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Research Forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

February 2007

Highlights

Domestic Affairs: At the opening ceremony of Havana's International Book Fair, one of Cuba's top poets takes the unusual step of arguing against the exclusion of certain authors on grounds of ideology or place of residence. Dissident attorney Rene Gomez Manzano is unexpectedly released from prison. Communication Minister Ramiro Valdes defends Internet restrictions. Cuban authorities decide not to renew visas to three foreign press correspondents. Fidel Castro calls in to Venezuelan President's radio talk show to say he feels well.

Economy: Cuban agricultural authorities express concern with regards to the outlook for sugar production in 2007. Cuban police break up several counterfeiting networks in Havana specializing in printing both convertible and national currency. Sherritt International Corp. says it expects growth to come in 2007 through expansion of its power and metals mining projects in Cuba. The 7th Session of the Cuba-Venezuela Inter-governmental Joint Commission concludes in Havana with the signing of 355 projects worth \$1.5 billion.

Exile Community: The Cuban-American National Foundation is ready to talk with Carlos Lage. Mario Chanes de Armas, the Cuban political prisoner who served the longest sentence in modern times, dies in Miami.

Foreign Affairs: The Organization of American States Secretary General hopes the lack of dialogue with Cuba is only temporary. It is a top priority for Mexico to re-launch "dialogue and political understanding" with Cuba. Canadian Ambassador to Washington says his country is prepared to act as a "bridge" between the US and Cuba. Honduras names its first ambassador to Cuba in 45 years.

Security: Cadets and teachers from Venezuelan military academies visit the island.

Terrorism: The Colombian government and guerrilla organization ELN hold talks in Havana.

US-Cuba Relations: Polls indicate that Americans want the US to re-establish regular diplomatic relations with the island. Cuba remained one of the more important markets for American farmers in 2006. US Commerce Secretary tells lawmakers and business groups the Bush administration won't waver from its tough stance toward Havana. A Florida International University professor accused of spying for the Cuban government is sentenced to five years in prison.



Domestic Affairs

February 2: Parliament president Ricardo Alarcón bade outstanding Cuban attorney in international law, Olga Miranda, the last farewell before her final resting place in the Armed Forces memorial at Colon cemetery. Miranda died suddenly the day before. At the time of her death she was teaching in the High Institute of International Relations in Havana, of which she was member of the scientific staff. She was also president of the Cuban Society of International Law and member of honor of the Cuban Union of Jurists. Olga contributed, as few did, to Cuban political tradition and belonged to the kind of people who never retire, are always useful to their last breath and that is why they are indispensable, Alarcon said. Miranda was founder of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was a collaborator of the first Minister Raul Roa, served as ambassador and represented Cuba in important international fora. Funeral service was attended by Alarcon, Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque and dozens of Foreign Ministry workers and students. Fidel and Raul Castro sent flower wreaths. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/2/07)

February 3: Cuban intellectuals who joined in a protest over the threatened revival of the so-called Five Grey Years (1971-1976) in the island's culture, believe their fears sparked a debate which must now continue. Several meetings of the country's top cultural authorities with the offended intellectuals prolonged the encounter, accessible by invitation only and without the press being allowed in, which left some optimistic and others skeptical. Writer Reynaldo Gonzalez, winner of the 2003 National Literature Award, told Efe Saturday that the meeting analyzed a period that was "very ugly" and one of "political extremism." "That was an evil time and Pavon [head of the governmental Dirección de Cultura (Culture Direction)] and others who influenced national culture got rid of the more serious artists (...) and destroyed a splendid theater movement in Cuba," said the 66-year-old author, who went 10 years without being published on the island. Gonzalez said that "it was an open dialogue (...) in which everyone entered into the discussion who wanted to, and there was a majority consensus that this (a possible return to the Five Grey Years) has to be stopped and I believe it will be stopped. It was very productive and hopeful." Poet Reina Maria Rodriguez, 54, thought the meeting "insufficient," because there are "too many things to deal with that haven't been spoken about for many years" and "it's impossible to think that one meeting can respond to so many questions, hopes and wishes." Frank Padron, a writer from a younger generation, thought the meeting "very illustrative, enlightening and opportune," but he was fairly skeptical about the future of the debate and said that "hopefully this meeting will become a channel for dealing with many of these problems." Filmmaker Rebeca Chavez said that "there were solid speeches, an approach to a very complex reality, the chance to speak openly about unhealed wounds," although, in her opinion, "we have to wait for the next meetings." (*EFE*, 3/2/07)

February 4: Dissident Julio Cesar Lopez Rodriguez, arrested a year-and-a-half ago, has been freed by Cuban prison authorities, a source within the communist island's dissident movement told the press. The Assembly to Promote Civil Society, headed by Marta Beatriz Roque, announced that Lopez Rodriguez told the group in a weekend telephone call that prison officials released him and took him to his home "without any conversation," and that he had had to sign a document "that they told (him) was a release letter." Lopez Rodriguez was arrested along with about 30 other opposition figures as they were participating in a demonstration in July 2005 before the French Embassy in Havana. He had been held since July 22, 2005, in the Canaleta prison in western Matanzas province, the dissident organization said. Lopez Rodriguez and another of the protesters, Raúl Martínez, were released without explanation, dropping the number of political prisoners in Cuba to 280, said Elizardo Sánchez, of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights. That number stood at 333 one year ago, but Sánchez is hesitant to call it a trend. (*EFE*, 4/2/07)

February 4: A strong earthquake shook parts of Cuba, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, authorities said. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. The quake had a preliminary magnitude of 6.1 and was centered in the Caribbean Sea about 75 miles northwest of Montego Bay, Jamaica, and 125 miles southwest of Bayamo, Cuba, the US Geological Survey in Colorado said. (*AP*, 4/2/07)

February 5: Approximately five thousand people participated in the consecration of the new bishop of Guantánamo-Baracoa, Wilfredo Pino, in an unusual ceremony held at the centrally located local square "Pedro A. Pérez" and attended by officials from the church and the communist party. After mass, prelates and church goers walked in

procession to the Cathedral of St. Catalina de Ricci, patron saint of Guantánamo, where the newly-appointed bishop gave his blessings from a balcony to all in attendance. According to the Catholic Church web site, the event culminated with the National Anthem and the Cuban traditional folk song Guantanamera. (*EER*, 5/2/07)

February 5: An increase by over 50 thousand persons living in mountain areas in Cuba indicates better living conditions, said Lazaro Vazquez, Executive Secretary for the National Comisión attending those areas. Cuban mountain areas are currently inhabited by 720 thousand persons, distributed over 10 provinces of the island's territory. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/2/07)

February 6: According to his daughter Rufina Velázquez, prisoner of conscience Ramón Velázquez Toranzo remains on a hunger strike in El Típico, a Las Tunas correctional facility where he was incarcerated on January 24. She added that her father was submitted to an expedited trial without any procedural guarantees, at the Municipal Court of Las Tunas. He was not allowed to file for appeal. Ramón Velázquez, along with his wife and daughter, staged a protest walk along the main national highway, from Santiago de Cuba to Ciego de Ávila, demanding the end of repression against peaceful activists and the release of political prisoners. (*Cubanet*, 6/2/07)

February 6: The Episcopal Church has named a woman as bishop in Cuba, the first such appointment by the church in the developing world, church officials said. The Reverend Nora Cot Aguilera was named suffragan bishop on February 4 during a service in the Cuban city of Matanzas, said Robert Williams, director of communications for the US-based Episcopal Church. "Her appointment is a wonderful reminder that in some nations, leadership is primarily about gifts for service and not about gender," said US Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. Cot will be consecrated in Havana on June 10, along with Cuba's other newly named suffragan bishop, Ulises Mario Aguiera Prendes. Cot, 69, told the press that she was "tremendously honored" but also faces "a great challenge" as the church, with some 10,000 members, moves toward greater national autonomy. (*AP*, 6/2/07)

February 7: Carlos Lage Davila, secretary of the the Executive Committee of the Council of State and member of the Polit Buro of the Party, toured some important social and economic sites in the eastern Cuban province of Las Tunas. Lage noted the rigor that the country is putting in the construction and renovation of social facilities as part of a program that the nation is implementing. "We have seen the quality, experience, and functionality of the work that is being done here," said Carlos Lage summing up his impressions about some projects that have already been concluded. He also offered words of praise to the new conditions provided to the elementary school Frank Pais that was reopened this past December in the northern town of Maniabon. His visit to Las Tunas also included Cuba's largest sugar producer, the Antonio Guiteras plant, which is now in operations as part of the 2007 harvest. Accompanying the top Cuban official were Ulises Rosales del Toro, minister of the sugar industry, and Jorge Cuevas Ramos, first secretary of the Party in Las Tunas. (*Periódico 26*, 9/2/07)

February 8: Two Cuban army officers were shot dead when three young conscripts detailed to a prison near the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba tried to help an inmate escape, a dissident Cuban news service reported. A dispatch by the Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental (APLO), an independent journalists' group in eastern Cuba, said the incident -- fatal attacks on Cuban soldiers are rare -- took place on December 20 at the El Manguito prison, in Songo-La Maya. The report said that when three conscripts detailed to the prison headed to the infirmary to subdue their superiors, an officer told conscript Yoelvis Delgado Arvelo to quit fooling around with dangerous weapons. Delgado answered: "I am not playing. This is the truth," and opened fire, killing Lt. Oliverio Orozco and 2nd Lt. José Antonio Tamayo, according to the report by APLO member Lisette Bravo. The incident has not been reported in Cuba's state-run media. Havana human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez said he was convinced the incident was true because some of the human rights activists he works with spoke to the family of one of the accused. The families were instructed by the government not to speak to the news media or dissident groups, he added. "It has nothing to do with the opposition or any kind of political project," Sánchez told the press. "I think it was an isolated incident which reveals, more than anything, the increasing degree of violence in Cuba," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/2/07)

February 8: Cuba's 16th International Book Fair was officially inaugurated at the Morro Cabana Fortress, with a ceremony to welcome Argentina, the guest of honor, and to pay tribute to Cuban poet, narrator and essayist Cesar Lopez, and historian Eduardo Torres Cuevas, recipients of the 2006 National Literary Award. The opening precedes ten days of book launchings, meetings with authors, book sales, poetry and literature recitals, concerts, and exhibits at the Fortress, located at the mouth of the Havana Bay. Argentina is represented by a large delegation of publishing houses, writers, artists and government officials, among them the country's Minister of Culture, Jose Nun, and the governor of Santa Fe Province, Jorge Obeid. Maria Mederos, who heads the Cuban Book Chamber, told the press that 82 foreign exhibitors are attending the fair, representing 550 publishing houses. The largest stands correspond to Argentina, Spain, Mexico, Germany and Cuba with 53 publishing houses. (*Granma*, 8/2/07)

February 8: One of Cuba's top poets took the unusual step of bringing up the subject of Communist censorship at a ceremony attended by high authorities of the regime, arguing against the exclusion of certain authors from bookstores and the state-run publishing house on grounds of ideology or place of residence. Cesar Lopez, who writes both poetry and prose and who won the National Literature Award in 1999, extended a polemic about who and what gets into print in Cuba that has been lively for weeks with his comments at the opening of the island's International Book Fair. On hand were provisional President Raul Castro, and Culture Minister Abel Prieto, among other top government and party officials. The critically acclaimed late author of "Tres Tristes Tigres", Guillermo Cabrera Infante, was among those named by Lopez in defending the idea that creative individuals "unauthorized" by the regime deserve inclusion and recognition. Lopez did not stop with Cabrera Infante. He also listed among contributors to the richness of Cuban literature Reynaldo Arenas, author of "Before Night Falls," Antonio Benitez Rojo, Severo Sarduy, Jesus Diaz, Heberto Padilla, Gaston Baquero and Manuel Moreno Fraginals, all of whom left the country and are now deceased. The poet and novelist said he wanted "to affirm that this book fair is dedicated to all Cuban creative minds" and expressed his wish "that it be inclusive and ecumenical so that it might overcome any limitation that over the years our culture might have demonstrated, borne and suffered." He urged Cubans "to emphasize what unites us, unites us beyond artificial, mechanical and taken-advantage-of borders." (*EFE, La Jornada*, 8,13/2/07)

February 8: Fidel Castro's health is improving and he is taking part in all important issues facing the government, his younger brother and acting President Raul Castro said. "He's getting better each day," the younger Castro said in brief comments to news media at the opening of an international book fair in Havana. "He's exercising much. He has a telephone at his side and uses it a lot." Raul Castro made a surprise appearance at the annual book fair --an event his 80-year-old brother often attended in past years. "He's consulted on the most important questions," Raul Castro said of Fidel. "He doesn't interfere, but he knows about everything. "Luckily, he doesn't call me much," Raul joked, saying his older brother usually called on Vice President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. The 75-year-old Raul traded in his typical olive green uniform for a gray jacket over a pair of blue pants for the event at a Spanish fortress across the bay from Havana. (*AP*, 9/2/07)

February 8: Six months after Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power, young hard-liners linked to Castro have all but disappeared from public view as economic czar Carlos Lage -- a moderate reformer -- has seen his profile grow, diplomats and analysts say. Notably absent from the spotlight since Castro handed authority last July to his younger brother, Raul, are Otto Rivero, Hassan Perez and other young radicals collectively known by diplomats and some Cubans as "the Taliban." "They have lost the kind of power that Fidel gave them to go everywhere giving orders and saying what should be done," said a Havana-based diplomat who asked not to be identified. "The ministries have returned to their logical role. Raul wants an effective organization," the diplomat said. One Cuban official who has benefited from the realignment of power is Carlos Lage Davila, 55, a pediatrician who is credited with implementing limited reforms that rescued Cuba's faltering economy in the 1990s. At the same time, the role has diminished of Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, 41, the former personal secretary of Fidel Castro, analysts say. Before Fidel Castro's illness, Perez Roque was the second-most visible leader in Cuba after the commander in chief himself. He often spoke at political rallies and appeared as Castro's heir apparent. "He was clearly more prominent than any minister of foreign affairs in any other country," said the Havana-based diplomat. "He was the maximum interpreter of Fidel Castro's ideas. Now, he is just the minister of foreign affairs." (*Chicago Tribune*, 8/2/07)

February 8: Cuban economists are busy studying ways to rev up one of the world's last communist-run economies, a step encouraged by acting President Raul Castro since he took over from his ailing brother six months ago. The debate is focused on how to make Cuba's inefficient command economy more productive and take advantage of newfound financial buoyancy in foreign exchange earnings. "There is consensus on our goals: more popular participation, the country's development and a better material and spiritual life," China expert and economics professor Evelio Vilarino told the press at a globalization conference. "Where there is no consensus is on how best to achieve that." The head of parliament's economic commission, Osvaldo Martinez, told the press the debate over economic policy probably would be taking place even if Fidel Castro were not too ill to govern. "We are not talking about the Chinese model, but a Cuban model, the best way forward given Cuba's possibilities, realities, resources and problems," Martinez said. Some Cuban economists believe that only by adopting China's model of a capitalist market under communist political control, or at a minimum by decentralizing and developing private cooperatives and markets in nonstrategic sectors, can internal production be improved. Others say any opening would provide the United States with a chance to topple the socialist system. (*Reuters*, 8/2/07)

February 8: Veteran dissident attorney Rene Gomez Manzano, who helped organize an unprecedented gathering of opponents of the Cuban government two years ago, was unexpectedly released from prison after being held for 19 months without being charged. Gomez Manzano said he had little information about what had occurred in his country since he was jailed in July 2005, but didn't think Fidel Castro's illness, or the ceding of power to his brother Raul, influenced the release. "I'm inclined to think that it doesn't have anything to do with it," the white-haired 63-year-old said. Despite his jailing, Gomez Manzano, an opponent of Castro's rule since the 1980s, said he would continue his activism and said officials imposed no conditions on his release. "They did not put any and I would not have accepted them," he said. "I am not going to change or abandon my ideas." While some dissidents have chosen to emigrate after leaving prison, Gomez Manzano said he planned to stay. He said he believed "we should make our effort here within the country." (*AP*, 8/2/07)

February 8: Cuban authorities detained the 13-year-old stepdaughter of Delmides Fidalgo Lopez, a Christian pastor and president of the evangelical group Christian Movement of Cuba, dissidents and Cuban exiles said. Leyani Dominguez Velasquez was detained for the second time in less than one week by "political police" in the town of Buenaventura in Holguin province, said the Cuban Democratic Directorate (CDD), a pro-democracy group. "The arrests are part of a repressive campaign against her stepfather" because of his activities as pastor and the Christian Movement of Cuba, CDD added in a statement to the press. Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, a blind lawyer and president of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation, said in a statement that "a State Security official and another agent who is in charge of minors in Buenaventura locked her up in the administration office" of the Buenaventura Secondary School, which she attends. "The captain threatened her and used methods of psychological terror and coercion to force her to speak," about her stepfather, the journalist said. "He told her that she would be arrested if she did not inform him about the trip her stepfather wants to make to Havana and his 'counter-revolutionary' activities". In addition officials allegedly threatened to take the girl "to a juvenile prison, and they said her step-father would be jailed in a maximum security prison." The group of pastors and other Christians are dedicated to preaching the Gospel of Christ independently from the State. (*Journal Chrétien*, 8/2/07)

February 9: Three Cubans were sentenced for making illegal television antennas and equipment with which residents could download "alienating" and "subversive" US broadcasts, said the government-run newspaper Granma. The three suspects were charged with "illegal economic activity," after police in March 2006 found at one of their homes "enough material to make 30 satellite dishes," 133 meters (yards) of coaxial cable, soldering equipment and an assortment of tubes. The daily said the materials were "bought on the street from unknown people." If found guilty, the three men could face up to three years in prison. The three suspects, Granma said, were producing home-made antennas and equipment to "pirate satellite signals from foreign channels, many of which carry programming that is culturally alienating, subversive and interfering." (*AFP*, 9/2/07)

February 11: After a seven-month hunger strike in a bid to seek Internet access for Cubans, the independent journalist still has no direct access to the World Wide Web. Maybe worse, few Cubans know Guillermo Fariñas' name. Even

fewer know about his protest, or that this time, he nearly died. Still, the 44-year-old dissident is undeterred. This strike, one of 20 he's held in the past decade, gained international attention. "The Cuban government controls the media inside the country, but it can't control the media outside," said Fariñas, from his mother's home in this provincial capital, nearly 200 miles from Havana. He is in Santa Clara recuperating, confined to a wheel chair, unable to walk because of the muscle he lost during the fast. A psychologist by training, Fariñas has repeatedly stopped eating and drinking to express his dissent with Cuba's communist government and to appeal for democracy. The peaceful protests spark solidarity within the country and worldwide, he said. Fariñas said he launched his most recent strike on January 31, 2006, after the government denied Cubans access to the one Internet café in Santa Clara. (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/2/07)

