

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

March 2002

Domestic Affairs

March 1: Acting on Mexico's request, Cuban authorities peacefully removed 21 young men occupying the Mexican Embassy after they repeatedly refused to leave on their own, the Cuban government said. Journalists at the scene were unable to watch the operation because the street outside the mission was blocked by police cars and wooden barricades. There was no information on where the Cubans were taken or what charges might be filed against them. Cuba issued a communique that described the young men as common criminals who were not politically motivated in their attempt to leave the island. (AP, 1/3/02)

March 1: Email is becoming more accessible to ordinary Cubans. Select post offices in major cities around the country are now charging \$ 4.50 USD to anyone who wants to open an email account. The fees includes a three hours of time on a computer at post office facilities. Users are allowed to send and receive email messages only, and cannot surf the internet or send or receive attachments. While most Cubans believe officials monitor the messages, the growing popularity of the service may make that impossible in the future. (CubaNews, 3/02)

March 1: Cuban post offices have opened their doors to e-mail service for the general public. They provide e-mail and access to specialized and professional Web pages for \$4.50 for three hours access. (Most Cubans do not have access to private e-mail, nor to Internet). (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/3/02)

March 5: In an address on Cuban state TV, Fidel Castro pledged that any Cuban who invades a diplomatic mission in Havana will never be allowed to leave the island, and said some 130 people arrested in the occupation of Mexico's embassy will be tried as criminals. Castro said that those arrested in the embassy invasion could expect to face charges in Cuba's courts. He also rejected their characterization as "dissidents or prisoners of conscience." "We will guarantee the security of the embassies," Castro said. "Anyone who enters an embassy by force will never, ever leave," he said. "We will not make any concessions." (AP, 6/3/02)

March 5: In the course of an appearance on state-run TV, Fidel Castro talked about internal dissident groups after Mexican President Vicente Fox met with some of their leaders in Havana. He labeled them as "mercenaries, agents provocateurs, habitual liars" and compared them to "fishes out of water," "organized, summoned and paid" by the "(U.S.) empire." (Notimex, 5/3/02)

March 6: Last year, Cuban anti-narcotics police seized 7.3 tons of illegal drugs on Cuban waters, as well as 25 airdrops, reported Cuban Minister of Justice, Roberto Díaz Sotolongo. The government official added that Spain constitutes the main conduit for drug smuggling into Cuba. (World Data Service, 6/3/02)

March 6: Suspects in the December slaying of five people, including a couple from Miami and an 8-year-old boy, have been arrested, Fidel Castro said in comments published by state media. Castro did not publicly reveal any details during his brief statement on the deadly attack, which he said "was especially repugnant" because it included the killing of an 8-year-old. The FBI confirmed that it was working with Cuban authorities to help solve the case. (AP, 6/3/02)

March 6: Cuban security forces beat four dissident journalists in recent days, while another roughly 20 activists opposed to Fidel Castro's government have been detained in recent weeks, opposition leaders said. "There's been a wave of repression," said Ricardo González, of the Manuel Márquez Sterling Journalists' Association, which represents about half of Cuba's

dissident reporters. Numbering about 100 in total, these are journalists who work without authorization outside the state-controlled media on the island and are often critical of the government. Separately from the journalists' incidents, about 20 opposition activists have been jailed in recent days, Elizardo Sánchez, of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said. (Reuters, 6/3/02)

March 7: The Liberal Party of Sweden has decided to award its "Lars Leijonborg Democracy Prize" to Berta Mexidor Vazquez and Gisela Delgado Sablón, as representatives of Independent Libraries in Cuba. Gisela Delgado Sablón will receive her prize at a ceremony in Stockholm whenever the Cuban authorities allow her to leave Cuba. During the last few years the independent libraries movement in Cuba has grown and has offered Cubans the availability of literature and cultural activities that the cultural institutes run by the state do not offer. (LPS Press Release, 7/3/02)

March 8: Cuban researchers reported early but notable success with a biotech drug that attacks advanced cancer of the head and neck regions. In preliminary trials, the novel agent, called Theracim h-R3, enhanced conventional radiation therapy to radically shrink and even completely eradicate tumors. According to Rolando Pérez, director of research of Havana's Center of Molecular Immunology, Cuba has placed Theracim h-R3 on fast-track approval. If the final phase of testing goes as expected, with the same good results, Pérez said he believes Canada will approve Theracim h-R3 by early next year. The project is a joint undertaking between the Cuban government and a Canadian venture capital firm. (NBC News, IPS, 8, 13/3/02)

