havana in 1947. Cuban rollers then named a new cigar vitola (type) on his name under the Partagas brand of cigars. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/2/04)

February 25: Cuban scientists disapprove of cloning for reproductive purposes; however, they support its therapeutic uses, according to specialists in the area. "Cuban scientists reject as unacceptable human cloning for reproductive purposes", said the Deputy Director of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Centre, Carlos Barroto, on local television. (*EFE*, 25/2/04)

February 25: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that when Fidel Castro no longer governs Cuba, "in no case will it mean the end of the Cuban revolution", and he said that, in that event, the people of the island "will continue defending his legacy, building his dream". In an interview with Argentinean Telam, the Cuban Foreign Minister discussed a possible successor to Castro. "Revolutions are not made by the efforts of just one person (...) Our people will continue to move forward, defending his legacy, building his dream, and will not renounce the idea of being a socialist country, with equal opportunities and true justice and democracy". (*BBC*, 25/2/04)

February 29: Last year Cuba's Masons inaugurated their first two new lodges since 1967 with approval from the Cuban government. Membership in the popular and powerful secret brotherhood dwindled after Fidel Castro's revolution, when many Freemasons fled the island while others were swept up by the winds of social change and felt they no longer needed the institution. "The decrease [in membership] was vertiginous," said Gustavo Pardo, president of the national commission of Masonic teachings. "There were lodges who supported the government and others who didn't." In recent years, however, as Cuba became more secular, Masonic lodges have started to fill with young members again -- from about 18,000 in the early 1980s to 29,000 today. (*Sun Sentinel*, 29/2/04)

Economy

February 1: The Chilean magnate in Cuba, Max Marambio, has started moving his business focus to Chile, it was reported. Marambio's holding company international Network Group (ING) comprises companies from the industrial, tourism and real estate areas. The ING companies posted a total turnover of \$100 mln (80.7 mln euro) in 2003, of which 80 pct was generated in Cuba. Marambio and the Government of Cuba have a 50 pct stake each in a Cuban-Chilean food and drink joint venture Alimentos Rio Zaza, which manufactures and sells 190 products, including juices, powder drinks, dressings, sauces, mayonnaise, dairy products, rum, wines and confectionery. Rio Zaza forecasts a \$50 mln (40.4 mln euro) turnover for 2004, compared to \$30 mln (24.2 mln euro) for 2003. Most of Rio Zaza products are made in Cuba, but it also buys raw materials and finished products from Chile, Brazil and Spain, to resell them afterwards under its own brands. A 100 pct of the milk used by Rio Zaza is bought from Chile. Marambio's Cuba-based travel agencies Sol y Son and Cosmo Service are present in 28 countries. They handled 120,000 passengers in 2003, most of whom visited Cuba. Sol y Son and Cosmo Service are the second largest travel agencies in Cuba, after the state agency Havanatur. Marambio also operates a number of hotels in Cuba. (*Latin America News Digest*, 2/2/04)

February 1: Cuba's non-traditional exports rose by 18 pct year-on-year for full-year 2003, officials of the country's Foreign Trade Ministry (Mincex) reported. The increase of the exports of consumer products reflected the favorable

economic conditions in the country, Cuba's Foreign Minister, Raul de la Nuez Ramírez, told the General Assembly of the country's chamber of commerce (CCRC). Cuba's trade turnover rose 13.2 pct year-on-year in 2003, data from Mincex showed. Some of the products, which registered an increase were generic drugs, biotechnological products, and iron and steel products for the mechanics industry. Cuba's main trade partner in 2003 were Venezuela, Spain, China, Canada, the USA, France and Russia. (*Latin America News Digest*, 2/2/04)

February 3: A conference on Chinese and Cuban biotechnological advances and their application in medicine got underway in Beijing with the participation of eminent scientists from both countries. The agenda includes the emergence, organization and development of biotechnology in Cuba and the introduction into the Chinese health system of techniques created on the Caribbean island. Cuba's development of neuroscience, new products to fight cancer, the HIV-AIDS prevention and treatment program and state control over medicines are other topics to be analyzed. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/04)

February 3: Cuban Attorney General Juan Escalona is in Guatemala City to attend the World Summit of Attorney Generals and Justice Ministers. Speaking with reporters as the summit began, Escalona said that he would discuss Cuba's experiences in fighting against money laundering, drug trafficking and other criminal activities. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/04)

February 4: The Electronic Industry in western Pinar del Rio province, the only one of its kind on the island, is developing new production lines aimed at meeting the demands of the national and foreign markets. The list of new products includes solar panels of different sizes and potentials, which are highly demanded in Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. The sector has produced over 1,500 solar panels to be exported to Japan, Italy and Spain, as well as another 2,300 of the important alternative power sources to meet the national demand. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/2/04)

February 4: Foreign investments in Cuba declined considerably in 2003, coinciding with a recovery and growth in important sectors of the economy like tourism, nickel production and oil extraction. According to the Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, 70 joint ventures were dissolved last year and 60 are near to close. At the end of 2002, over 400 joint ventures were operating in the island, 54 % of them with European companies. (*El País*, 4/2/04)

February 4: Coconut collectors in eastern Guantanamo province have achieved their highest yield in the past 13 years. Half of the large coconut harvest will be destined to the oil producing industry, 10% to benefit the upcoming planting season, while the rest will be sold at local markets for internal consumption as well as for tourism. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/2/04)

February 4: Cuba's Metal and Recycling Industry expects to increase its sales of traditional and new products on the foreign market in 2004. The sector expects to earn some 97 million dollars in exports this year, some 20 million more than in 2003. Such operations will mainly include metal production lines, such as steel, as well as equipment and recycling products. At present, the Cuban Metal industry funnels its productions to 62 major markets, 29 abroad. Caribbean countries offer important advantages for the sector's export operations due to their geographic location and the existence of a trade and cooperation agreement that favors trade ties between Cuba and CARICOM nations. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/2/04)

February 5: The National Biopreparations Center (BIOCEN) established a new record in 2003 in the manufacture of Anti-hepatitis B vaccines, with more than 17 million doses destined to cover national deliveries and export commitments. As Carlos Lastra informed Granma, last year BIOCEN ratified its position as an important manufacturer of Cuban biotechnology products, having taken on all the preparation phases of Recombinant Streptokinase; as well as the combination vaccine against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and Hepatitis B; the Colony Stimulation Factor and certain kinds of Interferon. (*Granma Internacional*, 5/2/04)

February 6: Some 700 German tourists have arrived in Santiago de Cuba aboard the "Delphin" cruise ship. The stopover is part of the ship's Caribbean itinerary and is the fifth cruise ship to arrive in Santiago de Cuba this winter. Previous cruise ships that have docked in Santiago de Cuba include the "Princess Danae" and "European Vision" -- with Italian and French vacationers -- and the cruise ship "Black Watch" -- with British passengers. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 6/2/04)

February 6: The Belarusian parliamentarians consider their visit to Cuba to be "successful and useful", the head of the parliamentary delegation, deputy chair of the permanent commission on international affairs and links with the CIS member-states of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus, Sergei Kostian told a press conference. There are good prospects for cooperation, in particular, in the area of high technologies, oil refinery, medicine, Sergei Kostian said. The Havana administration also showed interest in purchase of Belarusian buses. (*Belta*, 6/2/04)

February 7: Cuba and the African nation of Zambia have concluded a joint venture to begin producing generic HIV/Aids anti-retroviral drugs. Zambian Health Minister Brian Chituwo said the deal involves the Cuban pharmaceutical firm Farko, with production of the drugs scheduled to start before June. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/04)

February 9: The Cuban sugar industry entered the peak eight weeks of the harvest with raw sugar production behind schedule, sources said, as yields and milling remained below expectations. The official media reported that 75 mills were now open. Eighty mills were scheduled to grind by February. Local media reports over the last week indicated output was behind schedule in many of Cuba's 13 sugar-producing provinces. For example, eastern Santiago de Cuba was 15 percent behind plan, official radio reported, while the government's AIN news agency said central Cienfuegos province was 5,000 tonnes behind schedule and western Matanzas province 23,000 tonnes behind schedule. Sugar Ministry officials speculate that output may come in a bit below the 2.6 million tonnes planned, with all but 700,000 tonnes for export. (*Reuters*, 10/2/04)

February 10: The Cuban embassy in Belgrade stated that for over a year now, not a single Cuban company has sold sugar to Serbia-Montenegro firms or companies, so that any statement or insinuation which would link Cuba or its companies with the Serbian companies' illegal sugar transactions to the European Union was absolutely without foundation. In its statement submitted to Tanjug, the Cuban embassy said that while speaking for a late Studio B programme and commenting on the illegal export of sugar to the European Union, Serbian Finance Minister Bozidar Djelic had hinted that the product might have been purchased in Cuba. The statement was somewhat hypothetical, so that we deem that its intention was not to link our country with the so-called sugar scandal, the statement said. (*Tanjug*, 10/2/04)

February 16: A new and apparently growing food shortage in Cuba is making it increasingly difficult for those who depend on Cuban pesos and the government's ration system to obtain basic staples, according to residents and experts. Over the past three months, some items have become scarce even in usually well-stocked stores that accept US dollars, raising concerns that the Caribbean nation could be headed toward a nutrition crisis similar to one in the early 1990s. Even as the UN World Food Program carries out a supplemental food program in eastern Cuba, its Havana director disputed the reports of a food shortage. "That's totally out of context," Rosa Antolin said. "There is always a lack of one item or another, but there is no food shortage." It is nevertheless clear that monthly subsidized ration allowances have grown slimmer over the years, providing Cubans with what most experts agree is less than two weeks worth of food for every month. Eggs, for example, are restricted to 6 to 8 per person per month. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/2/04)

February 18: During a tribute to 30 Transport Popular Inspectors, Carlos Lage Dávila, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, indicated that about 400 million people are transported through regular public transportation every year; while 68 million commuters were transported through the Popular Inspectors system in state-owned vehicles not used for public transportation. The number represents 15% of all passengers in the country. (*Granma*, 18/2/04)

February 18: Two of Cuba's major beach resorts, Varadero and Jardines del Rey, have set record numbers in the arrival of tourists, Tourism Ministry sources highlighted. Varadero registered a record number of foreign visitors on St. Valentine with 22,628 tourists, a mark broken the following day when the so-called Blue Beach lodged 22,867 tourists from eight countries, most from Canada. On the other hand, Jardines del Rey, a growing beach resort in northeastern Cuba, welcomed 6,176 foreign tourists, a record number for a day in the history of this destination in Ciego de Avila province. The arrival of tourists in Jardines del Rey so far this year has grown 18 percent compared to the same period of 2002, Tourism Ministry official Eduardo Veiga told the press. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/2/04)