February 11: Benedict XVI appointed Bishop Dionisio Guillermo García Ibáñez, 62, of the Diocese of the Most Holy Savior of Bayamo and Manzanillo, as the archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. The Vatican press office announced that the Pope accepted the resignation for reasons of age of Archbishop Pedro Claro Meurice Estiu, who will turn 75 on February 23. The Archdiocese of Santiago de Cuba counts 242,000 Catholics in a population of 1 million inhabitants. It has 13 parishes, eight diocesan priests, 12 religious priests, three permanent deacons, seven major seminarians, 18 men religious (not priests) and 35 women religious. (*Zenit*, 11/2/07)

February 12: Information and Communications Technologies and their Contribution to a Better World is the motto of the 12th Cuba Informatics Convention and Trade Fair that began in Havana and runs through to February 16. Specialists from around the world will gather to share research and practical experiences on new technologies and trends, perspectives and the contribution of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to sustainable development. The Sixth International Congress of Computer Sciences in Health will be taking place simultaneously during the Informatics 2007 program. This parallel event will provide the framework to share Cuba's experiences in the use of ICTs for the improvement of its people's health and exchange experiences about advances in other regions. (*Periódico 26*, 12/2/07)

February 12: A senior Cuban official defended Internet restrictions as a response to US aggression and called for controlling "the wild colt of new technologies." Communications Minister Ramiro Valdes opened an international conference on communication technologies by complaining that Washington is choking Cuba's access to the Internet even as US military and intelligence services use it to undermine the communist government. Internet technologies "constitute one of the tools for global extermination," he said, referring to US policies, but they "are also necessary to continue to advance down the path of development." He defended Cuba's "rational and efficient" use of the Internet, which puts computers in schools and government computer clubs while prohibiting home connections for most citizens and blocking many sites with anti-government material. "The wild colt of new technologies can and must be controlled," he said. Valdes expressed dire suspicions of US intentions for the World Wide Web, citing post-September 11 security measures and press reports that technology giants Microsoft and Google have cooperated with US intelligence agencies. "These actions bring the destabilizing power of the empire to threatening new levels," he said. (*AP*, 12/2/07)

February 13: A senior Cuban official said that Fidel Castro is recovering "very well" but gave no indication when, or if, Cuba's ailing leader might return to public life. "He is recovering, doing very well and keeping abreast of everything," National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon said, adding to other recent statements that Castro is on the mend. "He continues to make progress. We shouldn't be impatient," Alarcon told the press. Asked if Castro might reappear on Workers Day, May 1, a major holiday in communist Cuba, Alarcon replied: "That depends on how the recovery continues and what the doctors think." Alarcon said Castro's absence was not a sign of declining health. "He could be perfectly well without the need to be giving interviews or making public appearances," he said. (*Reuters*, 13/2/07)

February 13: In an interview with the press in the days following his address at the opening of Havana's International Book Fair, Cuban poet and writer Cesar Lopez said he made comments about the barring of the works of writers due to their political positions "without consulting anyone" because, he said, he believes "in what unites us, without exclusions." Lopez, who was one of the writers being paid homage at the Fair, took the unusual step of bringing up the

subject of Communist censorship at the inauguration ceremony attended by high authorities of the regime, arguing against exclusion of certain authors from bookstores and the state-run publishing house on grounds of ideology or place of residence. Lopez said he hoped Cuban culture "will incorporate or reincorporate all those creators who indeed pertain to it". "Limits, in time or space, cannot remove from (Cuban) culture those writers - as well as painters, musicians, thinkers, et cetera - who for different reasons live in another place or are from another time, regardless of differences, including ideological ones," he said. "What's more, a culture is enriched by differences among points of view and I think that all Cubans who honestly are so want our culture to be ever more rich, complex, polemical and growing," he said. Another writer who took part in the book fair, Reynaldo Gonzalez, interpreted the presence of Raul Castro and Prieto at the fair's inauguration as "support" for those intellectuals who in recent weeks have increasingly expressed misgivings about official cultural policy. (*EFE*, 13/2/07)

February 13: Yolanda Alvarez Diaz, wife of independent journalist Alejandro Tur Valladares, was fired from her job as restroom attendant in Cienfuegos. Yolanda, who worked at an El Rápido fast food restaurant owned by CIMEX Corporation, was let go for not being "politically reliable." (*Cubanet*, 13/2/07)

February 13: Following several arrests, the opposition group Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), led by Martha Beatriz Roque, demanded that the Cuban government stop harassing the dissidents. The APSC demands from the Cuban government "an end to the harassment of dissidents" by State Security agents "and to the thefts to which they are subjected," said the organization in a press release. The ASPC denounced the temporary detention of two members of the organization's leadership, from whom a briefcase belonging to Roque was confiscated. "With these two, it's now up to six the number of arrests of Assembly leaders in the week from February 5 to February 11, with seizures of cash in Convertible *pesos* as well as other personal items," indicated the communiqué. (*EER*, 14/2/07)

February 14: A story in a Spanish-Mexican magazine has challenged Cuba's claim that it found the long-missing remains of revolutionary hero Ernesto "Ché" Guevara in Bolivia in 1997. The Letras Libres magazine reported in this month's edition that there were several inconsistencies in the identification of the remains recovered in 1997 by a team of Cuban forensic experts from an unmarked grave in Vallegrande, where Guevara's body was last seen. According to the report, the remains included a shirt and a belt, supposedly Guevara's, which could not have been his, and a container of tobacco that did not match the description of the container he was known to have had. The report said Fidel Castro pushed the search team to find remains before October 1997 -- the 30th anniversary of Guevara's death -- "in order to distract the Cuban people from their pressing hardships and to relaunch the country's revolutionary fervor." (*The Miami Herald*, 14/2/07)

February 14: Nigerian Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize for Literature 1986, and acclaimed Mexican author and journalist Elena Poniatowska, are in Cuba to participate at Havana's 16th International Book Fair. Soyinka, playwright, poet and narrator, author of the universally read plays *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Kongi's Harvest*, toured the Morro-Cabana Fortress Fairgrounds and commented on the eagerness of the Cuban readers to purchase the latest books offered. "Cuba has much of Africa and I very much enjoy its culture and the good friends," said Soyinka, who added that he feels at home on the island. Poniatowska, author of *Massacre in Mexico*, arrived in Havana to present her novel *Tinisima* about the legendary revolutionary Tina Modotti. The annual book fair takes place in Havana before moving on to 39 other cities in all of the country's provinces. The fair concludes in Santiago de Cuba on March 11. (*AIN*, 14/2/07)

February 14: The National Revolutionary Police (PNR) of Cuba arrested an indeterminate number of individuals involved in Convertible Peso (CUC, local hard currency) counterfeiting. A spokesman for the PNR informed journalists that one of the counterfeiters, a resident of San Miguel del Padrón, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. There were also raids against counterfeiters in the municipality of East Havana. (*Notimex*, 14/2/07)

February 14: Lazaro Pulido Farinas, 40, has remained incarcerated without due process for ten months in the Combinado del Este correctional facility for the alleged crime of attempting an illegal exit from the national territory. Pulido was detained in Bacunagua, south of Pinar del Río, in April 2006, after Border Guard troops opened fire on a speedboat from Cancun, Mexico. (*Cubanet*, 14/2/07)

February 15: The son of Fidel Castro said he expected his father to recover completely from surgery that forced him to relinquish power in July. "We believe that little by little comrade Fidel will see the total recovery that all Cuban people and revolutionaries the world over hope for," said Fidel Castro Diaz Balart. Speaking at the annual Havana book fair, the junior Castro repeated recent upbeat assessments of his father's health, including one last week by his uncle and acting president, Raul, that Fidel Castro is gradually but steadily recovering. "That is the same perception that I have," said the 57-year-old Soviet-trained nuclear physicist and eldest of Castro's seven children, who is known in Cuba as "Fidelito." (*Reuters*, 15/2/07).

February 16: A 10-year restoration effort has successfully concluded at the El Santo Salvador Church, the main catholic temple in the eastern city of Bayamo, the second villa founded by the Spaniards in Cuba. A major piece included in the restoration process was the church chapel, an architectural jewel linked to the island's political history, since it was the place where the national flag that led Cuba's 1868 independence fight was blessed. Also, the music of the Cuban National Anthem was for the first time interpreted in the surroundings of the church on June 11, 1868. (*AIN*, 16/2/07)

February 18: Fidel Castro's niece said he was recovering well from surgery and would likely be "very active" again in Cuba's government. "Fidel is stupendous," said Mariela Castro Espin, daughter of acting President Raul Castro, who took over in July after his older brother underwent surgery. It has not been clear if Castro would eventually return to power fully or would leave the government in the hands of colleagues. "One way or the other he is going to be present and very active," said Castro Espin, who attended the dedication of a book of collected speeches and interviews by her mother Vilma Espin, a veteran of the revolution led by Castro. Castro Espin, who heads the National Center for Sex Education, said she had not seen her uncle in recent days, but had spoken with "many people to be able to have information from different points of view" about his condition. "I know that he is very well, that he is recovering very well," she said. Castro "is recuperating as a man of 80 years should recuperate." (*AP*, 18/2/07)

February 19: After offering a large variety of books in Havana City over the past ten days, the 16th International Book Fair has expanded to the western Cuban territories of Pinar del Rio, Havana, Matanzas and the Isle of Youth, south of Havana province. Readers in 13 western localities will be able to attend book launchings, and other cultural activities included in the event's agenda. Next year's book feast will be dedicated to essayist and critic Graciella Pogolotti and author and playwright Anton Arrufat. Galicia, Spain was designated as the guest of honor taking the baton from Argentina whose literary and cultural contribution to this year's fair is massive, *Granma* daily reported. During the closing of the city of Havana segment of the annual fair, Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto said the book fair was bringing great joy to a population thirsty for knowledge and praised the high level of participation of Cuban and foreign authors and intellectuals. (*CAN*, 19/2/07)

February 20: The Municipal Court of Camaguey had no choice but to halt legal proceedings against independent journalist Armando Betancourt Reina last February 8. According to Betancourt's wife, the judges and lawyers were puzzled by contradictions in the evidence produced by the State Security Department that became apparent when the alleged witnesses who were supposed to have signed accusatory documents declared not to know anything about them. Betancourt, 44, was imprisoned in May, 2006 when he was covering a mass eviction at La Guernica neighborhood, in the province of Camaguey. (*Cubanet*, 20/2/07)

February 20: Cuban courts and the Attorney General's Office will report on their work for the last five years to the National Assembly of People's Power, by the end of June. The reports should include prisons, human resources, management, civil matters, safety, order, quality of work, fighting corruption and the work of judges and public prosecutors. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/2/07)

February 21: Cuba's renowned health service is in a frail condition. It has been a considerable source of pride for the communist authorities since the revolution of 1959, achieving infant mortality and life expectancy rates comparable to America's. But it is now badly short of medicines, instruments and equipment, while many hospitals languish in disrepair. Doctors can earn more as taxi drivers, while anecdotal evidence suggests growing numbers of medics are

trying to flee the country. According to the American Public Health Association, the blockade effectively prevents Cuba from purchasing nearly 50 per cent of new drugs, including those for cancer, diabetes, heart disease and asthma. Critics of Fidel Castro, who was forced by ill health to retire from public life six months ago and hand over power to his brother Raul, argue that his refusal to reform the state-controlled economy and its convoluted rules has helped impoverish the country. The medical profession is facing further instability thanks to Castro's extraordinary initiative to export 30,000 doctors and dentists to 68 countries around the world, earning vital revenue for them and the nation. Some medics in Havana say the absence of so many colleagues has led to increases in waiting times at hospitals and clinics; they also lament the poorer quality of new trainees. The government insists that with another 70,000 doctors at home the expatriates can be spared. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 21/2/07)

February 21: Delegates and guests to the 5th Plenary of the Communist Youth League National Committee ratified the commitment of the Cuban youth to fulfill their duties with the defense of the country and the socialist Revolution. The political organization of 600,000 young people from 15 to 30 years-old discussed the role of the new generations in the defense of the country. Some of the agreements signed in the meeting were aimed at promoting the study of Law 75 for the National Defense, as well as fostering among young people mass sports and popular recreational shooting. The Plenary also analyzed the role of the Jose Marti Pioneer Organization in patriotic education, and the importance of the increasing presence of girls in the Volunteer Military Service. (*Prensa Latina, El Nuevo Herald*, 21/2/07)

February 21: Chicago Tribune foreign correspondent Gary Marx, who has been based in Havana since 2002, was told by Cuban officials his press credential will not be renewed and he can no longer report from there. "They said I've been here long enough and they felt my work was negative," Marx said. "They did not cite any examples." The decision on Marx comes at a critical time for Cuba, with longtime leader Fidel Castro's age and health setting the stage for possible transition. Marx was among a handful of permanent correspondents for US-based news organizations in Havana. CNN and the Associated Press also have Cuba bureaus. A reporter for the South Florida Sun-Sentinel will continue to staff the Tribune Co. bureau, and the Cuban government told Marx it would welcome an application from a new Chicago Tribune correspondent. That might take time to process, and new rules for reporters entering Cuba initially require the renewal of papers every 30 days. "We're very disappointed and concerned by the news that the Cuban government has decided to not renew our correspondent's credentials and has asked him and his family to leave the island," said George de Lama, Chicago Tribune managing editor for news. (*Chicago Tribune*, 22/2/07)

February 22: Hydrogel or polymeric membranes that can be used on patients with dangerous burns are in a phase of development at a Cuban laboratory, it was reported in Havana. Yanet Rodriguez, from the Irradiation Techniques Lab at the National Agricultural Health Center, said that the first clinical tests will be done with animals, and later in humans. A project of technical assistance with the International Atomic Energy Organization will allow financing part of those technological modernizations, Granma daily reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/2/07)

February 22: Victor Rolando Arroyo, an independent journalist incarcerated in March - April, 2003, was beaten by a prison guard at the correctional facility where he is serving his sentence. The incident occurred as Arroyo was stepping out of the mess hall carrying his lunch with the intention of eating in his cubicle. A guard, not satisfied with a reply from Arroyo, struck him on the head, knocking the prisoner down to the floor, where he kept hitting him. Upon later review of the incident, a group of guards blamed Arroyo for the beating. (*Cubanet*, 22/2/07)

February 22: Pedro Meurice Estiu, a charismatic and controversial figure who is stepping down after almost 37 years as Catholic archbishop of Santiago de Cuba said he is leaving the post with the desire for reconciliation among all Cubans to be achieved. Meurice, one of the Catholic prelates most critical of the island's communist government, told the press that during his 52 years as a priest he fulfilled his responsibility to "fight for the faith, where the people are (...) suffering for it and seeking it." "As a Christian and a Cuban, I have hope that all this suffering will not be in vain and that some day all Cubans can unite as a people, believers and non-believers, to work for a better Cuba," he said. Meurice will hand over responsibility for the guidance of the Catholic faithful in Cuba's second-largest city to Dionisio Guillermo Garcia Ibañez. Meurice, who turned 75, said he was giving up his post because of age and health issues. "I have seen many very unpleasant and harsh things, all the ideological confrontation, the closing of religious schools, the

enormous exodus of Cubans, the Cuban (political) prisoners and also the great achievements of this revolution, for which it's a shame that such a high price is being paid," he said, reviewing his career. (*EFE*, 22/2/07)

February 22: Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power has agreed to discuss making sex-reassignment surgery free of cost to all "transsexuales" on the island who request it, the newsletter *Diversidad* (Diversity) reported. "The measure would complement the present Identity Law that already acknowledges the right of citizens to change name and sexual identity. This places Cuba at the vanguard of the legislations that acknowledge the rights of transvestites, transsexuals and transgender in Latin America," the newsletter said. The publication reported that Cuba's parliament will also discuss legislative recognition of same-sex unions. The entire public health care system in Cuba is free of charge. Mariela Castro Espín, director of the National Center of Sexual Education (CENESEX), has led the move to make sex-reassignment available to Cubans free to all who seek it. Mariela Castro, a leader in her own right, is the daughter of renowned revolutionary leader Vilma Espín and acting Cuban President Raúl Castro. (*Workers World*, 22/2/07)

February 23: Cuban authorities -- who had ordered Chicago Tribune foreign correspondent Gary Marx to pack up and leave the island -- told the correspondent for the big Mexico City daily *El Universal* that he is being expelled, too. *El Universal* reported that its correspondent César González-Calero has been notified his reporting credentials will not be renewed, for essentially the same reason Marx must leave -- "focusing reporting in a way that does not comport with the Cuban government." The expulsion of the *El Universal* reporter was condemned by the newspaper, Mexican legislators, and press-freedom groups. Roberto Rock, the newspaper's vice president and general editorial director, called it "an attack on a free press" and an attempt to intimidate reporters. The British Broadcasting Corp. was "talking to the authorities in Havana about the status of its Cuba correspondent after his accreditation was withdrawn," spokeswoman Karen Rosine said in a statement from London. Without naming correspondent Stephen Gibbs, Rosine said he "remains in Cuba, pending the outcome of these discussions." Jose Luis Ponce, director of Cuba's International Press Center, said that the government would have no immediate comment on the correspondents' status. (*St. Petersburg Times*, AP, 23/2/07)

February 23: International Press Center (CPI) officials said that the decision not to renew three foreign correspondents' credentials to work in Cuba is "final." The CPI (a Foreign Affairs Ministry body in charge of foreign press relations in the island) "is not concerned" about protests from several international press freedom organizations against the withdrawal of the press credentials of foreign correspondents Stephen Gibbs, from the BBC; Gary Marx, from the Chicago Tribune, and César González-Calero, from *El Universal*, of Mexico. (*EER*, 24/2/07)

February 23: Acting Cuban President Raul Castro promised to lay the groundwork for a new generation of revolutionary leaders, adding that he was referring to true leaders, not factory-made ones. Addressing the closing ceremony of a gathering of communist youth, Castro said that "our duty, that of our generation, is to open the way for new generations, new leaders." "But I am referring to leaders, not assembly line" products, he said. The event was not open to international media, but his comments were made public on state television. Dressed in his traditional olive fatigues, the 75-year-old Raul called being a youth leader a "sacrifice," but said that those who work hard could be called upon to work for the island's Communist Party. (*AP*, 23/2/07)

February 25: Leading Cuban dissidents who are denied access to the Internet at home now have their messages posted on Web sites, thanks to the work of exiled friends and family abroad. Oswaldo Paya, who five years ago used his bicycle to begin doggedly collecting signatures for a referendum on civil liberties, has no access to e-mail. But his Web site was launched last January by relatives in Madrid. The site (www.oswaldopaya.org) includes statements from Paya and news about the Varela Project, a petition rejected by the government despite its 25,000 signatures. The wives and mothers of jailed Cuban dissidents, known as the "Ladies in White" because they dress in white to march in silence demanding the men's release, have a Web site that was built for them by Cuban exiles in Spain (www.damasdeblanco.com). "I've never seen it. I don't have access to Internet," said Miriam Leiva, a founder of the women's group whose husband was released in 2004, after 20 months behind bars for criticizing Castro's government. A leading dissident in Cuba with close ties to the exile community in South Florida, Martha Beatriz Roque, has since