March 9: A family of four Cuban exiles detained after a trip to Cuba has been finally given permission to leave the island by Cuban officials. For two weeks, their relatives in Miami had been waiting to hear what was to happen to them. The family, visiting their native town of Jicotea in the province of Villa Clara, had their passports and visas taken from them, family members said. They suspected retribution from the Cuban government for the recent defection of other family members from the island. (The Miami Herald, 9/3/02)

March 9: Cuban authorities released three minors that, along with another 18 youngsters, had broken into the Mexican embassy in Havana last February 27, reported Elizardo Sánchez. The president of the officially banned Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said that José Luis Mulet, Raibel González and Sachel Gil Pérez were released after being held in prison for a week in Havana. (Notimex, 9/3/02)

March 11: The fourth pre-medical course of the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) began in the Higher Institute of Basic and Preclinical Sciences of Havana, with the arrival of some 1,100 students from 20 countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States. The largest groups of students are from Venezuela and Paraguay (100 each), 52 are from Chile (joining another 250 from that country who have already begun medical school), and for the first time, there are students from Puerto Rico. (Granma, 20/3/02)

March 11: The United States campaign to win a United Nations condemnation of Cuba's human rights situation is preventing the debate from dealing with the "expectations and urgency" of the island's problems in this area, say members of the domestic Cuban dissident movement. The discussion on human rights continues to be "vitiating and politicised" by the conflict between Washington and Havana, Manuel Cuesta, secretary-general of the opposition centre-left Cuban Democratic Socialist Current told the press. (IPS, 11/3/02)

March 12: In a note by Fidel Castro that appeared in the official newspaper Granma under the headline "Note from Comrade Fidel," Castro states "it is unfathomable to authorize or allow the raising of hogs in densely populated areas in the core of the capital." Residential hog husbandry

in Havana City became popular at the beginning of the so-called Special Period. (Granma, 12/3/02)

March 12: Just weeks ahead of a UN vote on Cuba's human rights record, Cuban dissidents have charged authorities with boldly stepping up politically motivated arrests. Twenty-six Cuban dissidents rounded up since late February will face trial in a matter of days, in a government bid to leave opposition organizations leaderless, Marta Beatriz Roque, director of the Cuban Institute of Independent Economists, told the press. Fidel Castro's government "is bothered by dissidents' being out in the streets" demanding civil liberties for Cubans and protesting Cuba's dire economic straits, Roque added. "This crackdown is aimed at removing the leadership of the dozens of dissident organizations working in Cuba, at a time of popular discontent with worsening social and economic conditions," insisted Roque. (AFP, 13/3/02)

March 14: A plane crashed in central Cuba killing 17 people, including 13 foreigners, authorities said. The plane, described as an AN-2 Aerotaxi, went down around 4:30 p.m. near Santa Clara, the capital of Villa Clara province about 165 miles east of Havana. The victims were listed as six Canadians, five Britons, four Cubans and two Germans. (AP, 15/3/02)

March 15: Cuban doctors have designed a simple 10-minute blood test to diagnose people suffering from a common intestinal disease caused by a protein found in cereals. Instead of taking a biopsy, doctors at the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Havana are using a quick and easy technique that recognises antibodies in the blood to detect the disorder. (Reuters, 15/3/02)

March 15: Two thirteen-year-old boys were arrested in Havana's International Airport under suspicion of trying to hitch a ride in an airliner. The two, Harol Domínguez and another whose name has not been released by his parents, were taken to a police station and questioned for six hours before their parents were notified. (Cuba Verdad, 15/3/02)

March 15: The 41st annual polio vaccination campaign is underway across the island. Children from one month to three years of age are being immunized against polio -- a deadly disease that was officially eliminated in Cuba in 1962. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/3/02)

March 16: According to a study conducted in Havana, around 1.5 million Cubans have settled abroad since 1959. One million 300 thousand reside in the United States, 130 thousand in Latin America, 37 thousand in Europe and over a thousand in the rest of the world. The countries hosting the largest Cuban communities, after the United States, are Spain, Venezuela, Puerto Rico and Mexico. (World Data Service, 16/3/02)