February 18: Cuba has risen to eighth place among tourist preferences in the Americas. According to experts in the tourism sector, the island is among the top destinations for vacationers and welcomed more than 1.9 million visitors last year alone. For a number of years, Cuba ranked 23rd among tourists as the favorite destination in Latin America and the Caribbean. Statistics show that Canada sent the most visitors to Cuba during 2003 -- with a total of 450,000 vacationers -- a nearly 30 percent increase over the previous year. Following Canada, tourists to Cuba came from: Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Great Britain and Mexico. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/2/04)

February 19: French giant Lactalis, one of the world's largest dairy and cheese producers, plans to expand its presence in Cuba, company officials said. Lactalis, marketer of world-famous President brand products, hopes to "increase its presence in Cuba because (the country) is a good, serious buyer," the company's Latin American and Caribbean chief, Thierry Trottareau, told the Cuban economic weekly *Opciones*. The French firm has been marketing its products in the island nation for three years through Spain's Inversiones Pucara, which sells Lactalis products to the Cuban hotel industry and the country's tourist-only supermarkets. (*EFE*, 19/2/04)

February 19: Eastern Las Tunas became the second Cuban province to produce 100,000 tonnes of raw sugar, the official media reported, as the harvest in the world's fourth-largest sugar exporter moved forward more quickly than last year. "The five active mills in the territory accumulated yields of 10.8 percent since the harvest began January 8, much higher than planned, and allowing for the production of 100,000 tonnes with 5 million arrobas (60,000 tonnes) less cane," the official news agency, AIN, reported from Las Tunas. The area's mills were operating at 75 percent capacity, compared with 64 percent at this time last year when it took the province until March 8 to reach 100,000 tonnes, state-run radio said. Villa Clara province was the first of 13 sugar-producing provinces in 2003 to reach 100,000 tonnes on February 26, followed by Las Tunas on March 8. This year central Camaguey province reached 100,000 tonnes on February 12, compared with March 25 a year ago. (*Reuters*, 19/2/04)

February 20: More than a third of the audits conducted on Cuban companies, almost all managed by the government, in 2003 uncovered irregularities, forcing authorities to exercise greater surveillance, especially with regard to products in high demand on the black market, officials said. Last year, the Audit and Control Ministry (MAC) conducted 5,917 audits and in 36 percent of the cases, the "conditions uncovered merited a grade of poor or deficient." Audit and Control Minister Lina Pedraza told official newspaper *Granma* that special attention would be paid this year to "control and supervision of sensitive products that are frequently diverted to the black market." The volume of irregularities discovered at the companies matched the results of Finance Ministry price inspections of establishments selling to the public. Finance Ministry supervisors conducted more than 316,000 inspections in 2003 and found price violations in 35 percent of the cases. According to Finance Ministry price supervision chief Miriam Rodriguez, most of the irregularities were found in the food sector, followed by the agricultural market. The majority of the irregularities have to do with short-weighting, sale of out-of-date products and charging more than the established price, a practice Cubans call imposing a "multa" or "fine." (*EFE*, 20/2/04)

February 19: Cuba and India signed a preliminary agreement on renewable energy sources and conservation. The document was signed by the Cuban vice minister of Science, Technology and the Environment América Santos, and the Indian Ambassador in Cuba Dr. Bhaskar Balakrishnan. The agreement covers cooperation in the area of renewable energy sources, including solar energy, photovoltaic batteries, bio-mass and small-scale hydro-electric projects. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/2/04)

February 23: The late-winter/early-spring harvest in Cuba's western tobacco-growing region of Pinar del Rio is an important annual event. Tobacco is the communist-run island's third-largest export -- producing an average of 150 million hand-rolled cigars worth about \$240 million a year -- and is recognized worldwide for its quality. But this year's harvest is especially important. Fed by good seeds, rich soil, and growth-favoring humidity, there is a fertile optimism that production levels will normalize after extensive storm damage lowered tobacco yields a year ago. (*Newsday*, 23/2/04)

February 23: Venezuela is Cuba's number one business partner, according to Cuban official sources. "Venezuela became Cuba's main economic partner, followed by Spain, China, Canada, the Netherlands and Italy," according to Raúl de la Nuez, minister of foreign trade, in an interview in Havana. (*World Data Service*, 23/2/04)

February 24: Spanish oil major Repsol YPF said it would start exploring for oil off Cuba by April at the latest, drilling several wells. The Communist-run island has granted Repsol the right to explore five blocks in the Gulf of Mexico off the west of Cuba, Repsol Chairman Alfonso Cortina told a news conference to discuss the company's 2003 results. "We have done the seismic studies (...) and we are going to start the first survey at the end of March or at the start of April," Cortina said. "These are high-risk areas (...) but we are optimistic." Cuba in December estimated its 2003 oil production at 260.4 million barrels (713,000 barrels per day), a 2.5 percent increase on 2002. Foreign companies, mainly Canadian firms Sherritt International Corp. and Pebercan Inc., have joint ventures and production agreements with state oil monopoly Cubapetróleo (Cupet) and account for around 60 percent of Cuba's oil and gas output. (*Reuters*, 24/2/04)

February 24: University Sains Malaysia (USM) has signed five memoranda of agreements with research institutions in Cuba to pave the way for collaboration in biotechnology, providing a further boost to Malaysia's BioValley programme. The deals were signed following the visit by USM Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dzulkipli Abdul Razak to Cuba. Dzulkipli said the deals are for collaboration in areas ranging from the development of vaccines for tuberculosis, biomaterials, neuroscience and aquaculture. (*Business Times*, 24/2/04)

February 24: Russia has presented Cuba with proposals to settle Cuba's debt to the former USSR and its outstanding debt to Russia. According to Russia's Finance Ministry, the Cuban debt to the USSR is denominated in transferable roubles, Soviet roubles and dollars and hovers around \$25.2 billion. Cuba also has a debt on part of a \$350 million credit issued by Russia in the first half of the 1990s. (*Novecon*, 24/2/04)

February 25: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque announced that his government will soon formalize a request to negotiate and sign an agreement that would make his country an associate member of South America's Mercosur trade bloc. Perez Roque is on a five-day official visit to Argentina, which currently holds the Mercosur presidency. "We have put all our hopes in the fact that Mercosur and Argentina (...) can lead a true movement of Latin American integration," he said. An official request, Perez Roque said, will formally be put forward to negotiate a 4-1 agreement with Mercosur, to further broaden trade relations with member countries under the group's norms and standards. (*AFP, Prensa Latina*, 25/2/04)

February 27: Kenya and Cuba have signed a two-year technical agreement to revamp the island's sugar industry. In Nairobi, Planning Minister Anyang' Nyong'o made the announcement upon his arrival from a one week tour of Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 28/2/04)

February 29: Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has become Cuba's biggest financial supporter since the Soviet Union pulled the plug on its subsidies more than a decade ago. Over the past three years, Cuba has run up a massive debt of US\$752 million for oil shipped by Venezuela's state oil company, according to people close to the company. Though Venezuelan officials deny that Cuba is falling behind, people familiar with the debt say it is piling up and that the government has made little effort to collect. This makes the shipments a crucial subsidy that is helping keep the island's economy afloat as it struggles with the impact of endemic mismanagement, declining sugar sales and US sanctions. (*Caribbean Update*, 1/3/04)

Exile Community

February 6: Lawyers working with the Democracy Movement (Movimiento Democracia) filed an emergency motion in federal court in Miami to try to bar the US Coast Guard from sending the Buick's passengers back to Cuba. A hearing on the motion -- which also asks the judge to extend the requested injunction to all migrants picked up at sea, including Haitians and Dominicans -- has been scheduled before US District Judge Federico A. Moreno. "The purpose is to stop the federal government from sending these Cubans back," said Democracy Movement founder Ramón Saúl Sánchez. "This is an embarrassment to Castro. They can't go back," Sánchez added. [For more on this, see US-Cuba Relations] (*The Miami Herald*, 6/2/04)

February 19: The Cuban Patriotic Forum, an alliance of several Cuban exile organizations issued a strong statement warning about "powerful interests" that seek a negotiated political transition with the regime of Fidel Castro. "Powerful interests from different viewpoints are attempting to pressure the governments of the United States and other European and American countries into negotiating a transition with the Castro's tyranny", added the document. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 19/2/04)

February 20: Cuban-American congressional leaders and members of anti-Castro exile organizations unveiled one of the most comprehensive proposals to date of how to proceed with a transition to democracy and a social market economy in a post-Castro Cuba. It calls for the privatization of joint ventures between the government and foreign investors, endorses the right of urban property dwellers in Cuba to remain in their homes as long as old private owners are properly compensated, and suggests that government-owned land be redistributed to small- and medium-sized private farmers to help foster a middle class. Republican US Representatives, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and brothers Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, championed the already formed Cuban Socio-Economic Reconstruction Commission as a necessary step in planning for a post-Castro Cuba. US Representative Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, sent a letter of support. Antonio Jorge, a Cuba expert and professor at Florida International University in Miami, will head the commission. The plan is in direct contrast to dissident movements such as the Varela Project, which is pushing for deep changes within the socialist framework, such as freedom to assemble and representation in the National Assembly. (*AP*, *KRT*, 22/2/04)

February 26: Most Cuban natives living outside the island can visit the country of their birth without a visa starting June 1, if they have a valid Cuban passport, the communist government confirmed. In order to validate their passports, Cuban-born people should present them at the Cuban consulate where a stamp free of charge will be placed. The Cuban Foreign Ministry announced the upcoming change last fall, but had not said exactly when it would take effect. Lazaro Hernandez, spokesman for the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, told the press the change would occur June 1. (*AP*, *Encuentro en la Red*, 26/2/04)

February 26: President Bush gave the federal government new powers to keep American boats out of Cuba, a step in which some people have smelled politics: "This administration is clearly interested in the Cuban-American vote," said Joe Garcia, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation in Miami. "Many Cuban-Americans had a lot of expectations about this White House, and unfortunately, most of them have not been met. And now the administration is scrambling to put together some type of comprehensive policy." [See also, US-Cuba Relations] (*CNN*, 26/2/04)