2004 had a Web site (www.asambleasociedadcivilcuba.info) run from Miami. Even if Paya, Leiva or Roque could freely surf the Web, they still would not see their sites because they are blocked in Cuba, as are other sites of staunchly anti-Castro exiles. (*Reuters*, 25/2/07)

February 26: Political dissident Elizardo Sánchez claimed that Fidel Castro "keeps a watchful eye on the regime's policy" and that his brother Raúl "has not changed an iota" of it. "It is time to give the people an opportunity now that the regime's 50th anniversary is drawing nearer," the leader of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) told French newspaper "Libération." (*EFE*, 26/2/07)

February 26: Every Sunday after mass in Havana's western suburb of Miramar, a group of women march up and down the pavement in front of the church to raise the plight of the political prisoners jailed by the regime for voicing dissent. Known as the Ladies in White, the wives and mothers of some of the 75 people imprisoned in a fierce purge of dissidents in March 2003 walk silently carrying stems of gladioli to demand their release. Their action, the only visible form of regular protest on an island where few dare defy the authority of Fidel Castro's regime, has been made possible by the Catholic Church, which is working quietly to prepare Cubans for life after their leader has gone. "Although the Catholic Church hasn't publicly supported our cause, they did condemn the crackdown of March 2003," said Miriam Leyva, one of the women who have marched since her husband, an economist, was jailed for criticizing the regime's economic strategy three years ago. "Most importantly for us, despite the sensitivity of the issue, the Church has opened their door to us and given us a meeting place," she said. "There are a number of open-minded priests and bishops who provide great support to those who look for it. They at least allow us to be free." (*Calgary Herald*, 26/2/07)

February 27: Fidel Castro called in to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's radio talk show to say he felt well and ask for calm, saying that Cuba was running smoothly without him at the helm. "I feel good and I'm happy," Castro said in a phone call to Chavez's weekday radio program, "Hello, President." "I can't promise that I'll go over there soon, but, yes, I'm gaining ground. I feel more energetic, stronger," he said in a soft but steady voice during the live broadcast. "But I ask for patience, calm (...) The country is marching along which is what is important." "And I ask for tranquility also for me so that I can fulfill my new tasks." The two leaders, who are close friends and allies, spoke for almost 30 minutes. (*AP*, 28/2/07)

February 27: Five dissidents arrested in 2005 in demonstrations against Cuba's Communist government were sentenced to jail terms of up to two years, human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez said. Rene Montes de Oca and Roberto de Jesus Guerra were picked up by police after a "symbolic" protest on the fringes on Havana's Revolution Square on July 13, 2005, he said. Three other dissidents arrested the same day in another peaceful demonstration near the port of Havana were also convicted of public disorder. All got two-year prison terms, except Guerra, who was sentenced to one year and 10 months. They should be freed within months because they receive credit for time served, Sanchez said. "They should not have spent a day in jail because they committed no crime," said Sanchez, who heads the illegal but tolerated Cuban Commission for Human Rights. "We think the government is moving to close pending cases," he said. Sanchez also said there is a tendency towards a decrease in the number of political prisoners. There are 270 political prisoners now in Cuba, six less than at the beginning of 2007. Since Raul Castro assumed power temporarily in Cuba, "at least 31 persons have been released in these seven months", Sánchez said. (*Reuters*, *AFP*, 27/2/07)

February 27: Dissident Jorge Olivera, who was temporarily released from prison due to his health condition, was requested to attend to the Municipal Tribunal in Old Havana. Olivera, who was sentenced in April 2003 during the crackdown on dissidents, told the press that this is the third time, since his release in 2004, that Cuban authorities have threatened him with revoking his license if he travels outside the limits of the City of Havana, attends public meetings, or doesn't accept a job under state supervision. Olivera and his family have requested permission from Cuban migration authorities to leave the country, but it hasn't been granted. (*Cubanet*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Cuban dissidents agreed that the on-air phone conversation between Fidel Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gave evidence of an improvement in the health of the communist island's 80-year-old leader

but did not dispel doubts about whether he would return to power. For the internal opposition in Cuba, neither the chat nor the messages sent by Castro contributed to clarifying whether he will - at some point - return to fully exercising the power he delegated last year to younger brother Raul. Vladimiro Roca, of the Todos Unidos group, said that the release of information about the health of the Cuban leader via the Venezuelan president "is becoming a circus." "This doesn't mean anything. It doesn't improve the country's situation. It's a way of diverting attention from the country's basic problems," he said. Manuel Cuesta Morua, of the social-democratic group Arco Progresista, said that Castro "has a clear intention to return to power like he (exercised) before the transfer" to Raul. "It would be more of a symbolic return than a real one because before his illness succession was being talked about, and so I don't think that it will be a complete return to power," he said. In Cuesta Morua's judgment, "changes in Cuba depend on the social (circumstances) of the citizens and not on the life or death of one person, no matter how important he might be for the country." Miriam Leiva, a member of the Ladies in White group made up of relatives of the 75 dissidents imprisoned in 2003, said that "the president was heard but not seen, and really the state of his health is not known." She also recalled that "at this time, the problems continue to be serious. The Spring 2003 prisoners are suffering enormously; in March they will complete four years in jail and each day they are (getting) sicker and are not released." Her husband, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of the opposition figures in the Group of 75 who was released from prison for health problems, said that it surprised and also disgusted him that Cubans know about the "health of Fidel Castro through a foreign president." (*EFE*, 1/3/07)

Economy

February 4: Cuba said it will invest 300-plus million dollars in its basic industry, including nickel, to improve industry output and energy-saving efficiency. Holguin -located over 456 miles east of Havana- closed 2006 with a record production as nickel exports excelled as Cuba's largest hard currency income source. The announcement was made at a meeting of the Provincial Assembly of the People's Power with Basic Industry Minister Yadira Garcia. (*EFE*, 4/2/07)

February 4: With Fidel Castro ailing and absent from the public eye, one of the biggest challenges for his brother and political heir, Raúl, will be dealing with the bleak living standards endured by many Cubans. A dysfunctional economy means major problems with productivity and the delivery of goods and services, forcing many Cubans to break some law in order scrape out a living. Many steal from state enterprises and then sell items -- from air conditioners to microwaves to lobster tails and slabs of horsemeat -- "por la izquierda," or "from the left," a common phrase used to refer the black market. Communist authorities like to point out that all Cubans are guaranteed employment and education, health care, housing and food. Still, many workers who rely on their \$12 to \$15 a month in earnings from state-run businesses said salaries alone are never enough to make ends meet. "The perception is very clear among economists here that the Cuban economy doesn't function," said Pedro Monreal, a professor at the Center for Research on the International Economy. "In the end, it is difficult to imagine popular support for whatever follows Fidel if that (...) government does not deliver in terms of the well-being of the people." Monreal said he was encouraged by the government's willingness to at least discuss economic reforms that years ago were considered taboo, including decentralizing control in businesses, expanding the power of managers at privately owned agriculture cooperatives and increasing incentives to workers. "What are people waiting for? Cheaper food," he said. "If the Cuban government does not provide that, nothing of what it says will be believed. If you cannot produce food at reasonable prices, you will have no credibility." (*Sun Sentinel*, 4/2/07)

February 5: The deputy minister of the Sugar Industry, José Carlos Santos, told journalists that qualitative changes are occurring in sugarcane production with improved quality in the sowing process, higher yields per hectare and an increase in sugarcane stalk population in the fields. The official said that the crop-sowing target for 2006 was completed at 95 %, with 123,600 hectares sowed country-wide and 9 provinces reaching their individual goals. (*Notimex*, 5/2/07)

February 6: Vietnam Oil and Gas Corp., or PetroVietnam, will expand its overseas oil exploration venture with two contracts this year, one in Cuba and the other in Nigeria, a top PetroVietnam official said. While negotiations on the Nigeria oil exploration contract are still preliminary, PetroVietnam is likely to conclude talks with Cuba by the second quarter, the official said. "We have been there (Cuba) many times, and the government-to-government relationship between Vietnam and Cuba is very good," Le Van Truong, E&P Director for PetroVietnam Investment & Development, said on the sidelines of an exploration and production conference in Singapore. "We have been offered one project (block), so we have to take this opportunity to get five offshore blocks (in Cuba). We hope to get a contract in the second quarter of this year," Truong said. The anticipated exploration contract comes on the heels of a cooperation agreement signed last October with Cubapetroleo, Cuba's state-owned oil company, under which Vietnam consented to Havana's oil terms. (*Dow Jones*, 6/2/07)

February 6: The 7th meeting of Turkey-Cuba Joint Economic Commission (JEC) will be held in Havana between February 7th and 8th, stated Turkish Foreign Trade Undersecretariat. Turkish Justice Minister Cemil Cicek and Cuban Foreign Investment & Economic Cooperation Minister Marta Lomas will co-chair the meetings. Cicek will hold meetings with Lomas as well as Cuban Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez, Minister of Foreign Economic Relations Ricardo Cabrisas and Health Minister Ramon Balaguer Cabrera. During the meetings, officials will discuss commercial and economic relations between Turkey and Cuba as well as measures to be taken to further develop bilateral relations. They will also discuss the cooperation facilities on banking, health, maritime transportation, industry, culture, tourism and contracting. Turkey considers Cuba as the gate to Central America and Caribbean. (*Anadolu Agency*, 6/2/07)

February 7: The growth observed in the Cuban economy in the last three years, "which is even higher than the average for Latin America," must be reinforced by solving the dual currency issue, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recommended. In Cuba, "there is an official exchange rate of one Cuban peso to the dollar and now they have introduced the Cuban Convertible Peso, which is even stronger than the dollar, more or less on a par with the Euro, and that generates much fiscal accounting distortion," said Jorge Mattar, CEPAL director for Mexico and the Caribbean. (*AFP*, 7/2/07)

February 8: Cuba's vice President Carlos Lage visited one of the country's largest sugar cane producing areas, in which he verified the reorganization of the sugarcane harvest after delays caused by rains. Lage talked to sugar workers in the eastern province of Las Tunas, 434 miles east of Havana City, who work hard to overcome the effects of frequent rains which hinder the harvest. Granma daily reported that 36 sugar mills across the country have started milling, eight less than those scheduled. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/2/07)

February 9: Cuban agricultural authorities have expressed concern with regards to the outlook for sugar production in 2007. According to a report in the Cuban media, the humidity of the soil has caused problems with the sugar crop in the current year. In addition, delays in the import of inputs for sugar fields have had an impact on the outlook for sugar production. Authorities had expected the current crop to be above last year's 1.3 million tons of sugar production. However, this target may not be reached now. Furthermore, 139,000 hectares of lands for agriculture cannot be used as the Marabu, an African tree brought in the 14th century, has invaded these areas. The problem caused by the expansion of this type of tree is that it is extremely difficult to eradicate and farmers do not have the technology to do so effectively. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 9/2/07)

February 9: Cuba's economy should follow two strong years of economic growth with an expansion of at least 10 percent, Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said. Rodriguez again defended Cuba's claims of 12.5 percent growth in gross domestic product for 2006, despite giving figures that indicated a slight slip in tourism -- the Cuban economy's chief income earner. Speaking at a congress of leftist economists, Rodriguez said Cuba had transformed its economy since the collapse of the Soviet Union, once its chief supporter and trade partner. An economy whose exports were 90 percent goods and only 10 percent services in 1989 now leans toward services, he said. Services now account for 76 percent of Cuba's overall economy while primary goods, such as crops, amount to only 4 percent. Rodriguez said growth in Cuba's GDP "should reach more than 10 percent this 2007" despite high prices for imported food and fuel.

Cuba has been aided by steadily rising domestic oil production as well as by significant fuel aid from Venezuela. (AP, 10/2/07)

February 10: A chain of debts within the government supply system has caused a cigarette shortage in Cuba's second-largest city, driving up the black market price of smokes, Cuban news media reported. The shortage led "a few unscrupulous people" in the eastern city of Santiago to sell Popular-brand cigarettes for 20 pesos (95 US cents; 73 euro cents) a pack, nearly triple the normal price of 7 pesos (33 US cents; 25 euro cents), according to the Communist Party youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. The reports, first mentioned on February 9 by the government's *Juventud Rebelde*, follow official exhortations for Cuba's state-run press to do more reporting on problems faced by Cuban citizens. According to the newspaper, the government retail company in Santiago owes about 9 million pesos (US\$430,000; euro330,000) to the government's regional cigarette wholesaler, which in turn owes 2 million pesos (US\$95,000; euro73,000) to the government cigarette manufacturer. The manufacturer stopped shipping cigarettes to the wholesaler after the debt extended past 30 days. *Juventud Rebelde* said that officials were working to solve the payment problems and had begun to ease the shortage by bringing in cigarettes from other areas. (AP, 11/2/07)

February 11: The London-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) ranks Cuba among the world's worst business environments -- No. 80 of 82 nations surveyed, with only Iran and Angola rated lower for the past five years. And with little policy change expected, the Caribbean nation likely will stay among the worst for business over the next five years, the EIU predicted in a recent survey. Even managers of Chinese companies favored these days by Havana cite headaches. "Our company does business with 46 countries, and Cuba is the only one where we can't have a commercial representative to find clients and service them," said a Chinese executive who declined to be named for fear of Cuban reprisals. (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/2/07)

February 13: Cigar aficionados should not expect to see ailing Fidel Castro strut out to greet them at the annual Habanos festival, but they will be able to bid for humidors signed by him. The maker of Cuba's famous hand-rolled cigars said that five elaborate humidors to be signed by Castro will be auctioned for charity at the closing gala dinner on March 2. "There'll be five humidors signed by the Comandante," said Enrique Babot, marketing director for Habanos S.A., a joint venture between Cuba's communist state and Spanish-French tobacco group Altadis. Some 1,300 aficionados and retailers are expected for the Habanos festival starting on February 26. For five days they will puff away at the world's finest cigars, tour factories to see the cigars being rolled by hand and visit tobacco plantations outside Havana. The Cuban cigar industry will unveil an entirely aged version of the Montecristo No. 4, perhaps the top-selling cigar ever, Babot said. The Reserva de Montecristo will have binder and filler leaves, not just the wrapper, that have been fermented and aged for three years, as Cuba moves to add value to its sales. Habanos' sales rose 10 percent last year to \$370 million, despite the fact that Cuban cigars are barred from the United States, the world's largest market for cigars. (*Reuters*, 13/2/07)

February 15: An information technology fair is underway in this nation in which surfing the web, for the vast majority of citizens, is a pipe dream. The International IT Convention and Expo lacks the sector's heavy hitters such as IBM and Microsoft, which like other US information technology and software companies observe their nation's decades-old trade embargo against the Communist regime. In any case, their market in Cuba would be miniscule. Cuba, whose 48-year-old one-party government tightly controls inhabitants' access to information, has the lowest rate of Internet use in the hemisphere, with 0.9 percent of the population of 11 million able to connect, according to figures from a UN agency. Even most of those do not have unfettered access to cyberspace, with government-issued licenses and permits required for greater degrees of freedom to navigate. The Netherlands-based NEC Philips Unified Solutions has a booth, but an executive of the company told the press it certainly didn't come to Cuba thinking about making money. "One goes to another type of fair to do business. Cuba has its idiosyncrasies, but business is not one of them," he said. At the heart of the expo is the Chinese-Cuban consortium Gran Kayman Teleco S.A. (GKT). That firm has the contract to supply hardware and software for social development projects carried out under the auspices of the so-called "Battle of Ideas." Yang Qi, sales manager for the Caribbean for ZTE, said his company's regional focus is on cellular telephones, but with only some 100,000 of the devices in use in Cuba, the market is not a big attraction. (*EFE*, 15/2/07)

February 15: A new undersea fiber-optic cable from Cuba to Venezuela should be finished within two years, a Venezuelan communications official said, dramatically expanding Cuba's internet and telephone capacity. Julio Duran, president of state-run Telecom Venezuela, told the press that the deal signed in late January calls for a line with a capacity of 160 gigabytes per second. That's well over 1,000 times the capacity of Cuba's current satellite-based internet link, which was listed as 65 megabytes per second on upload and 124 megabytes a second on download by Cuban Communications Minister Ramiro Valdes. It will break through what Cuban officials describe as choking restrictions imposed by the US commercial embargo on Cuba, which they blame for blocking possible connections with existing privately owned fiber-optic lines in the region. (*AP*, 15/2/07)

February 17: Cuba built an Internet search engine that allows users to trawl through speeches by Cuban leader Fidel Castro and other government sites, but does not browse Web pages outside the island. The search engine (www.infosoc.cu/buscador) unveiled at a conference this week underscored restrictions on Internet access in communist-run Cuba, which the government blames on US trade sanctions. Cuba's first search engine can search any subject, but only on Cuban servers, or the Cuban intranet, including 150,000 government sites and the state-run media. It has a special function key on the homepage to browse through hundreds of Castro's speeches since day one of his revolution in 1959. "The aim is to search Cuban Web sites without having to rely on foreign engines," said its creator, Leandro Silva. Cubans cannot buy computers and Internet access is limited to state employees, academics and foreigners. Cubans line up for hours to send e-mails on post office terminals that cannot surf the World Wide Web. Passwords are sold on the black market allowing shared Internet use for limited hours, usually at night. (*Reuters*, 17/2/07)

February 18: Cuba's communist government has said that they are now considering adopting open source software to remove their reliance on the software giant Microsoft. The government said that they are trying to wean state agencies from Microsoft's proprietary Windows to the open-source Linux operating system. Expert Hector Rodriguez said about this decision: "It's basically a problem of technological sovereignty, a problem of ideology." Cuban officials added that this step is also necessary for their national security as they are afraid of US government's influence over Microsoft and other American companies. Rodriguez added: "Two years ago, the Cuban free-software community did not number more than 600 people ... In the last two years, that number has gone well beyond 3,000 users of free software and it's a figure that is growing exponentially." (*TheckWhack*, 18/2/07)

February 18: Cuban police have broken up several counterfeiting networks in Havana specializing in printing both convertible and national currency, the press reported. The weekly *Tribuna de La Havana* reported that the police's DTI technical investigations unit "is confronting this class of crime in a systematic way with the intelligence of its officers and the collaboration of the citizens." One DTI official, identified only as "Aramis," said that "therefore one can speak of results and complete cases (that have been) cleared up." Despite their tricks, we've broken up several of their networks," he told the weekly in reference to the counterfeiters. Aramis also told the paper about the case of a man in the capital's Diezmero distribution network in the municipality of San Miguel del Padron who was found guilty of printing bills of different denominations and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. (*EFE*, 18/2/07)