March 19: The official newspaper Granma denounced an attempt by Florida-based Cuban-American sectors to establish a Cuban government-in-exile in Montecristi, in the Dominican Republic. "That so-called Cuban exile government would call an uprising within Cuba from Montecristi," stressed the article. According to the newspaper, the U.S. government is "not unaware" of this project. (World Data Service, 19/3/02)

March 25: The Cuban government has quietly banned the sale of computers and computer accessories to the public, except in cases where the items are "indispensable" and the purchase is authorized by the Ministry of Internal Commerce. According to Article 19, Chapter II, Section 3 of the ministry's Resolution No. 383/2001: "The sale of computers, offset printer equipment, mimeographs, photocopiers, and any other mass printing medium, as well as their parts, pieces and accessories, is prohibited to associations, foundations, civic and nonprofit societies, and natural born citizens. In cases where the acquisition of this equipment or parts, pieces and accessories is indispensable, the authorization of the Ministry of Internal Commerce must be solicited." (Wire.Com, 25/3/02)

March 27: Getting to the bottom of the mystery of what could be a lost underwater city near Cuba is the goal of a Canadian-led expedition. Their discovery of what appears to be a sunken island with massive temple-like structures will receive an important boost from an expert. Manuel Iturralde, one of Cuba's top geologists, plans to tell an international conference of geophysicists in Havana that there is no geological explanation for the megalithic stone formations found in about 700 metres of water some four kilometres off the western tip of Cuba. Iturralde's conclusion represents a vote in favour of the Canadian-led deep-ocean exploration team that in the summer of 2000 stumbled upon what looked like architecturally arranged stone formations while using sonar scans to comb the ocean floor for sunken galleons. (CP, 27/3/02)

March 27: Fidel Castro declared "victory" in his government's military-style campaign against dengue fever during a ceremony honoring those whose efforts helped wipe out the mosquito that spreads the virus. "The dengue virus has been eradicated in our homeland," Castro said after handing out diplomas to representatives of groups recruited for the campaign. "Today is a day of satisfaction for all residents of the capital and the entire country." (AP, 28/3/02)

March 29: One in seven Cubans is older than 60, reflecting an aging population comparable to that of industrialized countries. Cuba, with 1.6 million elderly, is one of the Latin American nations - along with Chile and Argentina - with the largest senior population. According to government figures, in 1959 the elderly accounted for about 6 percent of the population. By 2025, they are expected to exceed 25 percent. (EFE, 29/3/02)

March 29: Several hundred people attended the traditional Holy Funeral procession on Good Friday, which included an enactment of the Passion of Christ. The cortège traveled several blocks around the parish of Our Lady of Charity, in downtown Havana. Catholic processions had been banned in Cuba for nearly 40 years and were reintroduced following Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998. (EFE, 31/3/02)

March 30: According to the latest report by the Cuban Human Rights Foundation, "the situation of human rights in Cuba remains deplorable" and, far from improving, it has continued to deteriorate in the course of the last year. The report warns that this situation will only become worse if Fidel Castro's government continues to refuse to abrogate any of the legislation aimed at suppressing individual guarantees, and to abide by UN resolutions on the matter. (El Universal, 30/3/02)

Economy

March 1: Habano S.A. Commercial Vice-president, Manuel García, identified Mexico, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, the Canary Islands and Russia as the countries where manufacture of ersatz Havana cigars has been detected. In Cuba, nearly 800 thousand black market-made cigars were seized in 2001. (Notimex, 2/3/02)

March 2: Fidel Castro attended the closing dinner of the IV Habano Cigar Festival in Havana. The five-day festival included a trade show, trips to the tobacco-growing region of the western province of Pinar del Rio, a tobacco-themed art exhibit, and an auction of cigars and furniture that gathered 628 thousand US dollars donated to the Cuban Ministry of Health. (AP, Radio Habana Cuba, 2/3/02)

March 5: Mexico and Cuba have agreed to restructure the island's 380 million dollar debt, the Mexican foreign secretary's office said. The agreement reached after months of negotiations, allows Cuba to repay its debt over a 10-year period. A statement released by the Mexican government did not elaborate on how Cuba's debt had been structured previously. The agreement includes a dollars 30 million line of credit to buy Mexican goods, opening up the possibility of increased Mexican exports to the island. (AP, 6/3/02)