Foreign Affairs

February 2: A visit of a parliamentary delegation of Belarus to the Republic of Cuba has started. The Belarusian delegation is headed by Sergei Kostian, deputy chair of the permanent commission on international affairs, and head of the working group on cooperation with the Cuban National Assembly. (*Belta*, 2/2/04)

February 2: A group of Chilean senators on an official visit in Cuba met with dissident leader Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz to talk about the situation of civil, political and economic rights on the island. The delegation also met with Cuba's Vice-President Carlos Lage, and the President of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón. (*Europa Press*, 2/2/04)

February 3: Argentina's president, Nestor Kirchner, will travel to Cuba "between February and March", said Raul Taleb, the Argentine ambassador to the island nation. He also defended his government's stance of not condemning the administration of Fidel Castro at the United Nations for alleged human rights violations. "There is no final date, but I would venture to say that President Kirchner will visit Cuba between February and March. I believe that the president wants to do so, although he has a very hectic and full schedule," Taleb said during an interview at the Argentine diplomatic mission in Havana. (*BBC*, 3/2/04)

February 3: The People in Need Czech humanitarian organisation has supported dissidents and families of political prisoners in Cuba for seven years and its delegation visited some of them recently, the daily Mlada fronta Dnes (MfD) reports. Selected families of imprisoned Cuban dissidents will receive a one-off humanitarian aid of 200 dollars from the money collected within the SOS Cuba public fund raising, MfD notes. "Our aim is simple. We have been trying by all means to support democratic forces in Cuba," People in Need director Tomas Pojar told the paper. (*CTK*, 3/2/04)

February 3: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, considered as very productive the II meeting of the Forum for East Asian-Latin American Cooperation, which was held in Manila, the Philippines. [[Intervención del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba en el Foro de Cooperación AL-AE](#)] (*AIN*, 3/2/04)

February 4: The Ambassador of the Popular Republic of China in Cuba, Wang Zhiqian, was awarded the Medal of Friendship in recognition of what Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque called "his friendship and solidarity with and assistance for the Cuban Revolution." Pérez Roque presented the award to the Chinese diplomat, who will complete his posting this month, highlighting his tireless efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the two countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/2/04)

February 4: Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar told US Congress that Cuba is "one of the last remaining anomalies of history". Mr. Aznar was the first Spanish prime minister to address Congress. Mr. Aznar added that he "would like to reiterate here my desire and hope that, before long, Cuba can be welcomed into the fold of free nations." (*The Washington Times*, 5/2/04)

February 5: Soldiers arrested Ulises Bernal Pérez, a Cuban doctor who allegedly kidnapped two Venezuelan journalists as he sought to defect to Colombia, said General Vivian Duran, a Colombian National Guard commander. Bernal Pérez was one of 10,000 Cuban doctors working in poor communities across Venezuela under President Hugo Chávez's "Inside the Slum" initiative -- a product of Chavez's close relationship with Fidel Castro. The Venezuelan government had been investigating reports that Bernal Pérez had slipped into hiding and was trying to defect. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/2/04)

February 5: At the inauguration of the 13 th Havana's International Book Fair, the president of the Cuban Book Institute, Iroel Sanchez, accused the European Union of "complicity in an attempted cultural embargo" against the communist island and of hindering cultural exchanges between Cuba and Europe. He criticized the German government for having rejected Cuba's invitation to participate as an honored guest at the fair, although Berlin had committed itself to do so one year ago. "Our decision to honor German culture even under these circumstances was welcomed immediately by a group of friends and intellectuals from that country," Sanchez declared. He added that the

Cuban publishing houses had specially published 22 titles by German authors for the occasion and that a group of important story-tellers, essayists and poets from Germany had signed over their authors' rights without compensation for those editions. (*EFE*, 5/2/04)

February 5: The Mexican Foreign Ministry confirmed that Fidel Castro has been invited to the Summit of Heads of State from Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union (ALCUE), which will take place in May in Guadalajara, Mexico. (*Notimex*, 6/2/04)

February 5: I invited to the 13 th International Book Fair, Sir Colpille N. Young, General Governor of Belize, arrived in Havana. (*Granma*, 6/2/04)

February 6: An international higher education congress concluded in Havana with a call to end what participants termed the commercialization of education. The meeting-the fourth of its kind held in Cuba- passed a declaration that urges universities around the world to renovate themselves and to defend the culture, identity and sovereignty of countries. Fidel Castro delivered the gathering's closing address. He outlined some of the recent educational programs undertaken by Cuba, noting that in the process radical changes had been introduced in Cuban education to improve and promote it. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/04)

February 6: Argentinean Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1980, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, issued a message from Buenos Aires calling on all Latin American and world intellectuals to be supportive of Cuba, which he said is currently under the threat of a military invasion from the United States. (*World Data Service*, 7/2/04)

February 7: The European Commission's delegation in Cuba denied the European Union had imposed a "cultural blockade" on the island, as a Cuban official claimed at the opening of this capital city's 23rd International Book Fair. "The European Commission's delegation in Cuba wants to say that the EU has never imposed a cultural blockade on Cuba and continues to be willing to support cultural activities in Cuba within the current framework defined by Cuban authorities," the delegation said in a note released in Havana. "On June 5, 2003, the EU (simply) decided to reduce the presence of its member states at cultural events in protest against the imprisonment of 75 political dissidents in March 2003, all of whom remain in prison," the note explained. (*EFE*, 7/2/04)

February 7: The office of the European Union Commission in Havana has been informed of the "cruel and degrading" treatment that Cuban dissidents suffer in the country's jails, said EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Poul Nielson, to the EU Parliament. The Portuguese Member of the European Parliament, José Ribeiro e Castro, condemned before the Executive the living conditions of dissidents in Cuban jails. (*Europa Press*, 7/2/04)

February 7: Fidel Castro described presidents José María Aznar, of Spain, and George W. Bush, of the United States, as "repugnant characters." In a 3-hours-and-20-minutes long speech closing a higher education congress, Castro, who has called Aznar the 'Spanish Celestine,' said that the Spanish President was a "Mussolini-like acolyte of the Führer who today holds in his hands the reins of the [US] empire." (*Europa Press, Granma*, 7/2/04)

February 8: The Organizing Committee of the 13 th Havana International Book Fair rejected a communiqué from European Union in which it denies to be applying a cultural blockade against the island. "It is unbelievable that such a statement is released in a time when all measures taken by the EU on June 5, 2003 are in place (...) including a cultural boycott against our country which several [EU] members have been applying since then," said the Cuban statement. [[Desmiente Cuba supuesto comunicado de la UE](#)] (*World Data Service*, 8/2/04)

February 9: Intellectual figures invited to the 13th Havana Book Fair met with their Cuban colleagues to initiate common action within an international movement to protect the planet from the evils that are threatening to destroy it, including neoliberal globalization and capitalism. They proposed ways of supporting a World Congress of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity, to take place in Venezuela next December. During the exchange, one of the book

fair's high points, figures such as James Petras, Heinz Dieterich, François Houtard, Pablo González Casanova, Atilio Borón, Luis Britto and Tarek William Saab, Armando Hart, Carlos Martí, Roberto Fernández Retamar and Miguel Barnet, agreed on a number of basic principles underpinning this new struggle. They include the need to create an organization, constitute an organizing committee and embark on a program to promote those ideas. (*Granma International*, 10/2/04)

February 9: As a gathering of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in Panama was cancelled, a meeting between Mexican Foreign Minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, and his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque scheduled to take place during that meeting had to be called off. (*Notimex*, 9/2/04)

February 9: More than 1,000 experts attending the 6th International Conference on Globalization and Development, including two Nobel Prize winners, are debating in Havana current world economy trends and their negative effects on the people. Globalization is inevitable and the world should make the best of it, Nobel Prize-winning economist Daniel L. McFadden said. (*Prensa Latina, AP*, 9/2/04)

February 9: The extraterritorial enforcement of the so-called Helms-Burton Act on Cuban travel agencies based abroad, including Canada, announced by US Treasury Secretary John Snow, is illegal in Canada. Since 1997, a Canadian law protects Canadian companies doing business with Cuba, including those that operate in the tourism sector, from the provisions of the Helms-Burton. [For more on this, see US-Cuba Relations] (*Notimex*, 9/2/04)

February 10: Cultural Diversity in Cuba is being debated in a Colloquium that opened in the Cuban capital. UNESCO and Cuba's Casa de las Americas cultural institution, are sponsoring the meeting which runs through Friday. The event, entitled "Cultural Diversity in the Caribbean", brings together the two institutions for the first time in defending the thesis that cultural diversity is as important to the human species as biodiversity is important to all live beings, noted UNESCO Representative in Cuba Francisco Lacayo. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/2/04)

February 10: Cuba will keep all of its diplomatic personnel in Haiti and ship additional medical supplies to its doctors and nurses there, the Cuban Embassy announced. In a press release, the embassy said Cuban diplomats and medical staff in Haiti have received formal instructions from Havana to remain at their posts and continue their work. Some 570 Cuban health care workers, including 300 doctors, are currently in Haiti. Havana considers its medical mission in Haiti "very important," which is why the health personnel must remain at their posts to help the Haitian people, the statement said. (*EFE*, 10/2/04)

February 11: Irish Minister for European Affairs, Dick Roche, whose country holds the 6-month presidency of the European Union, refused to take any action against the United States on behalf of the five Cubans sent to prison for espionage. Roche believes that it is Cuba's job to appeal to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. (*Europa Press*, 11/2/04)

February 12: Brazil was chosen as the guest of honor to the 14th Havana International Book Fair, scheduled to take place during in 2005. During a meeting at the San Carlos de La Cabaña Fortress, Joao Luiz Bocayuva Cunha, Head of the President's Office of Brazil's National Library, expressed his commitment of Brazilian literature to that event. (*AIN*, 12/2/04)

February 12: With a potential migration crisis brewing amid continued political turmoil in Haiti, Cuba has issued an appeal for international assistance for the troubled country just 50 miles off its eastern tip. "Cuba believes that the international community cannot abandon Haiti. The social situation is getting worse," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque urged the members of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS). "Collaborating with Haiti has become a duty for all of us, its neighbors." In the early 1990s, about 600 Haitians wound up in Cuba as thousands trying to escape the violence of a military coup in their homeland fled in rickety boats in an attempt to reach the United States. Cuba set up an emergency refugee camp near the sparsely populated eastern tip of the island to accommodate the Haitians who had

come ashore in the eastern provinces of Camaguey, Holguin, Guantanamo and Santiago. Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, made the call at the opening ceremony of the ministerial meeting of the ACS, in Panama, and called on the Caribbean bloc to deliver more help to the turbulent country. (*Xinhua, The Miami Herald*, 12/2/04)