February 19: Cuban electrical authorities decried the "cannibalizing" of 36 kilometers (22 miles) of wire and more than 2,000 structures used to secure high tension towers in 2006, the official daily *Granma* reported. The official organ of the Communist Party said that the theft of the equipment had caused "noteworthy damage to the national economy," adding that "unscrupulous persons ... (are risking their lives) without thinking for a moment about the lethal consequences" that their actions could have. Data compiled by the state-owned utility Union Electrica indicate that the 2,193 tower-supports were stolen in 2004, 1,076 in 2005 and 2,094 in 2006. Among the measures adopted to prevent this type of plundering, Union Electrica has opted to weld the supports onto the towers up to a height of six meters (37 feet), something that the daily said cost an additional \$250,000. *Granma* said that in August 2006 a three-hour blackout affected the western portion of Cuba after two towers weakened by thefts of various supports fell over, damaging the transmission cable and other equipment. (*EFE*, 19/2/07)

February 19: Two of Cuba's largest sugar mills have been idle this season as unusually hot and humid weather have combined with repair problems to jeopardize plans to revitalize the sector after years of decline, and produce around 1.6 million tonnes of raw sugar. The country's largest mill, eastern Las Tunas province's Guiteras, with a capacity of more than 100,000 tonnes, has been unable to start up because rainfall has made it impossible to operate cutting machines, provincial radio reported. In neighboring Holguin province, the important Urbano Noris mill remained idle due to late arrival of parts and machinery needed to make repairs, the local Communist party weekly said. Some worry the El Niño phenomenon could produce unseasonable humidity and rainfall during the entire December-to-April dry season when sugar is harvested, lowering yields and slowing mechanized harvesting. The national weather service reported temperatures in January were the highest in 15 years. "Up to today the province's four open mills have processed 54 percent of the cane planned and produced 43 percent of the raw sugar, or 17,600 tonnes less than the plan," eastern Santiago de Cuba's Sierra Maestra weekly reported this month. Some mills probably will have to operate in May, if not into June, meaning higher costs. The sugar Ministry last reported that 39 of 49 mills scheduled to be open by March were grinding. Cuba hoped this season to launch a new era for sugar, once its most important industry, after a 15-year decline from 8 million raw tonnes produced in 1990 to 1.2 million tonnes in 2005. (*Reuters*, 19/2/07)

February 20: Cuban officials are tackling problems such as child care, poor lighting and insufficient transportation for workers so they can keep some government offices open later, the Communist labor newspaper reported. The goal is to have offices open at times when people can use them before or after their own eight-hour workdays, taking advantage of an expanding economy. *Trabajadores*, published by Cuba's Communist Party labor federation, reported that some notaries and civil registries in Havana are already working until 8 p.m. and officials hope to expand hours at least some days of the week at child care centers, primary schools, hair dressers and workshops. The effort is linked to a government campaign for greater discipline among workers, with a crackdown on absenteeism, overlong lunch breaks, sloppy work and theft. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/2/07)

February 20: The official daily *Granma* praised three Caribbean nations for signaling the possibility of their support of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a Venezuelan initiative opposed to the Free Trade Area promoted by the United States in Latin America. "The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) shines out its beacon of integration and progress towards the Caribbean," said the newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee. Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and San Vicente and the Grenadines signed a memorandum of understanding during a visit by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, to explore their support for ALBA in the future. (*AP*, 20/2/07)

February 21: Hugo Chávez' Government is encouraging tourism travels to Cuba by offering four plans to visit towns such as Havana, Varadero, Trinidad, Santiago, Camagüey, Guardalavaca and Holguín. Rafael Rivolta Rincón, Vice-Minister of Quality and Tourism Services, Ministry of Tourism, said "the goal this year is to benefit 100,000 Venezuela from all social strata by offering them financing at lower interest rates through (state-owned bank) Banco Industrial de Venezuela." (*El Universal*, 22/2/07)

February 23: Official daily *Juventud Rebelde* said that "economic chaos and a slacking off in morals and discipline" were the reasons Mincin enterprises ran substantial losses last year. The publication also said that in 33,843 inspections carried out during this fiscal year, almost 125,000 shortcomings were detected among more than 90 percent of the units investigated. (*EFE, Juventud Rebelde*, 23/2/07)

February 22: Sherritt International Corp. rode strong commodity prices, especially for nickel, to its best-ever annual results in 2006. Sherritt said its full-year profit almost doubled to \$245.6-million, \$1.42 per share, from \$124.3-million or 70 cents per share in 2005, as revenue increased to \$1.11-billion from \$1.02-billion. Power production at Sherritt's Cuban utilities faded by 11 per cent amid scheduled maintenance. An expansion project is set for completion by midyear, increasing the company's capacity in Cuba to 376 megawatts. (*Canadian Press, Globe & Mail*, 23/2/07)

February 22: The Cuban Chamber of Commerce has convened the second Business Forum of the Non Aligned Movement from May 7 through 10 in Havana. The several sessions and four panels is to promote bilateral contacts on

new ways to cooperate in trade, investments and finances, plus viable development alternatives for the people. The meeting also convenes chambers of commerce, economic associations from the 118-member NAM plus its 15 observers and 33 guests. Its sweeping agenda covers, among other topics, world trade today, the World Trade Organization and its Round of Doha and means to enhance South-South exchange and integration. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/2/07)

February 23: Sherritt International Corp. said it expects growth to come this year through expansion of its power and metals mining projects in Cuba as well as coal projects in Canada, after doubling its full year earnings. The diversified energy company said metals expansion at its Moa nickel mine in Cuba will lead to a 12 per cent increase in the project's mixed sulphide capacity in 2008, with further expansions planned. Power production capacity increased to 311 megawatts in 2006 and will reach 376 MW in 2007 – a 66 per cent increase in capacity from the 226 MW at the beginning of 2006. (*Canadian Press*, 23/2/07)

February 25: Cuba has opened an experimental wind farm, hoping alternative energy sources can one day ease occasional power shortages while reducing the island's dependence on oil, state news media reported. The \$3.4 million park, featuring six 180-foot windmills, was established on Isla de la Juventud, an island south of Havana, according to the Communist Party youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. Exactly when the park was inaugurated was unclear, but officials estimate that during its first year of operation it could produce 1,800 megawatts of electricity. That would save Cuba about \$136,000 in oil costs on the international market, the newspaper said. The park was built using French technology, and its windmills are designed to be disassembled quickly in case of hurricanes or tropical storms. Officials hope to finish work on another wind park with six windmills, located in the eastern province of Holguin, by the end of the year. (*AP*, 25/2/07)

February 25: With the presence of more than 1,500 international participants, the 9th Habano Festival started, including a varied program of meetings, exhibits, dinners, and expert meetings. With the presentation of brands Cohiba Maduro and Reserva de Montecristo, the 9th Habano Festival constitutes the most important meeting of its kind in the world. As in previous fairs, the closing dinner and activity in EXPOCUBA will include an auction of humidor and the presentation of the 2006 Habano awards. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/2/07)

February 26: Cuba has begun mobilizing cane cutters and will extend the sugar harvest from April into May as rain, hot weather and organizational problems jeopardize plans to produce around 1.6 million tonnes of raw sugar. Two months into the harvest, mills are operating well below expectations of 80 percent of potential and yields are well below the 11 percent or more that had been planned, national and provincial reports indicated. "We have some delays in plans due to rainfall. Also, some resources arrived late," Sugar Vice Minister Juan Godefroy said in an interview on national radio. The provinces of Villa Clara, Camaguey, Las Tunas, Holguin and Granma, due to produce close to half of this year's output, were particularly affected, Godefroy said. Temperatures have dropped and drier weather set in over the last week. But some worry that the El Niño phenomenon could produce unseasonable humidity and rainfall during the entire December-to-April dry season when sugar is harvested, lowering yields and slowing mechanized harvesting. Central Camaguey province reported at the weekend 4,700 macheteros would be mobilized in hopes of increasing the flow of raw material to mills. (*Reuters*, 26/2/07)

February 26: The Cuban Urban Gardening program has provided more than 45,000 jobs as the initiative has expanded to all 14 provinces with an increasing offer of fruits and vegetables. Sources with the Cuban Agriculture Ministry revealed that more than 35,000 hectares of cultivable lands have been dedicated to urban gardening, and the figure could increase with other idle plots of land. (*CAN*, 26/2/07)

February 26: An increase in the sales of counterfeits of high demand products such as coffee, beer, cigarettes and perfumery items in Cuban state-controlled retail stores was deemed "disturbing" by the official newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. "The sale of fake products has been claiming a space in the commercial networks of the island," says an article based on a three-month investigation conducted by a team of *Juventud Rebelde* journalists at a number of stores as well as a survey carried out among over one hundred consumers in the whole country. The survey showed that the

most counterfeited items include alcoholic beverages such as rum and beer, cigarettes and cigars, the Cubita brand of coffee powder, some brands of ice cream, natural water and perfume, as well as soap and deodorants from the Suchel brand. (EFE, 26/2/07)

February 26: Cuba sold US\$370 million worth of cigars in 2006, which Habanos said was an 8 percent increase over the previous year. Javier Terres, Habanos' vice president for development, said that for strategic reasons the company couldn't divulge how many total cigars it sold last year, though in 2005 it said it sold 160 million. Terres said the top markets for Cuban cigars are Spain, France and Germany, as well as Cuba. Because of Washington's four-decades-old trade embargo against the communist island, the cigars are not legally sold in the United States. Like fine wine, the taste of top tobacco depends much on the soil and climate in which it is grown. Sun-drenched plantations outside Havana and in the neighboring western province of Pinar Del Rio have made Cuban cigars famous for centuries, and most cigars produced here are hand-rolled and intended for the premium market. Despite the US embargo, Terres said Cubans still account for as much as 35 percent of cigars sold worldwide. He said American smokers consume up to 220 million top-end cigars a year — a market officials here would love to crack. (AP, 26/2/07)

February 26: Cuba's trade with China more than doubled in 2006 to nearly \$1.8 billion, the Chinese customs office said, as the Communist-run island prioritized its new revolutionary partners China and Venezuela. Since Cuba signed an agreement with Venezuela in late 2004 bartering and selling services for oil and also began receiving more credit from China, it has ordered all state companies to prioritize trade and investment with the two countries. China reported bilateral trade was \$1.792 billion last year, up 105.4 percent from 2005 and compared with just \$526 million in 2004. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said in January that bilateral trade with Venezuela was \$2.6 billion in 2006, compared with \$2 billion in 2005 and \$1.4 billion in 2004. The Cuban government reported trade grew 27 percent in 2006, compared with the \$9.5 billion reported in 2005, or to around \$12 billion, meaning China and Venezuela accounted for more than 35 percent of all trade. Spain was Cuba's third trading partner in 2006 at just under \$1 billion. (Reuters, 26/2/07)

February 26: Cuba and Venezuela have proposed to each other to undertake about 300 joint economic cooperation projects this year valued at more than \$1 billion, Havana's minister of foreign investment and economic cooperation said. Marta Lomas presided, along with Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba Ali Rodriguez, at the first day of the 7th session of an intergovernmental panel that will conclude on February 28 with the signing of new agreements, Cuban state media reported. The Cuban minister said that the two countries carried out projects worth more than \$700 million last year. "This, our integration, begins all the work that has to do with the process of ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas)," an integration initiative being pushed by Caracas which Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua have joined. Lomas recalled the cooperation projects and so-called social missions that have been undertaken since the bilateral agreement signed in 2000, "which has given rise to integration and our entire incorporation to ALBA and, therefore, what we have to do is continue working and honing it." (EFE, 26/2/07)

February 26: A brief article in the official Communist Party daily, Granma quoted Deputy Minister of Economics and Planning Magalys Calvo telling elected officials in predominately agricultural Camaguey province that the country must reduce its dependence on imported foodstuffs in 2007. Cuba imports 84% of the food destined for the basic shopping cart at a cost of "some one billion dollars" with most of government spending going for these imported foodstuffs and petroleum, Calvo was reported as saying. (CBS, 26/2/07)

February 27: Cuba's state-run distribution and retail network plans to gradually reduce its payroll from the current 309,000 employees to around half that number, the weekly Trabajadores reported. The publication cited the minister of internal commerce, Marino Murillo, as saying that some 150,000 to 160,000 workers would be sufficient to staff the system. More than 6,500 workers under Mincin, as Murillo's department is known, have already been placed in other jobs as part of a restructuring launched several months ago, said Trabajadores, the official organ of Cuba's state-controlled CTC labor federation, the island's only legal union. The process of downsizing applied to services will be rolled out gradually and will extend to the rest of the Mincin units," the weekly said. Many of the relocated workers are remaining in the sector for a program of technical requalifying, in which up to five training options are provided,

Murillo said. The minister told the weekly publication that the workday for services in the network of state-run shops will be extended by up to two hours, in line with a resolution on working hours that goes into effect this April. (*EFE*, 27/2/07)

February 28: The seventh session of the Cuba-Venezuela Inter-governmental Joint Commission concluded in Havana, focusing on cooperation and exchange in the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). Directors and experts from both countries signed 355 cooperation projects worth \$1.5 billion in fields such as science, technology, social security, labor, health, communications, and education. In the framework of ALBA, Havana and Caracas, along with Bolivia and Nicaragua, will increase bilateral trade to make good use of each country's advantages, affirmed Omar Verde, executive director of Venezuela's State Research Center for Agro-industrial Experimental Production (CIEPE). CIEPE, he added, brought 16 projects to the island to strengthen food sovereignty and security, particularly of dairy and meat products, as well as fruits and vegetables. The official also referred to the creation in Venezuela of a center to assess food quality and produce fortified food for children and pregnant women, as well as emergency food rations. As part of the agreements, Cuba and Venezuela decided to construct 11 factories to produce ethanol from sugar cane. Cuban Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Marta Lomas said, "our integration is just starting. Steps towards integration under ALBA are starting." Acting Cuban President Raul Castro, Vice President Carlos Lage and Venezuelan minister of Energy and Oil Rafael Ramirez attended sessions. But Raul did not speak during the closing ceremony. (*Prensa Latina, AP, El Universal*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Iranian First Vice President Parviz Davudi said in Tehran that Iran is willing to develop cooperation with independent states, including the Latin American state of Cuba. In a meeting with Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade Raul de la Nuez Ramirez, Davudi said that the ground is well prepared for cooperation among independent states especially in the field of trade, adding that the opportunity should be taken for multilateral growth of the developing nations. Davudi said that Iran has attached great importance to expanding economic and trade relations with Cuba and that a Tehran-Havana Joint Economic Commission has been set up within the Iranian Ministry of Industries and Mines to help upgrade industrial cooperation between the two countries. He said that Iran enjoys high engineering capacity and both Iranian and Cuban officials are expected to enforce the accords already reached in the industrial and engineering sectors. (*Tehran Times*, 1/3/07)

Exile Community

February 1: Several leading opposition figures in Cuba offered their reactions to the news that a Miami city commissioner proposed holding a party at the Orange Bowl when Fidel Castro dies. Most said it's a terrible idea. Oswaldo Payá, the Christian Liberation Movement leader who organized an unprecedented gathering of 25,000 signatures throughout the island to demand a referendum on democratic freedoms in the late '90s, suggested that the proposed celebration would offend many people in Cuba. "I don't celebrate anybody's death," Payá said. "Even though many members of Castro's regime offend, violate human rights and attack the dignity of even the most defenseless people, I think that celebrating anybody's death offends that person's family members, and affects the dignity of whoever does it." Oscar Espinosa Chepe, an independent economist who was jailed for his writings in 2003 and released for medical reasons in 2004, told me that holding a party in Miami after Castro's death "wouldn't make any sense, and would become an international scandal." "I understand the situation in Miami, where many people have suffered a lot, have been humiliated, and have all the right to express their feelings," Espinosa Chepe said. "But the repercussions this would have in Cuba would be very negative." "There's a reality which can't be denied: Castro is an elderly person who has ruled Cuba nearly 50 years, and even if he is leaving behind a very sad legacy, he will always leave behind a sentimental thing of respect among many people," he said. "Don't forget that a majority of the population at one time in history saw Fidel Castro as a god, even if he has lost much of his former popularity." Martha Beatriz Roque, another economist who was imprisoned in 2003 and released a year later, was less critical of the idea.