March 7: Cuba has opened its sugar export business to direct foreign investment for the first time since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, though its partner in the trade remains a mystery and subject of controversy. The veil of secrecy surrounding the Caribbean island's new sugar exporter, Compañía Internacional Azucarera, S.A. (CAISA), was lifted a bit this week with the first public confirmation that the company exists and has a foreign partner. Sugar has been a sensitive political issue. In Cuba, producing and selling sugar is a matter of national pride, while foreign companies involved in the trade might face U.S. sanctions under the 1996 Helms-Burton law. (Reuters, 7/3/02)

March 10: Off the Dutch port of The Hague, in the Scheveningen bay, a Cuban merchant navy crew of 25 have remained for nine months confined to their ship, the Maydin Reefer, owned by the Cuban state whose creditors, including British oil company Trampoil, have filed suit in a Dutch court. After a nine-month wait, a ruling regarding the Cuban debt is yet to be made. (El Nuevo Herald, 10/3/02)

March 12: Cuban Minister of the Economy, José Luis Rodríguez, has said that the country will face the economic contraction expected for 2002 with a program of restrictions and priorities. The Minister talked about the priorities of the Cuban government's economic program, including those regarding the so-called Battle of Ideas. The latter, an ideological campaign launched by Fidel Castro, has already had a rather costly impact on the Cuban economy. As part of it, massive rallies take place every single weekend in different provinces of the island. (World Data Service, 12/3/02)

March 17: Cuba has a foreign debt of approximately US \$40 billion, making it one of the most indebted countries in the world, said Jorge Salazar Carrillo, professor of Economic Studies at Florida International University (FIU) and director of its Economic Research Center. (El Nuevo Herald, 17/3/02)

March 17: The Cuban Basic Industry is expediting local oil prospecting and extraction in an attempt to reach an output of approximately 28 million barrels this year and meet a sizeable portion of the country's electricity requirements. According to sources with state-owned oil company (Cupet), besides reducing onerous yearly oil imports, the program aims at achieving production of 90 % of the electricity required by its national grid. (Notimex, 17/3/02)

March 18: The euro will circulate freely in the Cuban resort city of Varadero starting in June and could eventually become legal tender in the island, Tourism Minister Ibrahim Ferradaz announced in Berlin. Ferradaz said that adding the euro to the freely-circulating currencies was a practical matter in Varadero where 40 percent of visitors hail from one of the 12 nations that have adopted the European currency. The euro would become the fourth currency circulating freely in Cuba, in addition to the US dollar, Cuban peso and the convertible Cuban peso, which is for domestic use only and was created to make up for the insufficient supply of greenbacks for everyday transactions. It is pegged at one convertible peso to the US dollar. (EFE, 18/3/02)

March 20: The firm Heber Biotec S.A., whose exports for last year increased by 42.1% in comparison to 2000, won Cuba's National Export Prize in the category of large firms, for companies whose annual sales plans exceed \$10 million USD. The company, 100% Cuban-owned, holds exclusive rights to the international marketing of all products, technology and projects coming out of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB) of Havana. (Granma, 20/3/02)

March 21: netGuru Inc. (Nasdaq:NGRU), an integrated Internet and IT solutions, products and services company, announced its international telecommunications contract for Cuba. The successful provisioning of proprietary IP Network solution has allowed for rapid replication and deployment of netGuru's telecommunications business model. netGuru is committed to providing

quality wholesale telecommunication services to telecommunication companies for international long distance calls terminating in Cuba. (Business Wire, 21/3/02)

March 21: With the purpose to strengthen commercial links with Cuba, a delegation from the Bahamas started a program of meetings with local financial entities in Havana. The delegation, formed by 20 businessmen, has been looking for possibilities of investment in the island. Diplomatic relations between Havana and Nassau were established on November 30, 1974. (Prensa Latina, 21/3/02)

March 23: British aviation experts have advised travelers not to take internal flights in Cuba. This follows an Aerotaxi airline crash, which killed all 16 tourists and crew on board. Although this is the first fatal accident suffered by Aerotaxi - a small domestic airline owned by the state organisation Cuban Corporation of Aviation (CASCA) - it is one in a series of accidents involving CASCA airlines in recent years. (The Daily Telegraph, 23/3/02)

March 24: Honduras plans to sign tourism cooperation agreements with Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, Tourism Minister Thierry de Pierrefeu said. The minister told the press that negotiations were underway and agreements would be signed shortly. (EFE, 24/3/02)