February 12: The Executive Committee of the Centrist Democrat International (CDI), headed by Spanish President, José María Aznar, passed a resolution condemning the Cuban government's "repressive campaign." The resolution also requests from Fidel Castro's government the immediate suspension of all "terrorist acts", the release of all political prisoners, and full respect for civil and political rights. (*Europa Press*, 12/2/04)

February 13: Argentine Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, met with five anti-Castro intellectuals who in a public letter urged Argentina to recommend during the next meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission that Cuba allow international observers into the country. The letter also requests that the Argentine Embassy in Havana invite Cuban dissidents to its events. The meeting was attended by Marcos Aguinis, María Sáenz Quesada, Juan José Sebrelli, Fernando Ruiz, and Gabriel Salvia, director of CADAL, a policy centre based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (*Clarín*, 13/2/04)

February 13: The 6th International Meeting of Economists on Globalization and the Problems of Development ended in the Cuban capital. More than 1400 delegates from nearly 50 countries took part in the workshops, working commissions and plenary sessions, which were held at Havana's International Convention Center all week. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/2/04)

February 14: A brigade of 50 Cuban doctors traveled to Paraguay to provide care and conduct research there, the official press announced. The delegation, made up of general practitioners and 10 epidemiologists, will care for needy people as well as conduct research on diseases transmitted by insects and other animals, Granma official newspaper reported. This is the fourth Cuban medical brigade to offer its services in Paraguay. (*EFE*, 14/2/04)

February 14: The Cuban Council of State awarded its highest decoration- the "José Martí Medal"-, to Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova for the humanistic and Latin Americanist merits of his "life and work." (*Europa Press*, 14/2/04)

February 15: Cuba has offered to give members of the Zambia's MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy) scholarships in politics and help them learn from its schools on the Cuban revolutionary government. Cuban director of African affairs Luis Morejón Poto said in Lusaka that Cuba had made the invitation because it enjoyed close ties with African nations, especially in Southern Africa. The Cuban envoy said this when he paid a courtesy call on MMD officials at the party secretariat. Speaking at the same function, MMD national secretary Samuel Miyanda thanked the Cuban government for the support it had continued rendering to Zambia. "Credit goes to the Cuban government for all the support it has rendered to Zambia in the field of medicine and the provision of medical facilities," Mr Miyanda said. (*The Zambia Times*, 15/2/04)

February 16: Cuban doctors and medical personnel in Guatemala are confronting a severe virus that has already claimed the lives of at least 50 children. According to health officials, the virus has brought on a serious diarrhea epidemic which is primarily affecting children under the age of five. Daniel Pupo, head of the island's medical brigade in Guatemala, reports that more than 520 Cuban health professionals are in the Central American country. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 16/2/04)

February 17: Orlando Requeijo Gual, the new Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, presented his credentials to Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Until his current appointment, from 2001, Mr. Requeijo Gual served as his mission's Deputy Permanent Representative. He was Director, Middle East and North Africa Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1998 to 2001, and in 2000 served as Presidential Special Envoy in eight states of the Persian Gulf and the Arabic Peninsula. From 1994 to 1998, he was Cuba's ambassador to Qatar. (*Press Wire*, 17/2/04)

February 17: French Member of Parliament, Yves Bur, asked the Cuban Ambassador in Paris permission to visit two political prisoners he sponsors. They are brothers José Daniel and Luis Enrique Ferrer García. Bur, also Vice-President of the ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), expressed during his meeting with Ambassador Eumelio Caballero that “the situation of Cuban prisoners of conscience is unacceptable,” according to a release by the French MP. (*AFP*, 17/2/04)

February 17: A United Nations envoy has published a scathing report on Cuba's treatment of political dissidents in prison. In a report produced for next month's annual session of the UN Human Rights Commission, Christine Chanet noted that the dissidents were tried and criticized their convictions within weeks or days of their arrests last year and the fact that the trials were closed to the public. Chanet, who prepared her report based on meetings with activists, human-rights investigators and other governments, said she has information that the dissidents are kept in very poor conditions, either in total isolation or in overcrowded cells with common criminals. They are often moved from one prison to another, making it difficult for their families to visit them. Chanet said she also was concerned about the April 11 execution of three Cubans who hijacked a ferry to try to reach the United States. She also noted that Cuba continues to suffer from the "disastrous and persistent" effects of the US economic embargo that has been in place for more than 40 years. "The extreme tension between Cuba and the United States creates a climate that is unfavorable to the development of freedom of expression and assembly," she said. "US laws and the financial support given to 'the building of democracy in Cuba' make political opponents on the island look like sympathizers with foreigners." Nevertheless, she said, it was up to the Cuban government to avoid making its people suffer any more than they already are. (*CNN, BBC*, 17/2/04)

February 17: A delegation of the Mexican "Partido del Trabajo" (PT) continued its five-day visit to Cuba. The Cuban Communist Party invited the PT delegation, led by its national coordinator, Alberto Anaya, who highlighted Cuba's economic achievements without the support of the International Monetary Fund. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/2/04)

February 18: Vietnam's President Tran Duc Luong highlighted the excellent relations with Cuba in a farewell reception to retiring Cuban Ambassador to Vietnam, Fredesman Turro González. Luong said relations between Vietnam and Cuba are at a great moment and sent his greetings to Fidel Castro and the Cuban people. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/2/04)

February 19: About 30 Canadian secondary and university students are in Cuba on the second phase of a cultural, social and labour exchange program between the two nations- now in its 9 th consecutive year. “This program is more than a school as it allows to get acquainted with reality in the context of human relations,” said in Havana Matteu Pearse, president of Canada World Youth, a non-governmental organization that since 1977 hosts exchanges of students and teachers between Canada and developing countries. (*World Data Service*, 19/2/04)

February 19: “A shameful and indefensible behavior is that adopted by the European Union, which uses culture as a hostage to join the blockade against Cuba”, said Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto to the press in Eastern Camaguey city. Such a behavior was fought back during the 13th Havana International Book Fair, which was attended by more than 80 German personalities, and 34 publishing houses, Prieto told reporters. The Cuban Culture Minister recalled that the event, which was dedicated to Germany, has generated wide promotion of German culture in the island. (*Notimex*, 19/2/04)

February 19: A note in the official Cuban daily Granma praised former Mexican President, José López Portillo, for his political virtues. Portillo passed away in the Mexican capital. (*World Data Service*, 19/2/04)

February 19: An advocate of experimental cinema, Great Britain's musician, actor, producer and director Mike Figgis is at the San Antonio International Cinema School (EICTV), south of Havana, to teach a class to Cuban film students. The famous director of *Leaving Las Vegas* and *Hotel*, known for his unconventional innovation, most recently the use

of four cameras simultaneously in Time Code, accepted an invitation from the EICTV Board of Directors. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/2/04)

February 20: Canadian choir, the Greystone Singers, from Saskatchewan University, and Cuban Schola Cantorum Coralina performed at the Basílica Menor of San Francisco de Asís, in Havana. The Greystone Singers, headed by professor Gerald Langner and sponsored by Cuba-Canada Sports & Culture Festivals, showed a wide repertoire of both European classics and Canadian composers. (*Granma*, 20/2/04)

February 20: The first exchange of experiences organized by the International Police (INTERPOL) on the struggle against drug in the Caribbean, closed in Havana. According to Granma newspaper the meeting was held in the Ministry of the Interior Conference Center with the participation of delegates from 11 countries of the Caribbean, Central America and South America. The meeting was attended by six INTERPOL professors and officials headed by Mr. Stephen Schumberberk, director of Specialized Crime of INTERPOL's General Secretariat, as well as Salvatore La Barbera, undersecretary of Organized Crime and Drug. The objective of the meeting was to update participants on the latest world tendencies in the use of synthetic drugs, traffickers' ways to operate and techniques to fight drug trafficking. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/04)

February 20: The Vice Foreign Ministers of Laos and Cuba, Phonguavath Bounpha and José Guerra Menchero, met in the capital of the East Asian nation. Guerra Menchero heads a delegation from the Cuban Foreign Ministry currently on an official visit in Laos. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/2/04)

February 20: A delegation of the Mexican Partido de los Trabajadores (PT) is winding up a six-day visit to Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). The PT delegation, led by its President Alberto Anaya, met with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque who thanked them for the continued and decisive friendship of the Mexican people. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/04)

February 20: Contrary to widely circulated reports, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew did not confer the Order of St. Andrew upon Fidel Castro, nor did he present him with the Cross of St. Andrew. According to Dr. Anthony J. Limberakis, National Commander of the Order of St. Andrew, who accompanied the Patriarch on his recently concluded historic trip to Cuba, "His All Holiness gave to the Cuban leader a simple cross bearing the seal of the Patriarchate, as an expression of gratitude to the people of Cuba for the return and reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Havana." "Fidel Castro, despite his government's recent act of generosity to our Orthodox Church, does not espouse the Christian faith, and was never considered for this high honor," Limberakis added. (*Archon Aktouarios & National Commander*, 20/2/04)

February 22: Mexico's immigration authorities detained a couple of Cuban doctors fleeing from Venezuela at Mexico City's International Airport, said the Mexican newspaper *El Siglo*. Immigration officer Alberto Pliego said the couple tried to enter Mexico with fake Venezuelan passports and will be sent back to Caracas. The couple is part of the doctors' brigade that Havana has sent to Venezuela. (*NotiCuba Internacional*, 24/2/04)

February 22: A new team of 60 Cuban physicians has begun rendering their services in six Zimbabwean provincial hospitals. Doctor Felipe Delgado Bustillo, the head of the medical team, explained that 43 of the specialists are replacing those who had worked in Zimbabwe as part of the Integral Health Program for two years. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/2/04)

February 22: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez, asked Chile to reverse its decision in recent years to vote to condemn Cuba's human rights record, newspaper La Tercera said. Chile, as part of the United Nations' Human Rights Commission, voted in 2000, 2002 and 2003 to criticize Cuba's record. Perez met with Cristian Barros, Chile's deputy foreign minister, during his nine-hour visit to Chile, the first visit by a Cuban official during the administration of Chilean Socialist President Ricardo Lagos. (*Bloomberg*, 23/2/04)