"Fidel Castro has done a lot of harm to the Cuban people: there are many split families, much pain in the Cuban people," she said. "And perhaps there are people who want to get rid of their pain in that way [celebrating]. I think we have to respect people's way of thinking." (*The Miami Herald*, 1/2/07)

February 1: Some thirty US-based Cuban exile groups, assembled under the name of "United Cuban Organizations," announced in Miami a "post-Castro action plan." "As soon as Castro's death is confirmed," a plan of action will be set in motion that will feature "public demonstrations and conferences in memory of our martyrs," Orlando Martínez, coordinator of the new organization told the press. The Cuban exile initiative, to be carried out simultaneously in Miami, New York, New Jersey and Puerto Rico, seeks recognition for the exile groups' efforts. (*EFE*, 1/2/07)

February 3: Pedro Knight, husband, musical director and inseparable companion of salsa queen Celia Cruz, died at Methodist Hospital in Arcadia, California. He was 85. The cause of death was not released, but Knight had been in failing health for the past couple of years, suffering complications from diabetes and a series of strokes. The man who began fading as soon as Cruz died in July 2003 and said time and time again that he yearned to join his wife of 41 years in the afterlife is expected to finally rest beside her in a crypt for two at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/2/07)

February 6: Cuban exile organizations in Miami expressed satisfaction for the release of dissident Julio César López Rodríguez, who was incarcerated in Cuba for 18 months, and asked that the rest of the political prisoners also be set free. Tomás Rodríguez, director of Agenda Cuba, said that the political activist should have never been arrested, and that the international community would applaud the release of the rest of the Cuban dissidents. Miguel Saavedra, leader of Vigilia Mambisa, said that it was just a cosmetic gesture if it was not accompanied with freedom for all prisoners of conscience, free elections and freedom of the press. According to Ninoska Pérez Castellón, director of the Council for the Freedom of Cuba, the liberation of López Rodríguez cannot conceal the fact that there is still repression in Cuba, where jails remain full of political prisoners. (*OCB*, 6/2/07)

February 11: When Fidel Castro dies, Ramon Saul Sanchez, 52, the founder of a Miami group called the Democracy Movement, or Movimiento Democracia, plans to sail for the island with generators, medicine and other supplies — and bring word that "freedom is on its way." Military leaders, law enforcement officials and aid organizations preparing for the Cuban leader's death are hoping for a calm and measured response on both sides of the Florida Straits. Sanchez outlined his group's plans. A businessman has donated the use of 400 feet of dock space on the Miami River, he said, from which Sanchez plans to launch boats toward Cuba, including a ferry that can carry 50 passengers to the island, as well as 20 tons of cargo. He has two cargo planes on call and is amassing supplies at a large storage space, he said. Sanchez believes Cuba's government may collapse after Castro dies. With the communist government in control of so many functions, such as food distribution, that could mean a collapse of civic structure, Sanchez said. Therefore, he said, the only way to avoid a migration from Cuba is to go to the island immediately after Castro's death, against the wishes of both nations' militaries and government leaders, with supplies and a message of hope. "What we intend to do helps the US interest, because it diminishes the chance of a mass exodus to the United States," he said. "We have moral leverage, and we intend to use it." (*The New York Times*, 11/2/07)

February 16: The Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), one of the most influential groups of the Cuban exile, is ready to talk with those government officials of the island that do not have "blood on their hands," like Vice-president Carlos Lage, said Jorge Fowler, vice-president and member of the organization's Executive Committee. Fowler's declarations were made on the TV show "Oppenheimer Presenta." According to Fowler, CANF wishes for a peaceful transition in Cuba. "We do not want a single drop of Cuban blood spilled," he said. (*EFE*, 16/2/07)

February 17: With more than 10,000 white crosses Miami's Cuban exiles commemorated friends and family they say were killed by the Castro regime or disappeared at sea trying to escape Cuba. In a grass field of this American city's Tamiami Park, the crosses kept the memory alive of victims taken by the Cuban government since Fidel Castro took power in 1959 until now, according to the organizers of what they call the "Cuban Memorial: a people united in sorrow." During the event, which was held for the fifth straight year, friends and family of the fallen got together,

among them Miriam de la Peña, mother of one of the four pilots of the exile organization Brothers to the Rescue who died when Cuban MiG fighters shot down two of their light aircraft. The planes were shot down on Feb. 24, 1996 in international airspace, according to a United Nations investigation, while Havana claims they had entered Cuban airspace. Blanca Rojas, the daughter of Lt. Col. Cornelio Rojas, executed by a firing squad in 1959, also attended the event to pay homage to her father. As the ceremony concluded, the organizers lit the "flame of sorrow," which will remain alight for three days in honor of the victims. (*EFE*, 17/2/07)

February 26: It was 46 years ago, but the survivors remember all the gruesome details of their ride inside a sealed semi-trailer following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Urine and excrement sloshed on the floor, and men and boys -- more than 100 men captured by Cuban militia -- took turns breathing fresh air out of a small hole someone punched in the truck's side. When the truck stopped eight hours later in Havana, nine of the men inside were dead. Miami-based survivors of the invasion plan to file a lawsuit against Cuban military commander Osmany Cienfuegos, who they say gave the order to pack the men into the truck -- and Fidel Castro. "We believe we have enough proof that the crime was committed by these two individuals," said Juan R. López de la Cruz, a retired US Army colonel and Bay of Pigs veteran who lives in Miami. The invasion veterans want their case heard in a Spanish court, which has asserted jurisdiction for human rights abuses in countries around the world. A similar court indicted former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. The group wants the court to hold Castro and Cienfuegos responsible for the deaths of those nine prisoners of war. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/2/07)

February 26: Mario Chanes de Armas, the Cuban political prisoner who served the longest sentence in modern times and symbolized the struggle for civic freedom in 20th century Cuba, will be remembered with a funeral service in Miami. Chanes, 80, who suffered a fatal heart attack, spent his life in prison and in exile, but no adversity convinced him to halt his quest for a democratic future for his homeland. Certainly not during the 30 years he spent in prison for opposing the regime of Fidel Castro, his comrade-in-arms during the failed raid on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba in 1953. Captured days later outside Santiago de Cuba, he was tried and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, but he was released in 1955 in a general amnesty to the raiders. Chanes did not hesitate to take up arms again together with Castro and on December 2, 1956, he and 81 other rebels landed on the eastern coast of Cuba. After the failed landing, Chanes managed to reach Havana, where he directed sabotage teams. He was arrested again, and was in prison when the revolution triumphed, on January 1, 1959. Chanes became disenchanted by the shift in the revolutionary process toward communism and tried to pull away from the circles of power. On July 17, 1961, he was arrested on charges of conspiring to assassinate Castro and sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment. He always maintained that the charges were fabricated, pointing out that no weapons or compromising documents were ever found in his possession. Refusing to accept the routine in prison or even wear prison garb, Chanes identified himself as a *plantado* -- a disobedient inmate -- until July 16, 1991, when he was released. Chanes found exile in Miami in 1993. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/2/07)

Foreign Affairs

February 1: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said that Cuba's Fidel Castro has visibly improved, describing how the ailing Cuban leader has gained weight and is walking around and studying. "A notable improvement," Chavez said, describing Castro's condition when the two met recently in Havana. "He has gained several kilograms, and I think he is walking about more than me, analyzing, studying," Chavez said at a news conference in Caracas. (*AP*, 1/2/07)

February 1: Reporters Without Borders issued its 2007 annual press freedom survey. The survey reports on press freedom in 98 countries and includes the main violations of journalists' rights in 2006 and regional aspects of media and Internet freedom. "The report lists the worst violations in repressive countries, including major culprits North Korea, Eritrea, Cuba and Turkmenistan, but also looks at democracies, where progress needs to be made too," the organisation said. [[Cuba: Annual Report 2007](#)] (*RWB Press Release*, 1/2/07)

February 2: A high court ruled in favor of a Cuban dissident who was recently deported from Bolivia for criticizing President Evo Morales, saying a law prohibiting foreigners from involvement in the Andean country's politics is unconstitutional. Cuban doctor Amauris Sanmartino, currently in exile in Colombia, said he has not decided whether he will return to his home in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, 340 miles east of La Paz, where he was arrested in December for publicly decrying Morales' close ties to Havana. "Justice has been slow, but has now arrived," Sanmartino told Bolivian television from Colombia, where he had been flown upon his deportation in January. Morales administration officials declined to comment on the court's decision, saying they had not yet received a copy of the ruling. (*AP*, 3/2/07)

February 3: One year after their arrival in Bolivia, Cuban doctors have made 3,370,000 consultations, and saved the lives of 4,300 people, a Cuban diplomat revealed in La Paz during a meeting of solidarity with the island. During his address to the Congress of the Bolivian Movement of Solidarity with Cuba, the counselor minister of the Cuban embassy, Danilo Sanchez, said that, at present, there are 1,721 Cuban health workers throughout Bolivia. He also said these experts have assisted 3,730 births, noting a decrease in infant mortality rate. Over 4,600 surgeries have been performed and 197,000 medical examinations have been done in the 20 integral hospitals donated by Cuba, Sanchez added. Operation Miracle, a Cuban-Venezuelan Project providing free eye operations, has also contributed to important results, with 61,146 people having benefited so far. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/2/07)

February 3: Iran opened one of its nuclear sites to a large number of local and international reporters and a delegation of foreign ambassadors in an effort to show the transparency of its program before a United Nations Security Council deadline this month. Delegations from the Non-Aligned Movement, Group of 77 and League of Arab States arrived at the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility in central Iran with nearly 100 reporters. The delegation included representatives from the United Nations nuclear agency from Algeria, Cuba, Egypt and Malaysia, though none were official inspectors. (*The New York Times*, 3/2/07)

February 5: The 9th International Meeting on Globalization and Development Problems started in Havana, attended by 170 economy specialists of the economy and other social scientists from some 40 countries and hundreds of Cubans. According to experts, the meeting, that will last four days, is aimed at analyzing and exchanging current advances and challenges facing the economy and world society, specifically in Latin America and the Caribbean. Representatives of international and regional organizations from the UN, World Trade Organization, World Bank, the Latin American Economic System, the Latin American Integration Association, the International Monetary Fund and Inter-American Development Bank are expected to attend this event. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/2/07)

February 5: Reporters Without Borders condemned the detention of journalist Ramón Velázquez Toranzo of the independent news Libertad, who has been held in the provincial prison in the eastern province of Las Tunas since his arrest on 23 January and who went on hunger strike on 30 January. Around 40 journalists have been detained, attacked or threatened, some of them several times, since Raúl Castro took over as acting president six months ago. "The occasional hint of an opening under Raúl Castro's interim regime has not been translated into any progress in press freedom," Reporters Without Borders said. "Independent journalists continue to be subjected to harassment and violence by State Security. All Velázquez did was peacefully demonstrate for more freedom of expression." [[25th Journalist Arrested](#)] (*RWB Press Release*, 5/2/07)

February 6: Cuba and Argentina became part of the 58 countries that signed the UN Convention against people of forced disappearance, in a ceremony held in the Quai d' Orsay palace of Paris. Cuban Ambassador to France Rogelio Sanchez participated in the ceremony, while First Lady Cristina Fernandez and Foreign Minister Jorge Triana were the attendees on the Argentinian side. "In the Working Group negotiations, held before the Convention, as part of this process, our country had an active role in the framework of the Latin American and Caribbean Group", the Cuban ambassador said. "The Convention is of great significance for many countries, especially all those that have deeply suffered that scourge, and especially some in Latin America", Sanchez highlighted. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/2/07)

February 6: Forty-five writers from 22 countries have received Hellman/Hammett grants this year in recognition of the courage with which they face political persecution, Human Rights Watch said. The Hellman/Hammett grants, administered by Human Rights Watch, are given annually to writers around the world who have been targets of political persecution. Miriam Leiva, from Cuba, received one of the Awards. Leiva, a journalist, is one of the founders of Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), a group of wives and mothers of imprisoned dissidents. She was in charge of the international section of the magazine *De Cuba*, published by a group of independent journalists, which has been shut down in the face of threats of arrest by the security police. After the crackdown in the spring of 2003, many Cuban journalists stopped writing or would not sign their names, but Leiva continued to write critical articles and sign all her work. She drafted most of the Damas de Blanco declarations, despite being followed, watched, and threatened by the Security Police. (*HRW Press Release, 6/2/07*)

February 6: A government group has shelved conference plans at a Hilton hotel following suggestions that the US chain will not accommodate delegates from Cuba at its UK branches. The House of Commons Scottish Affairs Select Committee is boycotting the Dundee Hilton, where it was scheduled to meet later this month. Member Ian Davidson MP said it was decided at a meeting that it would not be appropriate to stay at the hotel following comments made by a Hilton spokeswoman in London, who indicated that Cubans may be barred from staying in their UK hotels as part of the US embargo against the communist country. Linda Bain was responding to reports that an Oslo hotel owned by the chain refused a booking by a Cuban trade delegation last month. Norwegian trade unions and anti-racist organisations are said to be boycotting the hotel chain until the policy is changed. The Scottish Affairs Committee now plans to demonstrate its opposition by booking another venue for its meeting at the end of the month. (*Scottish Press Association, 6/2/07*)

February 6: The Organization of American States Secretary General, Jose Miguel Insulza, said he hoped the lack of dialogue with Cuba is only temporary recalling that the majority of OAS members have bilateral relations with the island's government. The Secretary General said that the island "has bilateral relations with the majority of the OAS members, so I hope that the lack of dialogue about or with Cuba is only a temporary situation. We cannot help the people of Cuba if we cannot talk to them." He stressed that it is the government of Cuba—"not the people and country of Cuba"—that has been excluded from active participation in the OAS since 1962. (*OAS Press Release, 7/2/07*)

February 7: Cuba will deport reputed drug kingpin Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante to Colombia, which plans to extradite him to the United States, a government official told the press. The Colombian official said Gomez was expected to arrive in Bogota on February 8 and would be held at its heavily fortified chief prosecutor's office compound before being extradited to the United States. An extradition order has been signed, the official said. Gomez, an alleged top boss of Colombia's Norte del Valle cartel known by his alias "Rasguño," is wanted on a US indictment in New York on drug trafficking, racketeering and money-laundering charges. He has been held in Cuba since his 2004 arrest at a Havana airport on charges of carrying a false passport. He had fled Colombia after Washington offered rewards of \$5 million each for the South American country's top drug traffickers. (*AP, 7/2/07*)

February 8: Fidel Castro's health has improved following a post-intestinal surgery period in which the aging revolutionary icon temporarily stopped eating, Venezuela's ambassador to Cuba said. Ali Rodriguez Araque said Cuban officials observing Castro have seen "a significant improvement in his health, even his appearance," which was clear from footage of a recent meeting between Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez — one of the 80-year-old Cuban leader's closest allies. "He's improving progressively. The problem is that at first he didn't ingest food, now he is ingesting food and that has helped him significantly," Rodriguez told Venezuelan state television. Rodriguez Araque said he expected the situation in Cuba would remain normal when Castro dies. "I think there's been much preparation for a situation of this type," he said. (*AP, 8/2/07*)

February 8: Energy and development were on the table at the Ninth International Economists Meeting on Globalization, attended by over 1,500 delegates from 55 countries. The sessions included speeches by Venezuelan Deputy Energy Minister Bernard Mommer on natural resources and sovereignty, and John Saxe Fernandez, from the Mexican Autonomous University, on Mexico-Cuba relations, homeland security, integration and energy colonialism.

Malay Chandra Muzaffar, president of the International Movement for a Fair World, will talk on how to control natural resources, mainly oil, and Venezuela ambassador to Cuba Ali Rodriguez, also former OPEC general secretary, on energy integration in the ALBA. Other issues included international cooperation and development, and new guidelines for development in the Caribbean. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/2/07)

February 8: The Inter-American Press Association condemned the latest conviction and jailing of a journalist by Cuba's 48-year-old Communist regime and called on Havana to release all of the 27 independent reporters the press group says are held there as political prisoners. The Miami-based organization, which seeks to promote respect for freedom of expression throughout the Western Hemisphere, commented on the case of Ramon Velazquez Toranzo. Velazquez, who worked for the not-officially-recognized Libertad news agency, was arrested on January 23 along with his wife and the couple's daughter. The women were later released, but Velazquez was convicted in summary proceedings on the charge of "constituting a social danger" and jailed. The press group said the reporter had suffered harassment from state security forces throughout 2006, and that his principal "offense" lately appears to have been taking part, along with his wife and daughter, in a peaceful march for human rights on December 10. Velazquez has been on a hunger strike in jail since January 30, according to the IAPA. (*EFE*, 8/2/07)

February 8: Havana accused the Czech Republic and other European countries of planning "a new conspiracy" against Cuba, within which the EU group wants to take "a position of intervener" again, the Cuba daily Granma wrote. This "latest trick," mainly initiated by the Czech Republic and assisted by "convert" countries such as Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovenia, is aimed to achieve "a joint agenda" through which they would "undermine the independence and sovereignty of the people of Cuba," the paper wrote. But Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg rejected the allegations. "The Czech Republic is naturally not preparing any coup against Cuba. We consider the speculation an attempt to divide European countries before the approval of the EU medium-term and long-term strategy towards Cuba," Schwarzenberg told the press. It is a clear effort to prevent the strategy from being approved, he said. The support for human rights and political freedoms in Cuba is part of the Czech Republic's foreign policy, Schwarzenberg said. (*CTK*, 8/2/07)

February 8: The debates on the polemic reform of the United Nations Security Council started in New York with strong criticism by Cuba, who regarded the Security Council as a "frozen structure." The composition and working methods of the Security Council "do not reflect the realities of the world of today, and do not adequately represent the members of UN," Cuban Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca said. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/2/07)

February 10: India's Minister of State for External Affairs Anand Sharma will co-chair the Indo-Cuban Joint Commission Meeting in Havana. The Joint Commission will review and expand cooperation in areas such as Information Technology, Biotechnology, Energy, Sports and Science and Technology. Cuba has recently awarded two off-shore oil blocs to India's oil company, ONGC Videsh Ltd. Besides this, OVL has got 30 percent share in six more off-shore blocs in a Consortium led by the Spanish oil company, Repsol. Indian biotech companies, Biocon and Panacea, have established joint ventures to produce vaccines using Cuban technology. The minister will hold talks with the foreign minister of Cuba and other cabinet ministers. (*IRNA*, 10/2/07)

February 11: In an interview published by the newspaper "O State of Sao Paulo", Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim affirmed that lifting the embargo imposed on Cuba 45 years ago by the United States would be the best way to contribute to the democratization of the island. "Lifting the blockade would be the best course of action to assist in the re-democratization process, without losing sight of the achievements of the Cuban Revolution and without hurting the national pride of the Cuban people," said the head of the Brazilian diplomacy. Last week, Amorim held consultations in Brazilia with US Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns. When the interviewer asked if Burns was concerned about any influence that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez might have on the transition in Cuba, Amorim replied, "I'd be concerned if anyone tried to intervene, even the Cuban exiles." "The process of transition in Cuba, which I do not know how quickly or in what fashion will occur, is a task to be undertaken exclusively by the Cubans," he said. "Cuba's friends can assist so that there is always dialogue with other countries," but Cubans "do not like mediators, not even to facilitate a dialogue with the United States," he added. (*AFP*, 11/2/07)

February 12: Thousands of Cuban doctors and other medical personnel working in President Hugo Chávez's popular health clinics in poor neighbourhoods have left Venezuela, according to Cuban doctors and Venezuelan health volunteers. Though some 15,000 remain, the departures have forced the government to close many of the clinics, severely disrupting the "Barrio Adentro" program -- Inside the Barrio -- that many say helped Chávez win a recall referendum in 2004 and a resounding reelection December 3. "They began to remove them eight or 10 months ago," said Judith Aponte, coordinator of the volunteer neighborhood health committee in the Caracas barrio of Santa Eduwigis. "It's not clear why the Cubans left, though some Cuban doctors still here say those who left had fulfilled their three-year assignments. Hard facts about the program are often elusive. Even the pro-Chávez government ombudsman, Germán Mundaraín, complained in a December report that it was "very difficult to obtain up-to-date information on spending figures and health indicators" related to the program. "The information is managed by Cuba, not by Venezuela," says María Elena Rodríguez, who coordinates health research for the independent human rights group Provea, "When we asked for cost figures last year, [the Venezuelan health ministry] said, 'If you get that information, please send it to us!'" The doctors' departure is not believed to be connected to the defections of several of the Cuban medical personnel. Nearly 50 such defectors are reported to be living in Colombia while awaiting US visas. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/2/07)

February 12: The head of the Organization of American States said he is open to a dialogue with Cuba, which was expelled from the body more than 40 years ago. OAS Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza told a news conference in the Peruvian capital, Lima, that the body should initiate "at least a significant dialogue with Cuba," since many OAS member countries maintain diplomatic relations with the island nation. "I'm not calling for Cuba's return to the OAS (...) but it seems to me that the OAS should get involved in at least initiating a significant dialogue with Cuba." "The sooner the better," Insulza said of potential talks, alluding to the fact that OAS members do not need to wait until Fidel Castro's death to discuss the country's possible return to the body. Cuba was expelled from the OAS in 1962 after member nations said its communist regime went against OAS principles. (*AP*, 13/2/07)