Exile Community

March 4: A group of Cuban exile leaders launched a 90-day boycott against Mexican products and tourism, a protest against Mexico for allowing the Cuban government to arrest 21 young men who stormed Mexico's embassy in Havana. More than 100 members of anti-Castro organizations voted for the boycott. The group, however, lacks the support of the Cuban American National Foundation, Directorio Revolucionario, Hermanos al Rescate, Movimiento Democracia, Municipios de Cuba en el Exilio, and Unión Liberal Cubana, which have not joined the boycott and blames Fidel Castro for the arrest of the asylum seekers. (EFE, Sun Sentinel, 4/3/02)

March 6: Cuban exiles in the United States are urging Mexican lawmakers to investigate the incident in which 21 young Cubans were ousted from the Mexican Embassy in Havana. The Miami-based Democracy Movement - made up of moderate Cuban exiles - says it wants the Mexican congress to investigate the way officials handled the Cubans. (Voice of the Americas, 6/3/02)

March 14: A Cuban exile organization in Miami is launching a campaign for greater support of "civil resistance in Cuba." According to Directorio Democrático Cubano spokesperson, Marilú del Toro, "the campaign's objective will be to obtain greater and more decisive assistance for the internal opposition, as well as international support, particularly from former communist countries from Eastern Europe." (EFE, 14/3/02)

March 17: The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) expressed satisfaction with the recent turn in Mexican foreign policy towards Cuba and is opening a branch office in Mexico as part of its new relationship with the Mexican government. (Notimex, 17/3/02)

March 18: Cuban American U.S. Congresspersons, Lincoln Díaz-Balart and Iliana Ros-Lehtinen are taking action to obtain the release of nearly 30 Cubans currently detained at Guantánamo Naval Base, in Cuba. The Cuban refugees are confined in detention centers apart from those housing the 300 alleged Taliban or Al-Qaida prisoners, captured in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. The Cubans were taken to the base after separate unsuccessful attempts to reach U.S. shores in the last few months. (AFP, 18/3/02)

March 18: The Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF) is seething over comments made by U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill regarding the long-standing policy that bans American tourists from traveling to Cuba and spending their money on the Communist-ruled island. "I think Mr. O'Neill would do well to bone up on information regarding the role that Fidel Castro has played and continues to play in terrorism. I think that if he knew that, he wouldn't be making those statements that he has made," said Mariela Ferretti, a spokesperson for CANF. (CNS News, 18/3/02)

March 28: The Eriberto Mederos trial should remain in Miami because some government witnesses are elderly and should not be forced to travel and because last year's Cuban spy case showed an impartial jury could be seated in that city, the federal prosecutor said in a court filing. Mederos recently requested that his trial be moved because he would be denied a fair jury given "deeply rooted" anti-Castro sentiment in the exile community and "inflammatory" pretrial media coverage. Eriberto Mederos has been accused of torturing Cuban detainees while he worked in a Cuban hospital. (The Miami Herald, 28/3/02)

Foreign Affairs

March 1: The organization Reporters Without Borders (RWB) lodged a complaint following the assault of two Reuters journalists by Cuban police. A RWB letter to Cuban Minister of the Interior, Abelardo Colomé Ibarra, requests that an inquiry is conducted into the physical abuse suffered by Andrew Cawthorne and Alfredo Tedeschi on February 27 as they covered the forceful entry of a score of Cubans into the Mexican embassy in Havana. The InterAmerican Press Society (IPS) also condemned the assault on the reporters. (EFE, 1/3/02)

March 2: At a news conference, Mexico's ambassador to Cuba, Ricardo Pascoe Pierce, said the occupation of the embassy was too sophisticated to have been spontaneous. "We believe there may be some intellectual author behind them," said Pascoe. However, he declined to elaborate. (Sun Sentinel, 3/3/02)

March 3: Mexican newspapers reported that Fidel Castro would attend on March 21 and 22 the Summit on development to be held in the Mexican city of Monterrey. A La Jornada headline, quoting sources close to the Mexican President, informed that Castro would attend the International Conference on Financing for Development. (AFP, 4/3/02)

March 4: Mexican Foreign Minister, Jorge Castañeda's statements regarding the Mexican embassy incidents in Havana were strongly criticized in Cuban TV's, the "Round Table" (Mesa Redonda). The Round Tables, featuring commentary on current events, were Fidel Castro's brainchild and date back to the events involving young rafter Elián González. They are broadcast live on a daily basis by one of Cuban TV's only two channels. (Notinet, 4/3/02)