February 23: The Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, arrived in Asunción on an official visit to Paraguay to review bilateral relations. Perez Roque will hold talks with his Paraguayan counterpart, Leila Rashid. The Cuban minister will also meet with the leaders of the National Congress and the House of Deputies, as well as with senators and members of the Foreign Affairs commission. The guest will also hold talks with the Ministers of Health, Education, and the vice ministers of Culture and Youth. (*Prensa Latina, 22/2/04*)

February 23: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, stated in Asunción, Paraguay, that the relations between Cuba and Latin America widened as part of the new situation in the region. The Cuban minister commented to reporters that Cuba's relations with the rest of the area are extending, with the exception of a few cases of governments "subordinated and accomplices to the US policy of aggression and blockade" against Cuba. In his opinion, the new regional dynamics that discredit neoliberalism, and the appearance of new popular movements claiming for deep changes in the zone, are catalysts for the current situation. (*Prensa Latina, 23/2/04*)

February 24: Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte is hosting Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque on the second day of his visit to Paraguay, designed to improve bilateral relations and expand cooperation. Cuba and Paraguay have found common ground to strengthen trade relations. So far, there's been not much trade between the two countries due to distance and past political factors, Perez Roque said. (*Prensa Latina, 25/2/04*)

February 24: A UN organization has awarded its World Press Freedom Prize to Cuban journalist Raúl Rivero Castañeda, who is currently serving a 20-year prison sentence. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said it gave Mr. Rivero the prize for his "brave and long-standing commitment to independent reporting." The group also said it is concerned about the conditions in which Mr. Rivero is being held, and called on Cuba to release him and other reporters. Last April, Rivero and 25 other journalists were sentenced to lengthy prison terms on charges of undermining Cuba's communist government. (*VOA, 24/2/04*)

February 24: The President of the Dominican Republic, Hipólito Mejía, has expressed his personal appreciation for Cuba's training of doctors from his country. During an event at the Government Palace, the Dominican president noted that 40 young people have been accepted to study at the Latin American School of Medicine. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 24/2/04*)

February 24: The European Union put out feelers to Cuba in an effort to overcome the deep chill in relations prompted by last year's wave of harsh repression on the communist-ruled island, but the overture was rejected by Havana, diplomatic sources said. They spoke of "discreet gestures" and "testing the waters" from the European side but reported that Havana did not respond in kind. It was up to Ireland, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, to contact high-ranking Cuban officials in Dublin with a "conciliatory message" in the hopes of breaking the ice, according to the sources. In the message, the EU told Cuban officials that if Cuba "took concrete steps to improve the human rights situation, we would correspond immediately." Cuba's written response came a few days later, and stated that authorities on the island believe the "only way to improve the situation is for the EU to stop inviting mercenaries to their embassies." (*EFE, 24/2/04*)

February 25: The Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's visit to Argentina marks an important moment for strengthening bilateral relations. His visit includes discussions with Buenos Aires authorities to coordinate President Kirchner's next visit to the Caribbean island. Other points on the foreign minister's agenda will be to discuss Cuba's \$1.9 billion debt with Argentina and Buenos Aires' abstention on the United Nations vote on the question of human rights in Cuba. Both governments already exchanged points of view about these matters last October when Bielsa made an official visit to Cuba. (*Prensa Latina, EFE, 25/2/04*)

February 25: Another group of forty young people from Guatemala have left for Havana to study medicine in response to an offer made by the Cuban government. Havana's ambassador to Guatemala City, Angel Abascal, saw the students off at the airport. Speaking with reporters, the island's representative in the Central American country said that

these 20 young men and 20 women will study to become doctors and, when they graduate, return to Guatemala to treat people in poor, remote communities. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/2/04)

February 25: The first Latin American campaign in support of the Cuban civic movement has been announced during an event at the Asamblea Legislativa of Costa Rica, headed by Mario Redondo Poveda, president of the Asamblea. The "Letter of Support to the Cuban Civic Movement", the fundamental document of this initiative, was read publicly and signed by Former Presidents of Costa Rica Luis Alberto Monge, Mario Echandi, Oscar Arias, José Joaquín Trejos, Rafael Angel Calderón, Rodrigo Carazo and other Latin American leaders. The campaign has been supported by the Costa Rican Committee of Solidarity with the Democracy in Cuba, a non-governmental organization based in San José, and the Cuban Democratic Directory, an organization with headquarters in Miami. (*Puente Informativo*, 26/2/04)

February 25: Uruguay will not respond to Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, who accused President Jorge Batlle of being an agent of foreign powers". "It is not for us to comment on statements made by a country with which we broke diplomatic relations", said Uruguayan Foreign Minister, Didier Opertti. (*AFP*, 25/2/04)

February 26: Uruguayan lawmaker Jaime Trobo has been accused by Cuban authorities of participating in a plan against the island's government coordinated by "terrorist organizations" based in the US, Spain and other nations. The accusation was made in Montevideo, by Cuban journalist and legislator Lázaro Barredo. Barredo revealed the actions of the politician, also member of the National Party and close supporter of former leader (1990-1995) Luis Alberto Lacalle. (*AIN*, 26/2/04)

February 26: Argentina and Cuba touted the warmth of their bilateral relations in a press release, during the last day of Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's official visit to Buenos Aires. Perez Roque, who met with president Nestor Kirchner, is set to tour Argentina's provinces. Also, Perez Roque's Argentine counterpart, Rafael Bielsa, delivered to the Cuban visitor two letters written by the son of a Cuban doctor barred from leaving the Communist island because of her differences with the Castro regime. (*EFE*, 26/2/04)

February 26: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, refused to receive a letter signed by over twenty Argentinean lawmakers asking for the liberation of 75 Cuban dissidents. The letter was handed over to Roque by lawmakers Martín Borrelli (Frente Compromiso para el Cambio) and Fernanda Ferrero (Unión por Buenos Aires) minutes before the minister's meeting with the mayor of Buenos Aires. Pérez Roque didn't accept the letter saying that "there are no political prisoners in Cuba." (*Encuentro en La Red*, 27/2/04)

February 26: A Mexican delegation of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has arrived in Cuba invited by the Cuban Parliament and the Island's Communist Party (PCC). Deputy Jose Alberto Aguilar, member of the National Defense, Marine and Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Deputies, leads the delegation. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/2/04)

February 27: Cuban independent journalist Raul Rivero, who is serving 20 years behind bars, was "moved, surprised and happy" to find out that he was awarded the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize, his wife told the press. Rivero's wife, Blanca Reyes, broke the news to him over the phone. She said Rivero asked her to convey his gratitude to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and send a message "to the world's free journalists telling them he will uphold with dignity the name of the late Colombian journalist," referring to Guillermo Cano whose name is that of the Award. (*EFE*, 28/2/04)

February 27: Fourteen Cubans who left their country made it to the Honduran city of La Ceiba after their boat capsized, officials said. La Ceiba Deputy Police Chief Juan Lopez said one of the "rafters" told him the group sailed toward Honduras, southwest of the island, with the intention of requesting political asylum and finding work there. Immigration authorities will make the Cubans' names public and ultimately decide their fate, Lopez added. (*EFE*, 27/2/04)

February 27: The long-running case of a Canadian businessman charged with violating the US embargo against Cuba came to an end with a fine and a sentence of a year's probation. James Sabzali, 45, pleaded guilty to a charge of "smuggling" several thousand dollars worth of supplies destined for the island. He pleaded guilty in exchange for the probation and a \$10,000 fine. With the sentence, he avoids deportation. Sabzali has lived in Philadelphia since 1996. U.S. prosecutors said Sabzali broke the law while working for the American company Brotech Corp. U.S. officials said the company circumvented the trade embargo by selling products to foreign companies, which then shipped them to Cuba. (*CBC Canada*, 27/2/04)

Terrorism

February 11: A Yemeni captive at the Guantanamo Bay prison has acknowledged he was Osama bin Laden's \$200-a-month driver in Afghanistan, but asserts he was neither a member of al-Qaida nor a terrorist, a newspaper reported. Salim Ahmed Salim Hamdan, 34, is being held in isolation at the military prison in Cuba in segregated accommodations for prisoners facing possible military tribunals, his lawyer, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Charles Swift, told the press. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/2/04)

February 12: Spanish police will fly to Cuba to collect the only Spaniard held prisoner in the US military camp at Guantanamo Bay, Justice Minister Jose Maria Michavila said. Hamed Abderrahman Ahmad is one of four Guantanamo prisoners who Spanish High Court Judge Baltasar Garzon wants brought back to Spain as part of his investigation of al Qaeda. (*Reuters*, 12/2/04)

February 13: The United States expressed its willingness to strike agreements with other nations concerning the extradition and prosecution of suspected members of Al Qaeda and the Taliban being held at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said his government is talking to other countries about turning over suspects. Rumsfeld spoke about the transfer to those attending a meeting of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, assuring them that Washington would accelerate the process and repatriate the greatest number of prisoners possible. (*EFE*, 13/2/04)

February 13: The postponed trial of four individuals accused of plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro during the 2000 Ibero-American Summit in Panama is now set for March. "The court has more than enough proof," said plaintiff attorney Julio Berrios in declarations to the press. He added, "In the hands of Panamanian Justice are 43 volumes containing thousands of pages of evidence and testimony. Prosecuting the case represents a matter of honor for the Panamanian Justice System." (*Prensa Latina*, 13/2/04)

February 24: The Pentagon charged two suspected associates of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden being held at its Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, prison with conspiracy to commit war crimes, the first such action against detainees there. Ali Hamza Ahmed Sulayman al Bahlul, a Yemeni, and Ibrahim Ahmed Mahmoud al Qosi, of Sudan, were charged with conspiring with bin Laden to murder, destroy property and commit terrorism, according to a statement posted on the Defense Department's Web site. (*Bloomberg*, 24/2/04)

February 24: Rogelio Cruz, defense lawyer for Luis Posada Carriles has "deliberately" provoked a hostile environment in order to gain Judge Enrique Paniza's withdrawal from the upcoming trial. The proposal is that the trial judge should "not be familiar" with the DA's report or the "evidence presented and the object of evidence to be presented," the Panamanian district attorney Arquímedes Sáez Castillo, who is directing the proceedings, informed Granma International. (*Granma International*, 24/2/04)