February 13: The deputy speaker of the British Parliament, Sylvia Heal, called for improved European relations with Cuba that were upset by human rights concerns in 2003. "We hope that the European Union will continue to work with the Cuban government so that there will be improvement in some things that have been a little difficult," Heal, a Labour Party MP, told the press during a four-day visit to Havana. She urged Brussels to build on common ground with Havana. "That's the important thing, that we maintain a dialogue," she said before a lunch meeting with Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly. (*Reuters*, 13/2/07)

February 13: Reporters Without Borders took issue with comments by Cuban communications minister Ramiro Valdes describing the Internet as a "tool for global extermination" and as a "wild colt" that needed to be tamed. Valdes also insisted that, if few Cubans were online, this was due to a US embargo that prevented Cuba from have decent Internet connections. In RWBs' view, it is in fact due to the Cuban government's desire to control the flow of information throughout the country. An investigation carried out by RWB revealed that the Cuban government uses several mechanisms to ensure that the Internet is not used in a "counter-revolutionary" fashion. Firstly, the government has more or less banned private Internet connections. To visit websites or check their e-mail, Cubans have to use public access points such as Internet cafes, universities and "Youth computing centers" where it is easier to monitor their activity. Then, the Cuban police has installed software on all computers in Internet cafes and big hotels that triggers an alert message when "subversive" key-words are noticed. (*RWB Press Release*, 13/2/07)

February 13: India and Cuba renewed bilateral science and technology agreements and reviewed their relations during a visit by Indian Foreign Minister Anand Sharma. "The economic relations with Cuba are going very well, but they will go even better," said Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, who cautioned however that the deals would not lead to "spectacular leaps" in bilateral relations. Lage said Sharma's trip represented "the traditionally friendly and fraternal relations that have always existed between Cuba and India." Sharma headed an Indian delegation to an intergovernmental meeting that opened in Havana the previous day. On the opening day, Sharma underscored "his country's willingness to increase economic and cooperation relations" with Cuba "to raise them to the rank of the political relations," the Cuban official newspaper Granma said. (*AFP*, 13/2/07)

February 13: President Felipe Calderon's administration has held discussions with Cuba on improving relations after a series of diplomatic spats in recent years, Mexico's foreign secretary said. "Mexico has a border with the Caribbean and it is a top priority to relaunch dialogue and political understanding," Patricia Espinosa said in a speech before the Senate. "With Cuba, we have had diplomatic contacts with the aim of promoting a rapprochement." (*AP*, 13/2/07)

February 13: The government of Nicaragua restored diplomatic relations with Cuba by swearing in Ambassador Luis Cabrera, after a nearly 17 year-long political hiatus between Managua and Havana. Foreign Minister Samuel Santos swore in Ambassador Cabrera as his representative extraordinary and plenipotentiary before the government of Cuba. (*Notimex*, 13/2/07)

February 14: Barbados will strengthen its ties with Cuba in the areas of education, sport, health care and in the response to natural disasters. That is according to ambassador of Cuba, Pedro Roque, who made a courtesy call at the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) headquarters. According to Roque, the free eye operations for Barbadians will continue, and at this stage, Cuba is selecting a team to come to Barbados to test patients in March or April of 2007. Addressing the concern that some people have had complications due to the eye surgery, Roque said this was the exception to the rule. "If we are receiving 200 000 patients in Cuba, about 40 or 50 will have a problem." The Cuban ambassador also mentioned that talks are ongoing about the possibility of introducing into Barbados a programme to study and speak Spanish called "Yes, I can". "This is a Cuban programme that can be presented by the radio, television and it is free. We have the books, videos -- all of the materials which will be given to the Ministry of Education -- here," the Cuban ambassador said. (*Barbados Advocate*, 14/2/07)

February 14: A delegation from Belarus visiting Cuba held working meetings with the top management of the Cuban institute of radio and television, where they discussed avenues and forms of cooperation. The meetings were a follow up of an agreement signed in November 2006 in Minsk by the two parties. The Belarusians provided Ernesto Lopez, the president of the Cuban institute, with insight into the activity of the Belarusian national TV and radio company. The sides agreed to exchange TV programs on various topics, to make programs about Belarus and Cuba on their respective channels, to provide each other with urgent news in a timely manner, to tap into the potential of the satellite channels Belarus-TV and Cubavision Internacional for transmitting TV sketches about life in Cuba and Belarus, to buy each other's TV series, exchange reporters and specialists, to hold Days of Belarusian and Cuban television and radio and other events. (*BelTA*, 14/2/07)

February 14: Cuban daily Granma reproduced the text of a resolution passed by the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) denouncing European Union attempts to interfere in Cuba's internal affairs. The paper set aside two complete columns on one of its international pages for the document released by the PCE Executive Committee, highlighting EU complicity with the US government. Sponsored by the Czech Republic, the European Union decided to elaborate "a long and medium term strategy" on Cuba, which follows the Plan Bush patterns, including a secret section similar to that elaborated in Washington, the text reads. The document points out the White House has been working on the creation of a group called "Group of friends of a democratic Cuba," composed of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovenia. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/07)

February 14: Visiting Canadian and US chefs highlighted the Cuban traditional cuisine, during a 10-day tour of several provinces. During a meeting with members and directives of Cuba's National Culinary Association, the visitors said they found delightful and magnificent dishes and very creative and high-skilled cooks on the island. The 15-member delegation called for the strengthening of bilateral relations among Canadian, US and Cuban cuisine professionals, *Trabajadores* newspaper reported. The US and Canadian visitors were awarded the Culinary Friendship Award by the The Chef's House, a social institution in the Cuban capital. (*CAN*, 14/2/07)

February 15: North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il received a congratulatory message from the First Vice-President of the Council of Ministers of Cuba Raul Castro Ruz on the occasion of his birthday. The message said: "Please accept my warmest congratulations sent to you on behalf of the Cuban government and the Communist Party of Cuba and the

Cuban people on your birthday. It gives me great pleasure to most sincerely wish you success in your work to lead the heroic Korean people linked with the Cuban people by the ties of fraternal solidarity. (KCNA, 15/2/07)

February 15: The Czech Foreign Ministry has selected 17 projects aimed at the support of human rights and civil society in Belarus, Cuba, Iraq, Georgia, Myanmar, Serbia and Moldova, the ministry told the press. The Foreign Ministry this year allotted 20 million crowns for these projects that are designed to support democracy. The concrete sums that will go to finance individual projects and that will range from hundreds of thousands to millions of crowns will still be a subject for discussion, the ministry said. It is certain that the Institute of Documentary Film will receive a ministry grant for the project named Documentary Cuba as well as the non-profit People in Need society that prepared projects aimed at Cuba and also Moldova and Myanmar. (CTK, 15/2/07)

February 16: Canada is prepared to draw on its long relationship with Cuba to act as a "bridge" between Washington and Havana in the post-Castro era, Michael Wilson said. Wilson, who is approaching his first anniversary as Canadian ambassador in Washington, said he is acting on a mandate from Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who wants Ottawa to become more active diplomatically in the Western Hemisphere. "That's our neighbourhood," Wilson said. He said Canada has developed relations not only with officials in Fidel Castro's government, but also members of the island's fragmented opposition groups, and Ottawa has pushed Havana to release political prisoners and open its economy. Canada can also draw on its business investments and tourism spending in Cuba to curry influence, the former Conservative cabinet minister said. "We have a dialogue, and that is different from the United States because they have nothing like this type of dialogue," Wilson said. "Because of that dialogue, we have an understanding of how Cuba thinks. We also have an understanding of how Washington thinks. Cuba sees us as a North American country with which they can have some sort of dialogue." "We can build a greater understanding between the two countries." (Toronto Star, 17/2/06)

February 19: The first group of 27 Pakistani students arrived in Cuba and 368 more will also follow them, education official Dr S Mehmood Raza said. The statements were made during an orientation session for students who want to study in Cuba, organised by the Pakistani Higher Education Commission (HEC). Gustavo Machín Gomez, ambassador of the Republic of Cuba, was the chief guest on the occasion. Addressing the students, the Cuban ambassador said that Cuba had offered 1,000 medical scholarships to Pakistani students, adding that the students would receive education from medical institutes recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and related international organisations. "Pakistani students will receive the best medical education and will be among the 27,000 other international students belonging to around 120 countries studying in Cuba," he said, adding, "it is the first time Cuba is going to receive Muslim students and the people and government of Cuba are excited about this." (Daily Times, 19/2/07)

February 19: The Ladies in White, an organization comprising relatives of Cuban political prisoners, congratulated Germany's Hans-Gert Poettering for being chosen as speaker of the European Union's legislature with the conviction that his "continued support" will help them achieve their goals. "We are pleased to congratulate you on your well deserved election as president of the European Parliament," the Ladies in White said in a letter released in Havana. "We are convinced that with your continued support we will achieve our goals. Receive our best wishes for success in your responsible position, and for your personal good health and good fortune," the letter said. Poettering, a Christian Democrat elected as parliament speaker last month, spoke out against the January 2005 suspension of the political sanctions the EU had imposed on Havana after the arrests and imprisonment in Spring 2003 of 75 peaceful Cuban dissidents and the execution of three would-be ferry hijackers. (EFE, 19/2/07)

February 19: Cuba, whose doctors have experimented with dozens of alternative treatments, is training Panamanian therapists in the medical use of hypnosis, the government news agency AIN reported. The agency said that 80 Panamanians graduated from courses held in the Central American country under a program with Cuba's Higher Institute of Medical Sciences, based in the eastern city of Santiago. Cuba's best-known researcher in the field, Alberto Cobian, has said that hypnosis can be useful in treating stress, bronchial asthma, sexual dysfunction and some types of skin diseases, as well as offering some anesthetic effects, the agency reported. (AP, 19/2/07)

February 21: The first eight power generators donated by Venezuela to Nicaragua have been successfully installed and will be shortly linked to the national power grid thanks to the collaboration of Cuban and Venezuelan specialists. Gabriel Alvarado, one of the technicians overseeing the installation, said that the generators work perfectly after long-duration tests. The plants, which have a potency of 2.3 megawatts each, were installed in the district of Las Brisas, northwest of the capital. Another 22 power plants will be installed in Los Brasiles, in the municipality of Ciudad Sandino. Cuba-Venezuela cooperation with Nicaragua is part of agreements subscribed in the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an initiative promoted by Presidents Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro to promote regional integration and solidarity and as an alternative to free trade agreements. (*CAN*, 21/2/07)

February 21: More than a hundred Cuban doctors are in Bolivia assisting the victims of heavy rains and floods caused by the El Niño weather phenomenon that have been lashing the country over the last days. Cuban ambassador to Bolivia Rafael Dausa said the Cuban doctors are assisting the evacuated people and victims of the natural disaster. He said the doctors will stay in Bolivia as long as needed. The Cuban health experts were located in rural and indigenous communities, in the eastern departments of Santa Cruz and Beni, and El Chaco in Cochabamba. (*CAN*, 22/2/07)

February 22: During a meeting with journalists, Cuban ambassador to Austria Norma Goicochea criticised the Czech Republic saying it is one of the EU countries that pursues "the EU's Latin American strategy that is close to the USA," the Austrian news agency reported. She said that Cuba is afraid that the US Administration of President George W. Bush is planning to topple the Cuban regime and that it wants to engage the EU in it. Goicochea said that the Czech Republic is the leading force of the EU countries that want to push through the EU a Cuban policy close to the USA. She said that the EU governments siding with the United States support a strategy that disrespects the Human Rights Charter and the right to self-determination and sovereignty of states, and bears clear signs of interference. Besides the Czech Republic, these countries include, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, Goicochea said. Cuba accused EU countries of preparing a new plot against the "island of freedom" in early February already. (*Czech Happenings*, 22/2/07)

February 23: The press watchdog group Reporters Without Borders denounced a decision by the Cuban government to withdraw the accreditation of two foreign correspondents and not grant an entry visa for a third. Cuba ordered Cesar Gonzalez-Calero, the Spanish correspondent of Mexico City daily *El Universal*; and Gary Marx, a reporter with the Chicago Tribune to leave the country and denied a visa to BBC correspondent Stephen Gibbs, the Paris-based group known by its French initials RSF said in a statement. "When the Cuban authorities are not cracking down on Cuba's independent journalists, they target foreign correspondents. The reasons for these expulsions are clear," RSF said. "The Cuban regime is hard put to understand that the press is not a propaganda tool. It should realize the foreign media is not there to please any government, any more than Cuba's own media should be." (*EFE*, 24/2/07)

February 25: Nicaragua and Cuba will increase cultural exchange, particularly in the areas of literature and arts and crafts, reported the Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, who concluded a visit to the Central American country. Prieto, who received the Order "Rubén Darío" for Cultural Independence from the Nicaraguan President, Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega, avoided elaborating about these exchanges. (*EFE*, 25/2/07)

February 26: Fifty nine prisoners of conscience who remain imprisoned since the spring of 2003 sent a letter to the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, asking that the institution intensify demands for their freedom. The letter to Pöttering was announced by independent economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, condemned to 20 years in prison in 2003, and one of the few who are serving their sentence under house arrest according to the terms of a provisional release. (*EER*, 26/2/07)

February 26: The human rights arm of the Organization of American States opened two weeks of sessions that will total 49 hearings -- including five on Venezuela and one on Cuba that will be held behind closed doors. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) also will hold hearings on complaints brought by individuals and nongovernmental groups against the Colombian, Brazilian, Haitian and US governments. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/2/07)

February 26: The international representative of the Cuban opposition coalition Arco Progresista, Dirk Van den Broeck, from Belgium, was expelled from Cuba last February 21 when he attempted to enter the country via the Varadero airport. Dirk Van den Broeck, who is also secretary of the international association Cuba-Europa en Progreso, was making his 15th trip to Cuba since 1999. (*EER*, 26/2/07)

February 27: Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki met with Cuba's Foreign Trade Minister Raul De La Nuez Ramirez who is currently visiting Tehran to attend an international conference on the position and role of Latin America. During the meeting, Mottaki pointed to the two countries' joint political stances concerning the different world developments and stressed the need for increased cooperation between Iran and Cuba in the economic sector, a statement released by the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Information and Press Bureau said. He further noted the two countries' high economic potentials, and said that Iranian companies can transfer their experiences to Cuba in many fields such as dam, refinery and power plant construction, and auto manufacturing. The minister further described formation of the joint economic commission as facilitator of the two sides' economic ties, and voiced Tehran's preparedness to take giant steps in developing mutual economic cooperation. For his part, Ramirez, who has also taken the trip to Tehran to endorse the two countries' preferred trade agreement, pointed to the two countries' common stances in the face of international issues, and described the organization of the Latin America conference as a valuable initiative by Iran. (*FARS News Agency*, 27/2/07)

February 28: The 6th Hemisphere Conference against Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and pro Peoples Integration will be held in Havana on May 3-5. The gathering is promoted by the Hemispheric Social Alliance and its Cuban branch, which brings together men and women of all races in the continent to discuss alternatives to present free trade options, to fight foreign debt, militarization, and unfair World Trade Organization policies. (*CAN*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque arrived in Tegucigalpa where he will sign bilateral cooperation agreements, and inaugurate an ophthalmologic hospital donated by the Cuban government. In a press release, the Honduran chancellery said the Cuban official is expected to meet with President Jose Manuel Zelaya, and his counterpart, Milton Jimenez. Perez Roque's agenda also includes a visit to the community of Villa de San Francisco, about 12.4 miles east of Tegucigalpa, where he will inaugurate the mentioned hospital, the note added. The minister will also meet with members of the Cuban medical brigade in Honduras. As many as 300 Cuban doctors are currently working in the country, while about 1,000 Honduran students are being trained on the island. This is Perez Roque's second visit to the Central American country, with the first one in December 1998. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/2/07)

February 28: A delegation of the Cuban Communist Party, headed by Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, chief of the International Relations department of the Cuban Communist Party, arrived on official visit in Beijing, China's capital. On his first day in Beijing, Ramirez held talks with his counterpart Wang Jiarui, member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *Prensa Latina* reported. The two party officials discussed topics related to cooperation between the two political organizations and reviewed the current situation in the two countries. (*CAN*, 28/2/07)

February 28: A Cuban dissident who was recently deported from Bolivia for criticizing President Evo Morales plans to relocate to Norway, his wife said. Cuban doctor Amauris Sanmartino, currently in exile in Colombia, was arrested in December in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, 340 miles east of La Paz, for publicly decrying Morales' close ties to Havana. Despite a recent Bolivian court decision that overturned his deportation and allowed him to return to Bolivia, Sanmartino and his Bolivian wife, Normina Chavez, have decided to accept an offer of asylum from Norway. "We're happy," Chavez told the press. "To tell you the truth, we applied to other countries as well, but we know that Norway offers a good situation." Sanmartino was deported under a 1996 law that forbids foreigners from "intervening in any way in internal politics or inciting the alteration of the social or political order." (*AP*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Reporters Without Borders voiced surprise at the 22-month prison sentence which Roberto de Jesus Guerra Perez, a correspondent of the Miami-based Payolibre and Nueva Prensa Cubana websites and the US government-funded Radio Marti, received from a Havana court on a charge of "disturbing the peace". RWB said it hoped the 19 months he has already spent in detention will be deducted from the time he has to serve. "Such a severe

sentence for 'disturbing the peace' is in itself surprising," Reporters Without Borders said. "Guerra was held for 19 months without being charged before being tried. We obviously hope this long period already spent behind bars will be discounted from his sentence and that he will be released soon." The organization added: "Prior to his arrest, Guerra was repeatedly harassed because of his journalistic activities, and the peaceful demonstration in which he took part on 13 July 2005 was just used as a pretext for imprisoning him." (*RWB Press Release*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Cuba's State Council designated Pedro Ross as Ambassador to Angola, official daily Granma reported. Ross was former Secretary General of Cuba's Workers Union (CTC), since 1990 until last September when the 19th CTC Congress elected Salvador Valdés Mesa as Ross' substitute. (*AFP*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Fidel Castro received Venezuelan Minister of Energy, Rafael Ramírez. Ramírez was heading the Venezuelan delegation to 7th Mixed Intergovernmental Commission. According to Cuban news agency Prensa Latina, the meeting coincided with Castro's thirty-minutes conversation with president Hugo Chávez during the Venezuelan TV broadcast of "Hello President". (*AFP*, 28/2/07)

February 28: Honduras named its first ambassador to Cuba in 45 years, completing the restoration of diplomatic ties with the communist-run island that were severed during the Cold War. "Today, we have sealed our relationship with Cuba," said President Manuel Zelaya following a two-hour meeting with visiting Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Zelaya announced that Juan Ramon Elvir will be sent to Havana as Honduras' ambassador. Honduras broke off diplomatic relations with Havana in 1962, when Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States. It renewed formal relations with the island in January 2001, but did not name an ambassador until now. In recent years, some ties between the two countries -- like medical services -- have increased. About 340 Cuban doctors have served in this Central American country, and around 500 Hondurans study medicine in Cuba. (*AP*, 1/3/07)

Security

February 13: In the Ranchuelo municipality of Villa Clara, more than a hundred people received a call to create an anti-riot brigade. A local neighbor informed that the meetings were presided over by Lt. Col. Alio Gil, head of the Municipal Army Recruitment Office, along with an Army Counter Intelligence (CIM) officer. In each of the meetings, the CIM representative outlined the expediency of gathering volunteers to create shock brigades, which would receive training on how to deal with peaceful political activists and other opponents of the government. (*Cubanet*, 13/2/07)

February 13: With the aim of creating stronger links of friendship and Latin American integration, cadets and teachers from Venezuelan military academies visiting the island are beginning a wide range of activities in Havana. The delegation of more than 250 includes pupils from the first year of Command and Joint Chief of Staff, the Higher Institutes of War, Military Defense and National Guard Internal Order. The Venezuelan delegation, which remains in Cuba until February 17, is headed up by Vice Admiral Luis Alberto Morales Márquez. According to Granma daily, the programmed activities include visits to historic sites and units of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and the Ministry of the Interior. The South American cadets and officers, who arrived on February 12, were received at José Martí International Airport by Division General Urbelino Betancourt Cruces, director of the General Máximo Gómez FAR Academy.