March 4: A new orthopedic hospital similar to the Frank País Hospital in the Cuban capital, will be built by the Cuban Ministry of Construction in the Yemenite city of Sanaa. The hospital is part of a cooperation agreement signed by Professor Rodrigo Alvarez Cambras, director of the Frank País Scientific Complex in Havana and president of the Cuban-Arab Friendship Association. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/3/02)

March 4: A treaty establishing the limits of Cuban and Honduran maritime borders in the Atlantic is almost ready for endorsement, according to Cuban Chargé d' Affaires, Jacinto Pablos Muñoz. (La Jornada, 5/3/02)

March 5: Cuban Ambassador Jose Ramón Rodríguez held talks with Member of Iranian Majlis Presiding Board Hossein Hashemi on parliamentary cooperation. In his meeting with the Cuban ambassador, Hashemi expressed pleasure with the excellent Tehran-Havana relations and

cooperation of the two countries in the conferences of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (IRNA, 5/3/02)

March 5: According to Mexican President Vicente Fox, relations between Cuba and Mexico remain "excellent" in the wake of the incident at the Mexican embassy in Havana. "Our relations with the Cuban government remain as before or even better because we could talk with President Castro in a direct manner," Fox said to foreign press correspondents. (EFE, 5/3/02)

March 5: In a live television appearance Fidel Castro said the occupation of Mexico's embassy by 21 young men did not harm relations between the two nations. Castro said he considered Fox "a man of honor" and insisted that he had "no problem" with the Mexican president's brief meeting with Cuban dissidents three weeks before during a visit here. Referring to Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Jorge Castañeda, Castro added: "We do not say (...) that Castaneda was responsible for what happened," (...) "His words were manipulated." (...) "But, I warn him not to play with phrases". (AP, 6/3/02)

March 5: In an address on Cuban state TV, Fidel Castro said he had ordered an investigation into the beating of two Reuters journalists during the incident at the Mexican embassy in Havana. The pair were struck by police with batons, and had two cameras taken. "We've been in contact with them, they've behaved decently, they understand the police did not mean to attack journalists. But imagine what it was like, a small group of police with a bus launched at them and nearly killing them," he said. (Reuters, 6/3/02)

March 5: Fidel Castro was resentful of comments by Mexican ambassador Ricardo Pascoe that Mexico had imposed a condition of nonviolence on the eviction of the 21 Cubans from its premise. In an address on Cuban state TV, Castro said: "As if we were going to toss grenades in there. I'm sorry, that's fiction." "It was me who gave the instruction not to use or carry weapons." (Reuters, 6/3/02)

March 6: Mexico's ambassador to Cuba said that the 21 Cubans who drove a bus into his embassy were directed by someone wishing to sway Mexico's human rights vote. "I believe that (the incident) was intentional. The idea was to corner Mexico on the eve of the voting in the UN Human Rights Commission," said Ricardo Pascoe in an interview with the press. (AFP, 6/3/02)

March 8: Health Partners International of Canada has announced it is teaming up with concerned Canadian humanitarians to make its latest contribution in an ongoing humanitarian medical aid program to the people of Cuba. The program was inspired by the late Pierre Elliot Trudeau, and has since seen more than \$23 million (wholesale) in donated Canadian medicines, medical supplies and vaccines delivered to Cuba. (CNW, 8/3/02)

March 8: Cuba and Spain have decided to strengthen their joint drug enforcement operation as several Spanish citizens, some of them residing in Cuba, have been involved in the illegal drug trade. The two countries' Joint Commission showed interest in increasing bilateral cooperation in that field. (World Data Service, 8/3/02)

March 11: An Ontario businessman goes to trial in Philadelphia on charges he conspired to trade with an enemy of the United States. The precedent-setting case stems from the longstanding trade embargo the U.S. has imposed on Cuba and marks the first time a Canadian has been charged for business conducted while still a resident of Canada. James Sabzali begins a trial on a 76-count indictment by the U.S. Justice Department that he and his colleagues breached the Trading With the Enemy Act. The consequences for Mr. Sabzali, and for other Canadian businesses who have been trading in Cuba, are severe. If convicted, Mr. Sabzali could spend the rest of his life in jail and face a penalty of about \$2 million. (National Post, 11/3/02)