US-Cuba Relations

February 1: While some officers of the US Department of Homeland Security work overtime to thwart terrorists intent on using planes as weapons of mass destruction, their colleagues have been intensely monitoring Americans suspected of attempting to vacation in Cuba. Under an October 10 directive from President Bush, the department began devoting extra resources to more intensively inspect passengers who travel to Cuba on daily charter flights from Miami, New York and San Francisco. "Homeland Security and the Department of Foreign Assets Control officers are interrogating - or interviewing, depending on your point of view - everyone both on the way out and on return," says Bob Guild of Marazul Charters, a travel agency that arranges trips for those with legal exemptions to the travel ban. (*Houston Chronicle*, 1/2/04)

February 1: The federal Department of Homeland Security silenced renowned flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucia's first Bay Area concert in four years recently, denying Lucia's bandmate permission into the country because he is a Cuban national. De Lucia was supposed to play his groundbreaking version of jazz-influenced flamenco to a sold-out crowd at the University of California, Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall. But bass player Alain Rodríguez was held back from entering the country indefinitely as the Department of Homeland Security looks over his petition to visit. Rodriguez has been living in Spain for five years but is a Cuban national with a passport from Cuba. (*The Daily Review*, 1/2/04)

February 1: In an attempt to bring Texas farmers a potential \$57 million in food and agricultural exports to Cuba that could result in 1,500 new jobs, Texas businesses, organizations and individuals pursuing the Cuban market have formed the Texas Cuba Trade Alliance. The TCTA is designed to support the effort with current information about economics, business opportunities, and export trade policies. (*Farm Press*, 1/2/04)

February 2: Pernod Ricard said that a US patent appeal board upheld its registration of the Havana Club trademark in the United States, handing the French spirits group a victory in its long-standing dispute with Bacardi USA. In a joint venture with the Cuban government, Pernod Ricard has been selling Havana Club-brand rum worldwide, although a four-decade old embargo against Cuba bars Pernod Ricard from selling the product in the United States. (*Reuters*, 2/2/04)

February 2: A US Cuban scientific expedition kicked off a biodiversity study in the Sierra Maestra mountains and the Nipe-Sagua-Baracoa massif in eastern Cuba. The purpose of the trip is to conduct quick ecological analyses of the La Bayamesa nature preserve in the Buey Arriba and La Melva municipalities, in the northeastern province of Holguin. Some 30 specialists from Cuba's National Museum of Natural History and the Eastern Ecosystem and Biodiversity Center, along with experts from Cornell University and Chicago's Field Museum, are participating in the study. (*EFE*, 2/2/04)

February 2: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has reaffirmed the Cuban people's determination to defend their Revolution by any means necessary. The island's top legislator was in Camagüey for the 490 th anniversary of the foundation of the central Cuban city. Ricardo Alarcón noted that Cuban patriots fought almost barehanded against the Spanish colonialist army in the 19th century - - the most powerful army at that time. And he emphasized that Cuba is once again willing to do whatever is necessary to defend its independence and sovereignty against any invasion. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/7/04)

February 2: The US diplomatic mission in Havana has modified the procedures for those wishing to obtain a visitor's visa. Anyone applying for a non-immigrant visa will have to call the US mission first to make an appointment. The new procedure attempts to eliminate daily line of thousand of people, outside the US mission, who try to get an entrance to the building. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 3/2/04)

February 3: Two Cubans who tried to sail to Florida in a truck converted to a pontoon boat last year have made another attempt, this time piloting a seagoing 1950s-era Buick. Marciel Basanta Lopez and Luis Grass Rodriguez, who

were sent back to Cuba in July after they failed to reach Florida in a converted 1951 Chevy pickup, were apparently at the helm of the newest vehicle-boat conversion. The US Coast Guard refused to confirm the status of the tail finned car or the origin of photos of it in the water that were broadcast on television. US policy prevents the disclosure of information on such cases until they are resolved, such as by sending the participants back to their home countries, Petty Officer Sandra Bartlett said. Under US immigration policy, Cubans who reach US shores are allowed to stay, while those caught at sea are usually returned. (*The Globe and Mail*, 3/2/04)

February 3: An editorial published on the front-page of this morning's edition of Granma refutes a recent Wall Street Journal article as part of Washington's cynical campaigns against Havana and Caracas. The Granma editorial refers to an article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal on February 1st, charging that Cuba and Venezuela are a threat to "democracy and human rights" in Latin America. The article accuses the government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez of propping up the Cuban Revolution with crude oil sold to the island at preferential prices. [[Las cónicas campañas del gobierno de Estados Unidos](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/04)

February 3: Cuba has accused the US government of preparing the ground for an invasion of the island and the assassination of Fidel Castro. Recent attacks by Bush administration officials on Castro for forging an axis with oil-producing Venezuela to destabilise Latin American countries are building a pretext for an invasion, the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said. They aim to "create a climate of artificial hysteria that would justify before American public opinion a military adventure against our homeland, including the physical elimination of compañero Fidel," Granma charged in a front-page editorial. [[Las cónicas campañas del gobierno de Estados Unidos](#)] (*Reuters*, 3/2/04)

February 4: Cuban filmmaker Fernando Pérez did not receive a visa to attend the screening of his movie *Suite Habana* (2003) at the 21 st International Film Festival of Miami. Pérez was in Spain at the time, where he was invited to attend the Goya awards ceremony. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 4/2/04)

February 5: Cuban officials complained that the Bush Administration has denied visas to Cuban Grammy nominees for the awards ceremony and wondered how aging musicians could be considered security threats. All five nominees for best traditional tropical Latin album are Cubans who live on the island. They include 77-year-old singer Ibrahim Ferrer of Buena Vista Social Club fame and salsa pianist Guillermo Rubalcaba, aged 75. "I am not a terrorist. I couldn't be one. I am a musician and have always been well received by American audiences," said Ferrer, one of the veteran musicians who were rediscovered and shot to world fame by the Buena Vista project. [[Información del Instituto Cubano de la Música](#)] (*Reuters*, 8/2/04)

February 5: A Baptist minister who sits on Cuba's parliament worried that politics will hurt relations between churches here and in the United States after failing again to get an American visa for a long-planned visit. The Reverend Raúl Suárez was invited by American church groups to take part in religious conferences and other Black History Month events in Mobile, Alabama, and Boston. "I presented my application 14 weeks ago," Suarez told the press. To participate in the planned events "I would have to travel this Sunday at the latest," he added. Officials at the US Interests Section, the American mission in Havana, declined to comment on the case, citing confidentiality rules. Suarez is a deputy on Cuba's National Assembly, or parliament, and directs the church-run Dr. Martin Luther King Center in Havana. (*AP*, 5/2/04)

February 5: US law enforcement authorities in South Florida arrested two men for defrauding the public by claiming to be Secret Service agents assigned to a CIA operation to recover money from properties confiscated by the Cuban government. Prosecutors announced that authorities arrested Roberto Martin Cabrera, who came to Miami in 1996 claiming to be a deserter from the Cuban intelligence service who had been instructed to assassinate several members of the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), one of the main exile organizations. The other man arrested was identified as Christopher Johnson, who with Martin stands accused of conspiracy and fraud. (*EFE*, 5/2/04)

February 6: In a race against time, a carload of 11 Cubans found floating at sea in a vintage Buick sought a court order to get into the United States against federal policy rather than face a return trip home. Taken aboard a US Coast Guard ship, the Cubans would lose their legal rights in US courts if they were repatriated, so their only hope was to get a helpful court ruling while still at sea. The attorneys contend U.S. agents rule differently on claims of political persecution depending on whether people are caught at sea or reach U.S. soil. They said about 99 percent are denied at sea, but almost all Cubans are allowed to stay if they reach land under a policy adopted by the Clinton administration and kept by the Bush administration. [For more on this, see Exile Community] (*Sun Sentinel*, 6/2/04)

February 7: Cuba, where Ernest Hemingway lived for two decades, and a foundation in the US state in which he died agreed to swap information contained in books and documents the American writer left behind. The co-president of the Hemingway House Foundation in Idaho, Martin Peterson, struck the deal with Cuban officials at Finca Vigía, the estate on the outskirts of Havana where Hemingway lived from 1940 to 1960. Peterson gave the Cuban officials a black-and-white photograph of Hemingway on a hunting trip in Idaho during which he shot two antelope. Their stuffed heads hang in the sitting room at Finca Vigía. (*Reuters*, 7/2/04)

February 9: A Cuban family caught at sea on a floating 1959 Buick will not be returned to Cuba for at least two more days, a judge decided. US District Judge Federico Moreno extended an order while attorneys for the federal government and the family continue to examine immigration law and policies. Luis Grass Rodriguez, his wife and 4-year-old son are among 11 people found on the Buick off the Florida Keys. Assistant US Attorney Dexter Lee said the Coast Guard may be in a position to repatriate the other eight. [For more on this, see Exile Community] (*CNN*, 9/2/04)

February 9: The Bush administration identified 10 foreign companies -- most of which are involved in the travel business -- that it believes are linked to Cuba and thus are forbidden from doing business in the United States. The Treasury Department's action marks the latest development emerging from President Bush's call for more stringent enforcement of provisions that forbid most travel to Cuba. Under current rules, there are exceptions that cover working journalists, relatives of Cuban citizens, providers of humanitarian aid and others. The 10 companies named in the action are: Travel companies: Canada Inc., Montreal and Quebec; Corporacion Cimex S.A., Havana and all other locations worldwide; Havanatur S.A., Havana and other cities in Cuba; Havanatur, S.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina; Havanatur Bahamas Ltd, Nassau; Havantaur Chile S.A., Santiago, Chile; Cubanacan Group, Havana; Cubanacan International B.V., Zevenhuizen, Netherlands; and Cubanacan U.K., Limited, London. The gift company: La Compania Tiendas Universo, S.A., Cuba. [[Treasury Designates & Blocks 10 Entities for Cuban Embargo Violations](#)] (*CNN*, 9/2/04)

February 9: Appearing before about 100 Cuban-American businessmen in vote-rich southern Florida, US Treasury Secretary John Snow blasted Fidel Castro while naming the organizations to be put on a Treasury list that makes it illegal for Americans to deal with them. "We're cracking down," Mr. Snow told Cuban leaders. "We mean business. We're cutting off American dollars headed to Fidel Castro, period. At the same time, we're reaching out to the freedom hungry people of Cuba. While we will not tolerate illegal travel to Cuba, we sympathize with those desperate to travel here from Cuba. Because until Cuba is free, people will risk their lives to come to these shores of freedom." (*Reuters*, 9/2/04)