(*World Data Service, Granma International*, 12/2/07)

February 23: Russian Ambassador to Havana Andrei V. Demetrievev expressed gratitude to the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) for the homage paid in Havana on the Day of Homeland Defenders, on its 89th anniversary. The ceremony at the Internationalist Soviet Soldier Memorial in western Havana constitutes an example of the ties of friendship between the peoples of Cuba and the peoples of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Demetrievev said. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/2/07)

February 26: Operation Caguairán, which began in mid-2006 with the objective of training and improving troop mobilization and deployment as well as the systematic preparation of reservists and militia members, is successfully underway in the territory covered by the Western Army, according to General of the Army Raúl Castro Ruz, second secretary of the Party and minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. He affirmed that the task is being carried out with similar effectiveness throughout the rest of the country. This Army and all of the Armed Forces have fully earned, in a way that they rarely have done until now, the description of outstanding, Raúl said, at the conclusion of the Military Council. Among others, the meeting was also attended by members of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party, Ricardo Alarcon, Carlos Lage and Esteban Lazo, as well as by Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and chiefs from the Armed Forces. (*Granma Internacional, Prensa Latina, 26/2/07*)

Terrorism

February 25: The Colombian government and guerrilla organization ELN (National Liberation Army) began talks in Havana. Colombia's High Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo, and ambassador in Cuba Julio Londono are heading the governmental delegation, while rebel leaders Pablo Beltran, Juan Carlos Cuellar, and Francisco Galan are doing so for the ELN. This is the fifth round of talks between the Colombian government and the ELN. (*Prensa Latina, 25/2/07*)

February 27: The former chief of Cuba's military medical services is calling for international weapons inspections of a secret underground lab near Havana, where he says the government is creating biological warfare agents like the plague, botulism and yellow fever. Roberto Ortega, a former army colonel who ran the military's medical services from 1984 to 1994, defected in 2003 and now lives in South Florida. Ortega went on the Spanish-language media circuit to denounce what he claims is an advanced offensive biological warfare weapons program. He spoke at the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies where one angry heckler stormed out accusing him of deliberately sowing fear among Cuban exiles. "They can develop viruses and bacteria and dangerous sicknesses that are currently unknown and difficult to diagnose," Ortega told the press. Ortega said he told the CIA nearly two years ago about an underground Cuban facility southwest of Havana. The maximum security lab dubbed "Labor One" has an above-ground civilian cover and employs dozens of scientists, he said. But in the underground facility, scientists reproduced and stockpiled deadly germs and bacterias collected in Africa, he added. He visited the lab in 1992 when he accompanied a high-level Russian military delegation, he said. Ortega is believed to be the first defector with details of such an alleged biological warfare facility, said University of Miami professor Manuel Cereijo, who studies Cuba's biotechnology and terrorism issues. Ortega said he has come forward now because he did not see the CIA taking public action on his information. The CIA and the US State Department declined to comment. The Cuban government has denied such programs exist. (*The Miami Herald, 27/2/07*)

US-Cuba Relations

February 1: A top Cuban official said he didn't expect any change in the near future in US policy toward the island. "There is not the slightest doubt the current policy will continue for a while, as long as there is this man who stole the presidency," Parliamentary President Ricardo Alarcon said in reference to US President George W. Bush. Speaking during a conference on education, Alarcon, who is in charge of designing Cuban policies toward the United States, also said he didn't expect the United States to change its stance even if opposition Democrats should win the 2008 presidential election. "There is no reason to believe either that under a Democrat there would be any change in the panorama of this half-century," said Alarcon in reference to the 48 years the communist government led by Fidel Castro has been in power. (*AFP, 1/2/07*)

February 1: US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said that Washington is willing to help Cuba make the transition to a more open, democratic society. Speaking to reporters during a one-day visit to Mexico, Gutierrez said

the US supports a "peaceful transition to democracy." Gutierrez, who was born in Cuba, said the United States does not plan to meddle in Cuban politics but wants to see the country make the transition to democracy. "The future of Cuba is in Cuba," he said, but added that "if we can be of help, we are ready to help in that transition." Gutierrez did not elaborate, but last September he suggested that Cubans could work with the Organization of American States and other groups to hold a referendum on whether they want to live in democracy. (*The New York Times*, 1/2/07)

February 1: Herzfeld Caribbean Basin Fund has long prepared for a capitalist renaissance in Cuba once Fidel Castro dies. Now the fund seems poised to reap hefty profits as Castro's long-time reign over the tiny Communist nation appears to be in its final days. Thomas Herzfeld created the closed-end fund (its ticker symbol is CUBA) 14 years ago in Miami amid speculation that Castro's health was taking a turn for the worse and the US was planning to lift its 45-year embargo against Cuba. "At the time, no one wanted to underwrite it. We did it ourselves," Herzfeld said. "Our belief was once trade is resumed in Cuba there will be a boom in the country. Because (that market) is starting from such a low economic base, the percentage in gains would be phenomenal." After Castro's ailing health last July forced the 80-year-old to temporarily relinquish power to his brother, Herzfeld anticipated that the end of economic sanctions might also be near. The market appears to be making the same bet. (*Dow Jones Newswire*, 1/2/07)

February 2: At least 38 Cuban doctors who defected from a mission in Venezuela have been stranded for months in Colombia, where they have been refused refugee status as they await word on possible asylum in the United States, according to a relief organization. The doctors find themselves in Bogota despite a shift in US policy, announced in August, that allowed Cuban medical personnel working abroad to come to the United States once they passed routine background checks. Most of the defecting doctors who fled to Colombia have been waiting as long as six months for a response, according to an advocacy group in Miami and several doctors who spoke to the press. Jorge Toledo, a 39-year-old physician, and his wife, ophthalmologist Leticia Viamonte, were told in a December 27 letter that their request to enter the United States under the Cuban Medical Professional Parole program was denied. The decision cannot be appealed. (*AP*, 2/2/07)

February 5: The Bush administration's new budget calls for a slight increase in US aid for Latin America, with a few targeted nations like Colombia, Ecuador and Haiti getting the lion's share of the money, and a big jump in US funding for controversial programs to promote democracy in Cuba. The 2008 fiscal year budget request asks for \$46 million for the Cuba programs, compared to \$9 million in the 2006 budget. The proposed boost to Cuba programs is in keeping with last year's recommendations by an interagency commission to augment such aid to \$80 million over two years in order to help and hasten a move toward democracy on the island. The 2008 budget proposed \$38.7 million for Radio and TV Martí -- similar to current levels. The Cuba programs usually come under attack in Congress, where a group of lawmakers tables amendments that seek to cut or eliminate the programs. The attempts have been unsuccessful so far. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/2/07)

February 5: The Cuban government denounced the use by the United States of a new legal subterfuge to not accuse Luis Posada Carriles of terrorism and murder, an official note said. In a note published in official daily Granma, the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry said, on February 1, Washington authorities should have supported charges that impede acceptance of the appeal presented by that criminal's defense attorney. Cuba says crimes against humanity were committed by this Cuban-origin individual, who was member of the Central Intelligence Agency. The note said that Posada Carriles has been granted impunity, even when US entities recognize that "he has a criminal record and has been involved with people and organizations that promote and use terrorist violence." [[Declaration by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 5/2/07)

February 5: Cuba blasted a new move by a US-funded TV Marti to provide its anti-Fidel Castro programming to Spanish-language stations in Miami that are picked up by popular illegal satellite dishes on the island. The Miami station WPMF-TV, an affiliate of the Spanish-language Azteca Americas network, in December announced plans to air the Marti programming daily. It appears to be the first time Marti programming has been broadcast on US airwaves. TV Marti is paying \$195,000 for six months worth of broadcasts. "They are trying new ways to get their meddling and subversive messages, designed to destabilize the Cuban revolution, seen and heard in our country," an article in the

Communist Party newspaper Granma said. "The authorities of our country, with the support of the vast majority of the people, are taking and will take the necessary measures" to halt this new effort to bring TV Marti programming to the country, Granma said. (AP, 6/2/07)

February 5: American cyclists could be absent from the upcoming Tour of Cuba because the US government has denied their athletes visas, Jose Pelaez, president of the Cuban Cycling Federation told Cuban radio. Pelaez, who is also president of the Pan-American Cycling Federation, said the cyclists would continue to seek visas until the last possible moment. The Tour, which will take place from February 13-25, has attracted cyclists from Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador, Germany, Canada, San Marino and Austria. (Xinhua, 5/2/07)

February 7: The US Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) is calling for an increase of broadcasts to critical anti-American nations like Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Somalia. The BBS, an independent federal agency responsible for all US government and government sponsored, non-military, international broadcasting, oversees the Voice of America (VOA) and under its new plan, the majority of the station's English language programming would be cut to make room on the budget. The BBG will increase its Cuban programming, after signing a contract in Miami to give its anti-Castro networks, Radio and TV Marti, further availability on the communist island. Currently, under Cuban law, satellite receivers are illegal, however, many still own them, and will now be able to pick up TV Marti, broadcasting from South Florida. (AHN, 7/2/07)

February 8: In almost equal measure, Americans say they do not like Fidel Castro but want the United States to re-establish regular diplomatic relations with the communist island nation after 46 years of estrangement. Less than half of those polled think Cuba will become a democracy after the 80-year-old revolutionary leader dies or permanently steps aside. However, 89 percent in The Associated Press-Ipsos poll say they think Cubans will be better off or about the same when Castro is gone. The poll showed 64 percent of respondents had a very or somewhat unfavorable opinion of Castro, who has said he will be a Marxist-Leninist until the day he dies. Castro got slightly better reviews from younger people -- 60 percent of those younger than 35 had an unfavorable view of Castro while 66 percent of older people felt that way. Younger people were more likely to reserve judgment about him. Among people 18-34, about 35 percent said they don't know enough about Castro to have an opinion, while 24 percent of those 35 and older said that. Even so, a large majority of people -- 62 percent -- said the United States should re-establish diplomatic ties. The scant contact between the two countries is now handled through Switzerland or via low-level diplomatic offices called interests sections. Among Hispanics, 70 percent say Cubans will be better off after Castro, compared with 53 percent of non-Hispanics. (AP, 8/2/07)

February 8: Some Cubans welcomed a poll released the day before showing that most Americans favor renewed diplomatic ties with the communist-governed island. While the AP-Ipsos poll showed 64 percent of respondents had an unfavorable opinion of Fidel Castro, 62 percent said the United States should re-establish diplomatic ties broken off in 1961. Only 30 percent said it should not. Cubans interviewed in the streets of Havana — while told about support for the embargo — tended to assume that renewed diplomatic ties would mean a broad range of closer ties. And they liked that idea. In December, a Gallup Poll survey conducted without government approval in Cuba's two biggest cities found that those surveyed were most likely to cite the United States as the "ideal partner" for increased commercial ties with Cuba. Cuba's government had no immediate reaction to the poll. (AP, 7/2/07)

February 8: The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, repatriated 49 Cuban migrants to Bahia de Cabañas, Cuba. On February 3, the crew of an HC-130 Hercules located 17 Cuban migrants on a rustic vessel approximately 60 miles southwest of Key West. At the request of U.S. Citizen and Immigration Service, one of the 17 migrants will be taken to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for further disposition. (US Fed News, 8/2/07)

February 8: New proposals in the Democrat-controlled Congress to relax US sanctions against Cuba will not get past a White House set on confrontation, Cuba's top diplomat in the United States said. Dagoberto Rodriguez, the chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, said legislative moves to ease a ban on travel to Cuba would likely be blocked or vetoed by US President George W. Bush. Other proposals include easing restrictions on Cuban American family

travel and cash remittances to Cuba, and relaxing payment requirements on food exports to Cuba under an exception to the trade embargo. "We see as positive any step in the direction to establish a communication with Cuba and we applaud those efforts in the Congress. We think it is the right thing to do," Rodriguez said in an interview. But he added: "We think a change of policy would be very difficult under this administration." Despite the temporary sidelining of Fidel Castro due to emergency surgery six months ago, Rodriguez said Cuba is stable and its socialist system will continue. (*Reuters*, 8/2/07)

February 8: The United States does not harbor "absolutely any" intention of militarily attacking Cuba, said the US Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutiérrez. "We want them to know that we do not have imperialist aspirations for Cuba," said Gutiérrez in an interview with the press. "We are not interested in going there and pulling people out of their houses. There is absolutely no military objective. And I say it because those are things that the regime has said to the Cuban people in the last 47 years," he added. (*Reuters*, 8/2/07)

February 9: Bills from both the Democratic and Republican Parties have been submitted to the United States Congress as part of a package calling for a change in US policy towards Cuba, which include proposals to lift the US economic embargo and ease travel restrictions to the Caribbean island. Public pressure is building on US President George W. Bush to shift his policy on Cuba, as it is on the Cuban regime to implement economic, social and political changes. It is unlikely that any significant changes will take place in either of the two countries. If the reforming legislature introduced in Congress does go through, a presidential veto is likely to be waiting. Similarly, the Cuban regime will exercise caution when it comes to implementing changes, which in turn means that any reforms will take a long time to become a reality. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 9/2/07)

February 12: US Catholic Bishop Thomas Wenski said Cuba is going through a period of uncertainty, since no one there knows what will happen after Fidel Castro's death. Bishop Wenski recently returned from Cuba. He was there as part of a charity related gathering. Wenski told the press he spoke with several people on the island about what they believe will happen once the ailing dictator dies and his brother Raul takes over. "In my short visit to Cuba, I did not find anyone who had a clear idea of what was gonna happen," Bishop Wenski said. "Everybody is a little bit uncertain and in that population, some of the uncertainty translates to fear." Bishop Wenski said the church will play a role as an agent of reconciliation when Castro dies and his brother Raul takes the reins of power in Cuba. (*13 Central Florida News*, 12/2/07)

February 13: State Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson said he has been invited to bring a delegation of North Dakota food exporters and processors to Cuba in May. "The Cubans are very interested in the commodities and products that North Dakota has to offer," Johnson said in a statement. He is organizing a trip to Havana May 21-25, to finish signing contracts for a \$20 million purchase agreement. So far, \$10 million worth of products has been contracted and delivered by North Dakota producers, Johnson said. "We hope to finish contracting the remaining \$10 million and act on any future sales contracts," Johnson said. (*AP*, 13/2/07)

February 13: A Cuban exile militant being held in Texas on fraud charges has hired a Miami criminal defense lawyer who previously represented an exile colleague convicted of weapons charges in South Florida. Luis Posada Carriles, charged in El Paso federal court with lying about how he sneaked into the United States, will be represented by attorney Arturo Hernandez. "I'm looking forward to the challenge," said Hernandez, who will file his formal notice of appearance on Posada's behalf on February 15. Hernandez worked during the past year with a team of lawyers for Posada's benefactor, Santiago Alvarez, a wealthy Miami real estate developer who pleaded guilty in September along with his employee, Osvaldo Mitat, to conspiring to possess illegal weapons. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/2/07)

February 13: The lawmaker leading the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs said that Congress should try to reduce the influence of the Non-Aligned Movement at the United Nations. "The pace of UN reform remains excruciatingly slow. The secretariat is hamstrung from the top down by a management structure that is at best obsolete," Democrat Tom Lantos, 77, told a hearing on the UN's future. "And the grouping of states still known as the Non-Aligned Movement -- and I wonder what they are non-aligned against this time -- has far too much sway in

blocking reforms, polluting human rights mechanisms, and bashing the democratic state of Israel," said the Hungarian-born representative for California. At a September summit in Havana, the group reiterated its rejection of what it called a unipolar world dominated by the United States and its allies. (*AFP*, 13/2/07)

February 13: A TV Marti executive charged with failing to disclose about \$112,000 in kickbacks he pocketed from a video vendor pleaded guilty in Miami federal court. Jose M. Miranda, nicknamed "Chema," accepted about 73 checks from Perfect Image Film and Video Productions from November 2001 to December 2004 while the vendor was doing business with the TV Marti operation. Miami-based TV Marti is part of the federal government's Office of Cuba Broadcasting, a taxpayer-funded television network that attempts to beam news and other programming into Cuba. Its programs, however, have largely been jammed by the Cuban government since its launch in 1990. Miranda, the former director of TV Marti programs, admitted to receiving the kickbacks while he approved requisitions and invoices for services by Perfect Image, according to the US attorney's office. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/2/07)

February 14: A wing under construction at St. Brendan Catholic School in Miami harbors a pile of goodwill -- some of it withering in the dank humidity -- that was meant to be delivered to Cuba's needy. Donated diapers, baby formula, wheelchairs, even Christmas decorations are stacked from floor to ceiling. But for almost two years, the Archdiocese of Miami has had little face-to-face contact with Catholics in Cuba, a byproduct of tightened travel restrictions for religious organizations imposed by the US Treasury Department. Reverend Fernando Heria, St. Brendan's pastor and an archdiocese spokesman, said the Cuba-bound goods sometimes expire or rot, so the archdiocese tries to give perishable goods to Miami's needy before they go bad. The church would send the aid with Catholics who traveled to the communist island or ship it with their humanitarian license, which expired in 2005, Heria said. "Whenever we limit the flow of communication between people, it serves to alienate us, as opposed to unite us," Heria said. The archdiocese sent about 50 clergy and laypeople a year to Cuba under its religious license but now sends fewer than five. The Catholic umbrella organization had a religious travel license for a decade, but the Treasury Department has yet to answer the diocese's request to renew the license, Heria said. US Jewish groups would drop in on Cuba's biggest synagogue, Beth Shalom, up to three times a month, bringing care packages stuffed with matzoh crackers, school supplies, and nonprescription drugs for Cuba's Jewish community of about 1,500. The visits have tapered off to six or seven a year, and donations have dried up, said William Miller, head of Beth Shalom in Havana. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/2/07)