February 9: Fidel Castro signed baseballs, handed out cigars and flower bouquets and discussed increased ties with the United States in a meeting with two Republican legislators who want to lift a ban on US travel to Cuba. Senator Larry Craig and US Representative Butch Otter, both of Idaho, "are pushing very hard to lift the travel restrictions," said Craig spokesman Mike Tracy, who attended the encounter with Castro at the Palace of the Revolution. The 22 other members of the trade and cultural delegation were also present, Tracy said. (*AP*, 9/2/04)

February 9: The Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC), established by President Bush on October 10, 2003, and chaired by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, welcomes public input for working groups to assist in identifying and encouraging measures to help the Cuban people to bring and end to the dictatorship, and develop a plan for agile and decisive assistance to a post-dictatorship Cuba. The core agencies responsible for day-to-day operations of

the Commission include, the State Department, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Treasury Department, the Commerce Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Security Council, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Secretary Powell designated Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger F. Noriega to direct day-to-day Commission activities. [[CAFC Welcomes Public Input for Working Groups](#)] (*Department of State, Press Release, 9/2/04*)

February 10: The world's only flying eye hospital and training center -- the Orbis DC-10 --- is restocking its medical supplies and picking up staffers in West Palm Beach after training eye-care professionals in the Philippines. The jet heads for its seventh mission to Cuba this month. Orbis was invited as a humanitarian organization by the country's Ministry of Health -- where it will train doctors, nurses and medical technicians. (*The Palm Beach Post, 10/2/04*)

February 10: Eight of the eleven Cubans who tried to cross the Florida Straits in a boat made from a green 1959 Buick car were sent home by the US Coast Guard, which confirmed it had sunk the Buick. The Coast Guard said it repatriated the group as part of a larger batch of 98 Cuban migrants who were picked up at sea in recent days and delivered to the port of Cabañas in western Cuba. The other three Buick boaters, a family of three, are still being held on a Coast Guard cutter at sea pending a decision on their immigration status. (*CNN, 10/2/04*)

February 11: Two Republican US lawmakers, just back from a trade mission to Cuba, believe the United States will drop its ban on Americans' travel to the Caribbean island next year. Senator Larry Craig and Congressman Butch Otter, both Idaho Republicans, just returned from a four-day trip to Cuba, where they led a trade delegation and signed agricultural agreements with Cuban officials. (*The Voice of Americas, 11/2/04*)

February 11: The book "Cuba, the Untold Story" ("Cuba, la historia no contada"), denouncing the four decades of US terrorism against Cuba, is a splendid background to the case of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US, Cuban People's Power National Assembly (Congress) President Ricardo Alarcon said. At the book launching for "Cuba, La Historia No Contada" at the 13th International Book Fair in the presence of the wives and mothers of the Miami Five, Alarcon said the work explains just what terrorism means for the Cuban people. (*Prensa Latina, 10/2/04*)

February 12: A family of three Cubans will be sent to the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, where their requests for political asylum will be reviewed. An asylum officer with the Department of Homeland Security said in court papers that Luis Grass Rodriguez, who pushed off Cuba's shores in a 1959 tail-finned Buick with his wife, Isora Hernandez Hernandez, and their 4-year-old son, Angel Luis, has demonstrated a "credible fear of persecution" in Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel, 12/2/04*)

February 12: Havanatur Tour company operating in the Bahamas may be forced to change the way it does business, in the face of an embargo by the US Treasury Department for allegedly providing Americans with travel packages to Cuba. Havanatur manager, Nelson Sarduy, told The Guardian newspaper that his firm is waiting to see what will happen and to have a better view of the measures they have to take. Sarduy admitted that the company would have to make adjustments to the present state of business. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 12/2/04*)

February 13: Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, one of the biggest US law firms, is facing a \$40 million malpractice suit from a former client for allegedly advising it to continue trading with Cuba through foreign subsidiaries. Purolite, a privately owned water purification resin manufacturer based in the US, accuses Morgan Lewis of malpractice and gross misconduct for advising it that trading between a British subsidiary and "entities affiliated with Cuba", which is subject to a US trade embargo, was legal. (*Financial Times, 13/2/04*)

February 14: Fidel Castro urged US President George W. Bush for the second time in a week to state whether he, as a policy, renounces the assassination of foreign leaders. Referring to Bush on the reelection campaign trail, the 77-year-old communist leader asked in a lengthy address at an economic conference: "How can the transition (the US says it wants) be sped up in Cuba?" Quickly answering his own question, Castro said "the only way is by moving to an

extrajudicial execution," and Castro challenged Bush to state openly whether he believes he has the authority to order the executions of foreign leaders. "We will honor our obligations and duties until the last breath," Castro said, warning, "we always are on guard." Instead of his usual "Fatherland or Death" salute to cap a speech, Castro addressed Bush jokingly, saying: "Hail, Ceasar. Those who are about to die salute you." (*AFP*, 15/2/04)

February 14: America's economy hangs by a thread while Cuba -- after four decades under a US economic blockade -- continues to offer free health care and boasts an infant mortality rate lower than its northern neighbor, Fidel Castro asserted. In a 41/2-hour speech to economists, Castro also took shots at President Bush, saying he "couldn't debate a Cuban 9th-grader." He recited for a half-hour from "Dos Cabalgan Juntos (Two Men Riding Together)," a book of purported malapropisms by Bush. Castro also lashed out at the "foolishness" of the US economic blockade that has been in place since the presidency of John F. Kennedy, saying it hadn't stopped Cuba from surpassing the United States in many areas. At one point -- after offering his audience coffee to avoid falling asleep -- Castro went on to quote various reports from the US media severely criticizing Bush, the economy, US unemployment and the war on Iraq. (*AP*, 15/2/04)

February 14: The US Cuban Adjustment Law (1966) is responsible for illegal emigration in the Island, Granma daily reiterated, after informing that US authorities recently returned another 112 illegal Cuban emigrants. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/04)

February 15: Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker debuted the Spanish translation of her novel "Meridian" in Havana, telling her Cuban fans there is a direct correlation between the US civil rights movement and the socialist revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power. "I thought about Cuba a lot when I was writing this," Walker told a packed audience at an international book fair. "It has meant very much to me that Cubans have understood what I'm doing. Sometimes in my own country, I am very severely criticized by people who don't bother to read me at all." (*AP*, 15/2/04)

February 16: The Treasury Department announced that it would "take a hard look" at restricting "remittance" rules that allow Cuban Americans to send as much as \$1,200 a year to relatives on the island. The government wants to be sure that the money really is "going to where it's supposed to," Treasury Secretary John Snow said during a news conference announcing a crackdown on Cuban-owned companies conducting illegal business in the United States. A spokeswoman for the Treasury Department said that details of how remittance rules would be changed are still to be determined. The move to restrict remittances, spokeswoman Tara Bradshaw said, stems from President Bush's speech in October that condemned Fidel Castro for recent crackdowns on dissidents. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/2/04)

February 16: The Roundtable, broadcast from Havana, presented details of the latest "pandering of President George W. Bush government to the anti-Cuban right-wingers in Miami". The panel of political analysts gave examples of the newest harassments of US citizens traveling to Cuba, restrictions on the amount of money and number of visits Cuban Americans can send or make to their families in Cuba. They also talk of Washington's attempts to extend restrictions to companies in third countries that have Internet connections with US citizens but do business in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/2/04)

February 16: US farmers and businesspeople believe that Cuba is a valuable market with which they want to develop and strengthen trade, according to Marvin Lehrer, director of the US Rice Federation for Latin America. Lehrer arrived in the Cuban capital to continue negotiations with Cuba's ALIMPORT company on US rice exports to Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/2/04)

February 17: Despite four decades of trade sanctions and increasing White House hostility, Cuba has become the United States' 35th market for food exports. Cuba's purchases of American agricultural products doubled last year, as US agribusiness giants sold more and more grain to the Caribbean island, according to a report by a New York-based

business group. The US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which monitors trade between the two countries, said Cuba imported \$256.9 million worth of US agricultural products in 2003. (*Aljazeera.Net*, 17/2/04)

February 17: Cuba harshly criticized the US before the World Trade Organization (WTO) for refusing to fulfill its obligations in a dispute involving Brussels and Washington regarding the "Havana Club" brand name. The Cuban representative complained that the U.S. keeps on refusing to comply with an adverse ruling by the WTO's disputes settling body, arguing that the case is being reviewed by the U.S. Congress. (*EFE*, 17/2/04)

February 17: US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, Peter DeShazo, said he expects that the presence of Cubans in Venezuela is restricted to health and education. "There are Cubans in Venezuela" invited by President Hugo Chávez, said DeShazo in a TV program taped at the headquarters of the Voice of America (VOA). (*AFP*, 17/2/04)

February 19: A crackdown by the Bush administration on US travel to Cuba has reduced the number of non-Cuban Americans visiting the island to a trickle, travel agents and Cuban officials said. At Havana's Hemingway Marina, it is hard to find a yacht or big-game fishing boat with a US flag these days. "The Commerce Department began asking for export licenses for the vessels," said the marina's commodore, Jose Miguel Diaz. "The yachters didn't want trouble." Havana was packed with American tourists in November and December, including museum curators and retired academics, who rushed to get a glimpse of the communist-run nation before permits for cultural and educational visits ended. (*Reuters*, 19/2/04)

February 19: Despite tough talk by both countries, the US and Cuba quietly maintain ties and cooperate with one another, a leading Cuba expert said. Jorge Dominguez, director of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, made the remarks during a gathering at Florida International University. He said while President Bush and Fidel Castro maintain a show of "fierce hostility," the countries actually work together when it comes to issues like migration, security and exports to Cuba. "It is easier to engage in rhetoric if Castro's rhetoric is equally high and hostile," Dominguez said. Bush's tough stance on Cuba, Dominguez said, allows him to win over traditionally Republican Cuban-Americans who might otherwise sit out the upcoming presidential election, which could be detrimental considering the crucial role Florida played in the 2000 election. "Every vote here counts and every campaign penny here counts," Dominguez said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/2/04)

February 19: Republican US Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart issued a statement refuting professor Jorge Dominguez's take on US-Cuba relations. He said Bush has expelled Cuban spies, indicted Cuban officials, and threatened to veto attempts to weaken the embargo and travel restrictions to the island. Diaz-Balart suggested Dominguez's remarks were tied to Democratic efforts to undermine the president's re-election campaign. "Dominguez' remarks are a clearly calculated political maneuver to weaken Cuban American support for President Bush," Diaz-Balart said in the statement. (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/2/04)

February 19: The United States Olympic women's basketball team began training workouts in advance of its trip to political rival Cuba for three exhibition games. The Americans, who have named nine members of their roster for August's Athens Games, will play against the 2003 Pan American Games champions three days in a row and conduct a final practice session before returning home. (*AFP*, 19/2/04)

February 20: The top US diplomat in Havana said Cuba's government was fabricating a threat of invasion by the United States to instill fear in Cubans and retain political control. "The Cuban government is fabricating the 'threat' of a US military attack to engender fear in the Cuban population", the head of the U.S. mission in Havana, James Cason, said in a statement. "Last year the Cuban Foreign Minister suggested that we were slowing down the processing of travel documents for Cubans migrating to the US to create a mass migration crisis as a pretext for war, which of course was untrue. The US Interests Section asked MINREX [the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry] to allow Mr. Cason to address the Cuban public through Cuban newspapers and television to tell the Cuban public directly that we had no

intention to attack or invade Cuba. We were trying to reassure the Cuban people. The Cuban government did not allow it", the note adds. (*News Havana, Reuters, AP, 20,21/2/04*)

February 20: José Contreras, the New York Yankees pitcher who defected from Cuba, expressed his frustration saying the Cuban government is keeping his family there to punish him. The righthander also said he wished the team would try harder to help him out, a sentiment echoed by his agent, Jaime Torres. Torres plans to set up a meeting with Yankees officials sometime during spring training. "I'm hoping Randy Levine or Mr. Steinbrenner can maybe contact the White House and get our diplomats involved in contacting the Cuban government," Torres said. Contreras already has tried the usual route, saying his wife, Myriam, and two daughters, Nailan, 11, and Nailenis, 3, were granted visas on three occasions from Nicaragua, where Contreras, established residency. He said the Cuban government has steadfastly refused to give them the white cards necessary to leave the country. "They were told they weren't eligible for the white card until five years after I left the country," Contreras said. (*Newsday, 20/2/04*)

February 20: The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office dismantled a ring of human smuggling between Cuba and South Florida, which had brought 250 persons into the US in the last three years making about \$2 million. (*El Nuevo Herald, 20/2/04*)

February 20: The United States Department of Commerce revoked the license of Send a Piano to Havana, a non profit organization that has donated pianos to Cuban music schools since 1995. The project had sent 237 refurbished pianos to date with the latest shipment of 27 instruments arriving in Havana earlier this month. The Cuban representative of the US charity, Armando Gómez recently established the Newton Hunt School of Tuning and Instrument Repair in the Cuban National School Of Music. The project is named after a New Jersey piano tuner who died last year bequeathing the entire contents of his workshop to the Havana school. (*Prensa Latina, 12/2/04*)

February 20: House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (Republican-Texas) delivered an impassioned speech denouncing Fidel Castro's terrorist regime and honoring thousands of victims of communist violence and oppression at el Memorial Cubano in Miami, Florida. "Humanity has known it by many names -- Nazism, fascism, Communism, terrorism. But it is one and the same evil, inhuman ideology -- no matter what language it speaks, or what uniform it wears," DeLay said. "The war on terror is a war against evil, and it is therefore a war against Fidel Castro," DeLay said. "Freedom and terrorism cannot coexist, and evil will not stand. And if it will not stand in Baghdad, Kabul, Tehran, or Ramallah, then it will not stand in Havana." DeLay joined Florida congressmen Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Mario Diaz-Balart, along with members of the Cuban Memorial Project, an assembly of various organizations, groups, and individuals from the Cuban exile community, to denounce Fidel Castro's regime. (*US Newswire, 20/2/04*)

February 21: Cuba, the US poultry industry's eighth export market, said it would increase imports despite the appearance of the dreaded bird flu in four states and bans slapped on US chicken and eggs by some countries. "We have limited purchases from a few states due to avian influenza, but see no problem with the vast majority," said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's state food importer Alimport. Alvarez said Cuba would purchase 120,000 metric tons of US poultry in 2004 as his company increased US food imports in general. (*Reuters, 21/2/04*)

February 21: In a move that pits national security concerns against academic freedom and the international flow of information, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control recently declared that American publishers cannot edit works authored in nations under trade embargoes. Although publishing the articles is legal, editing is a "service" and it is illegal to perform services for embargoed nations, the agency has ruled. This includes the five embargoed nations: Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Libya and Cuba. (*Los Angeles Times, 21/2/04*)

February 21: Thirteen Cuban migrants were picked up by US Border Patrol agents after being smuggled into the Florida Keys aboard a speedboat, an official said. Members of the group said they left from Cuba, and the boat left them on Duck Key, about 90 miles southwest of Miami, Border Patrol supervisor Kerry Heck said. The group had

made it to shore by the time they were spotted, and will therefore likely be allowed to stay in the country. (CNN, 21/2/04)

February 21: Cuba announced an agreement to buy \$1 million in cattle feed from Iowa under ongoing deals that have carried Cuba to No. 35 on the US's list of food export markets. Pedro Alvarez, president of the Cuban food import-export firm Alimport, announced the deal to buy 10,000 metric tons of feed from Midwest Grain Processors during a news conference with visiting Iowa farm representatives. The deals announced are the latest in a series of ongoing transactions between the communist-run island and US farm producers that are allowed under an exception to the US trade embargo. (AP, 23/2/04)

February 23: America's top diplomat in Cuba said that there were no plans to restart formal US-Cuba migration talks that the United States suspended last month. The meetings, held every six months, were established to monitor 1994 and 1995 accords designed to promote legal, orderly migration between the two countries -- and prevent a mass exodus as in 1994 when tens of thousands of Cubans took to the sea in flimsy vessels for Florida. The United States said it suspended the migration talks because of Cuba's repeated refusal to discuss key issues, while Cuba blamed the suspension on US presidential election politics. "The talks potentially could be useful," James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section in Cuba, said. "But I think we have found in recent years that they haven't been." Cason said Cuban authorities are still refusing to discuss allowing American diplomats to visit repatriated migrants in the countryside and are denying exit permits to hundreds of doctors and health care workers who have US government approval to immigrate. He said three other issues Havana refuses to discuss are: Cuba's cooperation in holding a new registration for the lottery from which two-thirds of all legal migrants are chosen; a deeper port in Cuba for repatriations, allowing the US Coast Guard to use its larger vessels to return migrants and free up smaller ones for patrols; and Cuba's obligation under international law to accept the return of Cuban nationals the United States wants to deport. (Houston Chronicle, AP, 23/2/04)

February 24: The Reverend Lucius Walker, director of IFCO/Pastors for Peace, is in Cuba with a group of US students who are enrolling in Havana's Latin American School of Medicine. Of the nearly 7000 students from Latin America and other parts of the world attending classes at the medical school, 60 students are from poor families in the United States. Their only obligation is to return as graduating doctors and treat poor people in their communities. (Radio Habana Cuba, 24/2/04)

February 25: The State Department issued its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. The report found that human rights abuses in Cuba "worsened dramatically" as the regime of Fidel Castro continued to commit numerous serious abuses and denied Cuba's citizens the right to change their government. The report pointed to the sentencing of 75 dissidents to lengthy prison terms for exercising their fundamental rights as evidence of the government's poor performance. The report was also critical of the Castro regime for ignoring petitions, which contained thousands of signatures, calling for a national referendum on political and economic reforms. [See, [Cuba 2003. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)] (EFE, 26/2/04)

February 26: The US National Committee to Free the Cuban Five has issued a statement on the status of two wire transfers sent to the Committee from overseas to help pay for the upcoming full-page New York Times ad on the Cuban Five. According to the solidarity organization, the US Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in conjunction with Wachovia Bank, first prevented the National Committee from receiving two wire transfers sent to it from two Cuban Five support committees: the Coordinadora Andaluza de Solidaridad con Cuba, in Andalucía, Spain, and the Paris-based National Coordinator for the French Committee to Free the Cuban Five. Neither the OFAC nor Wachovia explained why they unlawfully denied the National Committee access to these funds. Instead, they demanded that the groups involved answer intrusive questions about the work they do on Cuba and the case of the Five. It was announced that the funds have now been released. (Radio Habana Cuba, 25/2/04)

February 26: President George W. Bush stepped up restrictions on boats traveling between US ports and Cuba, citing "the disturbance or threatened disturbance of the international relations of the United States caused by actions taken by the Cuban government." Bush signed a presidential proclamation authorizing Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to take the necessary measures to keep tabs on boats bound for Cuba and increase inspections of vessels in US. The president also asked local and state authorities to collaborate with the federal government to prevent "the unauthorized departure of vessels intending to enter Cuban territorial waters." The measure strengthens enforcement of the US embargo against Cuba. [See also, Exile Community] (*EFE*, 26/2/04)

February 26: US President George Bush signed an order that expands the government's authority to inspect US vessels sailing to Cuba, further tightening the embargo in a move critics say aims to appease Cuban-American voters during a hotly contested election year. Stating that US boaters could be endangered by the Cuban military's "potential use of excessive force," Bush directed Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge to develop new rules to prevent unauthorized vessels from entering Cuban waters. US authorities would be authorized to inspect any vessel in US waters, place guards on ships and take possession under some circumstances. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/2/04)

February 27: One of the Cubans who tried to reach Florida last summer aboard a truck converted into a boat was called by US officials to a surprise interview about his request to migrate legally to the United States. (*AP*, 27/2/04)

February 27: Thirty-six Cubans were returned to their homeland after they were found at sea in two separate interdictions, the US Coast Guard said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/2/04)

February 27: Seven months after a group of Cubans boarded a customized '51 Chevy pickup and headed out to sea, only to be returned by the US Coast Guard days later, the remaining *camionautas* -- or "truckonauts" -- have yet another chance. Eight of the Cubans whose political asylum claims were denied by US officials were summoned once again to resubmit their paperwork, according to family members and reports from the island. A ninth truckonaut, Ariel Diego Marcell -- whose asylum application is still being processed -- fainted on the steps of the US Interest Section in Havana after showing up for interviews. "He just passed out from nerves," said Rubén García of Miami, a relative of several of the Cubans who left the Havana coast aboard the battered, diesel-powered Chevy. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/2/04)