February 14: Top US diplomat to Latin America, Thomas Shannon, and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns were in Argentina and Brazil to discuss everything from energy collaboration with Brazil to dealing with nations like Venezuela and Cuba, with which the United States has strained relations. The trip also laid the groundwork for President Bush's visit in March to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. Burns called 2007 "a year of engagement" with Latin America. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/2/07)

February 14: The Castro government has asked the International Telecommunication Union to make a greater effort to prevent the United States from continuing to "violate" Cuba's broadcast spectrum, the Cuban press reported. Fabio Leite, deputy director of the UN agency's Radiocommunication Bureau, was cited by Juventud Rebelde newspaper as saying that Cuban Information Minister Ramiro Valdes made the request. "He asked us to make the greatest effort in the ITU to end this flagrant violation of international law and the permanent aggression on the part of the U.S. government against the Cuban government," Leite, who is in Havana for the International Informatics Convention and Exposition 2007, said. The Cuban Communist Party daily Granma complained about the US government's move to lease airtime on a private television station in Miami that is carried on the DirecTV and Dish satellite systems to ensure that Washington-funded Television Marti can be seen on the island. (*EFE*, 14/2/07)

February 14: Communist Cuba remained one of the more important markets for American farmers in 2006 despite a decades-old trade embargo, a US-based organization that tracks the sales said. US food exports to Cuba totaled \$340.4 million last year, placing Cuba 34th out of 227 agricultural product export markets, the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council reported, based on US government export data. That is a slight dip from \$350 million in 2005 and \$392 million in 2004, the council said, with total sales to Cuba exceeding \$1.5 billion since they began five years ago. The United

States was the top exporter of food to Cuba in 2004 and 2005. The figures for 2006 are not yet available. The council has monitored the cash-only sales since they were approved by the US Congress in 2000 as an exception to the trade embargo imposed on Cuba after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. (*Reuters*, 14/2/07)

February 15: An anti-Castro Cuban militant is to face trial in the US in May, charged with lying to immigration officials. Luis Posada Carriles has been held in an immigration detention centre in Texas since 2005 after crossing the border illegally from Mexico. Both Venezuela and Cuba want to put Mr Posada on trial for allegedly masterminding the bombing of a Cuban jetliner in 1976 that killed 73 people. A US judge ruled that Mr Posada can not be deported to Cuba or Venezuela. (*BBC*, 16/2/07)

February 15: Four members of the US House proposed easier rules for selling food to Cuba, such as letting Cuba pay US banks directly instead of routing the money through foreign banks. The legislation also would clarify the meaning of cash sales to Cuba. The Bush administration says Cuba must pay before ships leave US ports. The bill would allow payment before delivery in Havana. US farm and agribusiness groups see Cuba as a natural, nearby market. For years they have campaigned for sales despite the overall US embargo on trade with the island. Food sales have been permitted since 2000. Representative Jerry Moran, Kansas Republican, said in a statement "this is an opportune time to encourage the United States to change its trade policies toward Cuba." He cited the decision by Fidel Castro to temporarily give up power. "In addition to the clear benefits that opening this market would have for our domestic producers, millions of Cubans are in need of access to a safe and abundant food supply," said Representative Stephanie Herseth, South Dakota Democrat and a sponsor of the bill with Moran, Missouri Republican Jo Ann Emerson and Arkansas Democrat Mike Ross. (*Reuters*, 15/2/07)

February 16: Spurred by events in South Florida, a national group is urging students to read books that have been burned in Cuba. The organization, FREEDOM, launched the project last month to bring attention to documents and books, such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, that the Cuban government has banned and set afire. The project is a takeoff on campaigns encouraging people to read banned books. "Banning a book is the intent to kill," said Walter Skold, co-chairman of FREEDOM, a group of librarians, authors and human rights activists. "Burning it is the crime of murder." The project came about in part from a controversy in Miami-Dade County public schools over the children's book *Vamos a Cuba*. The Miami-Dade School Board pulled the book last year after Cuban exiles complained it was an inaccurate portrayal of life on the communist island. Among critics of the book's removal were Cuban librarians. Skold, a middle school teacher from Maine, said many media outlets reported the criticism without disclosing that some books are prohibited in Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel*, 16/2/07)

February 16: Concerned about a possible mass exodus of Cubans, the Department of Defense plans to spend \$18 million to prepare part of the US Navy base at Guantánamo Bay to shelter interdicted migrants, US officials told the press. The new installation is needed because terrorism suspects occupy space on the base used in past emergencies to hold large numbers of migrants, Bush administration officials directly involved said. They note that the facilities are designed to house people from any Caribbean nation who attempt to enter illegally -- not just Cubans. But they say privately that Fidel Castro's illness and temporary hand-over of power to his brother Raúl last summer injected a renewed sense of urgency into plans to handle a mass exodus. The administration quietly requested the funds about a month ago and Congress has approved it. The officials, who were authorized to speak on the subject but requested anonymity because of the sensitive nature of Cuban issues, say there is no sign a Cuban migration crisis is brewing, but they acknowledge predicting one is difficult. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/2/07)

February 17: Cuba unveiled a marble plaque commemorating the interview 50 years ago by New York Times reporter Herbert Matthews that helped build the legend of Fidel Castro, the state news agency Prensa Latina reported. The plaque was placed on the spot where Matthews met with Castro at his hideout in the Sierra Maestra mountains of south eastern Cuba. Castro had taken to the hills two months earlier with a handful of men who survived a disastrous landing from Mexico to launch a guerrilla movement against US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista. The government had

claimed Castro was dead. Matthews' article, published by The New York Times on February 24, 1957, showed Castro was still alive and fighting. It immediately made the 30-year-old firebrand an international figure. (*Reuters*, 17/2/07)

February 17: The Bush administration remains hopeful that the death of Fidel Castro will unleash grass-roots pressure among Cubans for democratic change -- but many analysts see little threat to the regime under the thus-far seamless succession of brother Raul. As US officials see it, the seismic political event for Cuba has yet to come. "We don't feel that we've lost an important moment, because quite frankly, we don't see any significant possibility of change of any kind until Fidel is gone," Tom Shannon, the top State Department aide for Latin America, said. (*AP*, 17/2/07)

February 19: The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) said it supports new legislation in Congress that promotes agriculture sales to Cuba, while removing burdensome restrictions impeding trade to that country. H.R. 1026, sponsored by Jerry Moran (Republican-Kansas), would allow US agriculture to continue selling goods to Cuba with the potential for a significantly increased share of the market, according to AFBF. The legislation contains four main provisions supported by AFBF, including: Allowing individuals making agricultural sales with Cuba to travel on a general license; issuing visas to Cuban inspectors to enter the US to inspect processing facilities; Clarifying payments of cash in advance; and allowing direct wire transfers from Cuban financial institutions to those in the US. (*AFBF Press Release*, 19/2/07)

February 20: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is concerned about a report of deteriorating health of independent journalist Alfredo Pulido Lopez, who has been imprisoned in Cuba for almost four years. Pulido Lopez, 46, is suffering from serious breathing and stomach ailments, his wife Rebeca Rodriguez Souto told CPJ. The journalist is receiving medical care in prison, but his wife said the living conditions are unbearable. According to Rodriguez Souto, Pulido Lopez is being held in a room with at least 100 hardened prisoners in Camaguey's Kilo 7 Prison, where he was transferred in August 2004. Rodriguez Souto said that her husband has witnessed continuous acts of violence among the inmates and fears for his life. CPJ's attempts to reach Kilo 7 Prison in Camaguey were unsuccessful. (*CPJ Press Release*, 20/2/07)

February 20: Despite pressure from members of Congress and business groups, the United States has no plans to soften its policies toward Cuba as the island heads into the post-Fidel Castro era, Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said. "Now isn't the time to ease the restrictions," Gutierrez said in an interview with the press ahead of a speech he was to deliver to business groups on Cuba policy. Gutierrez said Castro has tried to blame the United States for the country's economic problems but that Castro's own policies are responsible. "This isn't about American policy. It's about Cuban policy," he said. He added that he sees little prospect for change in Cuba under Raul Castro, who has been acting president since his elder brother fell ill in late July. "There is nothing in his past to suggest that he (Raul) is a reformer," Gutierrez said. Interest in Cuba comes naturally to Gutierrez, who was born in Havana and left Cuba at age six for Florida with his family. Now 53, he joined President Bush's cabinet in 2005 after serving as chairman of the board and CEO of the Kellogg Co. Gutierrez sought to put to rest the notion among Cuban officials that the United States is intent on recapturing the dominant role it played on the island before the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power. "We have no plans to confiscate any property," he said. "We have no military plans. Our goal is to be of help. We know we can be of help. The destiny of Cuba is in the hands of Cubans on the island, not people in Washington or someplace else." (*AP*, 21/2/07)

February 20: The transition in Cuba is already taking place and Argentina might have an important role to play in the process of democratization of the island, said the US Cuba Transition Coordinator. In an article published in the newspaper *La Nación*, of Buenos Aires, Caleb McCarry, emphasizes that Cuba is going through a historical moment that clearly shows signs of change. However, the US official indicates that the United States must continue to exert pressure on the communist regime, even without Fidel Castro in power. (*OCB*, 20/2/07)

February 21: Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez had some straight talk for lawmakers and business groups pressing for a softer approach toward a post-Fidel Castro Cuba. The Bush administration won't waver from its tough stance toward Havana, he said. "The question is not when will the US change its policy. The question is when will the

Cuban regime change its policy," said Gutierrez, the highest ranking Cuban American in the Bush administration and co-chairman of a high level government commission that makes recommendations on Cuba. He dismissed Cuba's argument that the US sanctions against the island are to blame for its hardships. The United States, Gutierrez noted, supplies one-third of the island's food and medicines, and millions of mostly Canadian and European tourists have traveled to the island but there's been no improvement in the plight of the Cuban people. Apparently directing some of his remarks to Cubans on the island, he added that President Bush ``has no imperialist intentions. We have no military intentions to occupy the island. We will not confiscate property or support any arbitrary claims for property." (*The Miami Herald*, 22/2/07)

February 21: A federal judge denied a request by anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles to be released from jail while immigration officials figure out where to deport him. US District Judge Philip R. Martinez threw out Posada's lawsuit after federal prosecutors said immigration officials could not release him because he is in the custody of the US Marshals Service. Posada, a former CIA operative suspected of bombing a Cuban jet 31 years ago, left Department of Homeland Security custody after his indictment last month on suspicion of lying in a citizenship application. Posada, 79, was arrested two years ago on an immigration violation after he reported paying a smuggler to sneak him into Texas from Mexico. (*AP*, 22/2/07)

February 21: Three Cuban boxers who defected from their national team while visiting Venezuela in December were denied entry to fight professionally in the United States, their Miami manager said. Attorney Tony Gonzalez, the boxers' manager, said 2004 Olympic champions Yan Barthelemi, Yuriorkis Gamboa and Odlanier Solis, who are currently in Colombia, had received clearance from the Department of Homeland Security for P1 visas for athletes and entertainers. But the US consular office in Bogota has denied the fighters' requests. Gonzalez said the three fighters already are training and had targeted February 23 night's card at Miccosukee Indian Gaming for their professional debuts. But the delay in obtaining their clearance to travel to the United States will keep their fight plans on hold. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/2/07)

February 23: The US Attorney's Office charged two men with obtaining fraudulent licenses for religious travel to Cuba by making up churches. Victor Vazquez and David Margolis obtained the licenses to travel under false pretenses, according to court records. The agencies sold the authorization to travel under the licenses for \$250 a piece to more than 4,500 customers who could not have gone to Cuba legally, the affidavit stated. Vazquez, of Miami, and Margolis, of Fort Lauderdale, were each charged with one count of conspiring to violate Cuba-related travel regulations. Vazquez also was charged with two counts of making false statements on the applications for the religious licenses. Each charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. The prosecution is the first for the Cuban Sanctions Enforcement Task Force, a federal interagency commission launched in October to crack down on illegal travel to Cuba and to limit the flow of dollars into the country. It was unclear whether the people who traveled to Cuba using the licenses would be prosecuted. (*Sun Sentinel*, 23/2/07)

February 23: The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists expressed concern over the decision taken by Cuban press authorities in relation with Havana correspondents for the Chicago Tribune, the BBC and a major Mexican newspaper that they can no longer report from the island. "We are dismayed by the Cuban government's decision to effectively ban two well-respected journalists from doing their jobs by not renewing their press credentials," said Carlos Lauria, the group's Americas program coordinator. "The decision comes in clear reprisal for their independent reporting. We urge the Cuban government to review its decision and allow the journalists to continue reporting from Cuba." The Inter-American Press Association said it also condemned the measures, calling them "another manifestation of the arbitrary handling of freedom of expression and press in that country." (*AP*, 23/2/07)

February 23: Former US Vice President Al Gore's documentary on climate change has Cuba's vote. The Union of Young Communist's newspaper reported acting Cuban President Raul Castro "recognized the effort of the former vice president to denounce" global warming during a two-hour meeting with youth leaders. Cuba's official and only television media showed Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" on prime time this month and an update by

Gore, giving the one-time presidential contender more positive publicity than any other US leader in decades. (*Reuters*, 25/2/07)

February 26: US President George W. Bush decreed a continuation of restrictions on ships traveling from US territory to Cuba because the Havana government might resort to the "reckless" use of force against US vessels. The "declaration of national emergency" was running out, but Bush extended it by issuing a presidential notice and transmitting it to Congress. The restrictions were originally issued on March 1, 1996 by his predecessor, Bill Clinton, in response to the Cuban shootdown "in international air space" of two light aircrafts owned by a Cuban exile organization, according to the proclamation released. The document affirms that, since then, "the Cuban government has not demonstrated that it will refrain from the future use of reckless and excessive force against U.S. vessels or aircraft that may engage in memorial activities or peaceful protest." The Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, may make rules and regulations governing the anchorage and movement of any vessel in the territorial waters of the United States, which may be used, or is susceptible of being used, "for voyage into Cuban territorial waters and that may create unsafe conditions and threaten a disturbance of international relations." In the notice, the President argued that the expansion of the restrictions' scope in 2004 was due to the fact that the Cuban government would have taken a series of steps "to destabilize relations with the United States, including threatening to abrogate the Migration Accords with the United States and to close the United States Interests Section" in Havana. (*EFE*, 27/2/07)

February 27: Repression is increasing in Cuba under the control of Raul Castro, and the domination of the government by his brother, Fidel, is nearing an end, Bush administration officials said. "In Cuba, this year will mark the end of the long domination of that country by Fidel Castro," Mike McConnell, the nation's new spy chief, told Congress. McConnell told the Senate Armed Services Committee that significant positive change immediately after Fidel Castro's death was unlikely. He said Raul Castro has had the opportunity to solidify his control in the seven months since his brother's incapacitating illness. (*AP*, 27/2/07)

February 27: Lazaro Medina's happiness that six of his countrymen finally reached Key West was tempered with his disappointment that he hadn't known they were making another desperate voyage from Cuba. "I would have left," said Medina, one of a group of 15 Cubans who reached an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys in January 2006, only to be sent back home and then -- after a court intervened -- invited to return to the United States legally. Like the six who made it over, Medina, 37, has been attending meetings with government functionaries but has received no assurance he will be given the permit required to leave the country. "I guess they thought the permits wouldn't come. They took another chance and they made it. I'm really happy for them," he said from his home in Matanzas province. The group landed on Higg's Beach, said Victor Colon, assistant chief patrol agent in Miami. There were 23 people on the overloaded boat, all part of a "cooperative" trip, rather than a smuggling venture, he said. The Border Patrol processed the group at its Pembroke Pines station, Colon said. Because they reached land, they apparently will be allowed to stay in the United States. (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/2/07)

February 27: US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez told the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research lifting sanctions will not solve Cuba's problems. Fidel Castro and his brother, Raul, have "destroyed the ability for Cubans today to succeed, prosper and make a life for themselves," he told the nonpartisan Washington institution. "The United States is ready to help the Cuban people peacefully usher in a new era," said Gutierrez, co-chairman of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. Despite nearly \$1 billion funneled into Cuba by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, the majority of its residents remain "economic captives" mired in "indentured servitude," he said. Gutierrez said it is "naive" to believe the lifting of US sanctions would force any kind of change in the repressive government. Instead, he called for a continuation of working directly with citizens of the island by providing emergency food, water, fuel, medical supplies and education. Education is the key to ending the nearly 50 years of oppression under Castro, he said, adding the United States has no military plans to occupy Cuba. (*UPI*, 27/2/07)

February 27: A college professor was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty to lesser charges in a case alleging that he and his wife spied for the Cuban government. Carlos Alvarez, 61, and his wife, Elsa, 56, were

sentenced by US District Judge K. Michael Moore on reduced charges they received in a federal plea agreement. Elsa Alvarez was sentenced to three years in prison and one year of probation. Carlos Alvarez also received three years' probation. They apologized at the sentencing hearing but said they were not communists or supporters of Fidel Castro. They were trying to establish open dialogue with Cuba, where both were born before coming to the United States, they said. Carlos Alvarez said he once advocated removing Castro from power by force but later decided discussion would be more effective. "The methods and channels that I used were, unfortunately, wrong," he said. He pleaded for leniency for Elsa Alvarez, who said her husband had acted in good faith and did not profit from the Cuban government. "As we know, a good motive is never an excuse for criminal conduct," Moore said before handing down the sentences. "Their behavior undermined US foreign policy." Carlos Alvarez, a professor at Florida International University, was accused of spying for decades on Cuban-American exile groups and prominent individuals in Miami, as well as reporting on US political affairs. His wife, also a university employee, was implicated to a lesser degree in the suspected spying. (*AP*, 27/2/07)

February 28: A US new spy chief is replacing Norman Bailey as the intelligence community's point man on Cuba and Venezuela just three months after Bailey took the job. Bailey's departure came as Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell told a Senate panel that Fidel Castro's domination over Cuba would end this year and that his brother Raúl was consolidating his position in power. There was no immediate word on how Bailey's departure will affect US intelligence gathering and analysis on Cuba at a sensitive time, when the ailing leader Fidel Castro, 80, has been "temporarily" replaced by Raúl Castro. Bailey told friends about the decision in an e-mail on February 25, a copy of which was obtained by the press. It said McConnell was overhauling the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and eliminating the three country "mission managers" who supervise intelligence gathering in critical countries like North Korea and Iran. Intelligence officials denied Bailey's version, saying that the Cuba and Venezuela position will be retained and that several candidates already were being considered for the post. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/2/07)