March 12: Two hundred Cubans, reportedly the most to seek asylum in recent years, arrived in Madrid's international airport, on separate flights, over the weekend. At least 92 of the 210 Cubans have been given permission to leave the airport where they have been confined and have entered Spain, officials confirmed. The 210 asylum-seekers were all passengers arriving on the scheduled flights between Havana and Moscow that have to make a refueling stop in Madrid. (EFE, AP, 12/3/02)

March 12: Japan decided to extend 480, 000 U.S. dollars in emergency aid to the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) to help Cuba, which was hit hard by hurricane Michelle last November, the Foreign Ministry said. (Xinhua, 12/3/02)

March 14: Another group of Cubans, this one of 49, filed for political asylum at Madrid's Barajas airport during a layover of the two last flights from Havana before a required transit visa goes into effect for Cuban nationals, airport officials told the press. (EFE, 14/3/02)

March 14: The Argentine Senate formally asked the government not to support any new U.N. resolutions condemning Cuba's human rights record. The Senate resolution was announced after Foreign Ministry officials predicted that Argentina would back a U.S. sponsored resolution denouncing the human rights situation in Cuba at the next meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The document was approved by all senators present with the exception of three from the governing Justicialista (Peronist) Party and two others from provincial parties. (EFE, 14/3/02)

March 15: Nicaraguan President Enrique Bolaños has confirmed that the Cuban exile will not represent his country at the annual UN Convention on Human Rights in Geneva. Nicaraguan Foreign Affairs Minister, Norman Caldera, has told the press that the president's decision "does not constitute a change in Nicaraguan foreign policy towards Cuba, which remains the same." (EFE, 15/3/02)

March 16: The governments of Cuba and Sweden have signed a judicial cooperation agreement to allow prisoners to serve sentences in their native countries so as to facilitate their contact with families. Under the agreement, citizens of either country standing trial on the territory of the other, can serve sentences in their native land. Cuba has signed similar agreements with 22 other countries. (Xinhua, 16/3/02)

March 16: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage arrived in Berlin from Argelia, where he will meet with top German government officials. During his stay, Lage will attend the inaugural gala of the International Tourism Fair of which Cuba is the guest of honor. (Radio Habana Cuba, 17/3/02)

March 17: More than 50 Peruvian legislators have signed a document urging President Alejandro Toledo not to support a possible condemnation of Cuba at the annual session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) in Geneva, according to a statement published in Lima. (EFE, 17/3/02)

March 17: Fidel Castro said that president Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, could speak for him and his revolutionary ideas at the International Conference on Financing for Development in the Mexican city of Monterrey. "Even if I don't go, we, I, feel represented in your words," Castro told Chávez in a telephone call during a marathon live broadcast of the Venezuelan leader's weekly "Hello President" television and radio program. (Reuters, 17/3/02)

March 18: Cuba and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have decided to establish diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. The two sides signed an agreement in Cairo, Egypt. The UAE was the only Arab country that had not established diplomatic ties with Cuba, although there are cultural exchanges between the two countries. (Xinhua, 20/3/02)

March 19: President Eduardo Duhalde announced that Argentina will vote in favor of a resolution condemning Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva. In Cuba "many rights are ignored, including the right to petition the government, enter and leave the country, travel freely and political rights," the president told the press. He said this has been Argentina's "historic" position and categorically denied that the country's stance has been influenced by U.S. foreign policy. (EFE, 20/3/02)

March 20: The Czech Republic will not propose a draft resolution on human rights violation in Cuba during the current annual session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. The final decision was made at the time Foreign Minister Jan Kavan participated in the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico. Alexander Slaby, Czech ambassador to the UN in Geneva, said the decision would be made by the week's end. "If we decided to propose the draft resolution, it would be the same text as last year and that means no progress would be made. It is necessary to seek alternative forms of addressing the target," Deputy Foreign Minister Pavel Vosalik said. Vosalik said the Czech decision not to submit the resolution does not mean the human rights situation in Cuba has improved. "We came to the conclusion that there are other possibilities how to communicate with Cuba. At this time, we are consulting all possibilities that could result in changes in Cuba and if there is an initiative, we will support it," Vosalik said. (CTK, 21/3/02)

March 20: Fidel Castro arrived in Monterrey, Mexico, for the UN Conference for Financing on Development. (Granma, 21/3/02)

March 21: Cuban expertise in combating the dengue virus is being employed in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, where there has been a serious outbreak. Cuban medical specialist, Eric Martínez Torres, who is a consultant with the Pan-American Health Organization, is in Brazil at the invitation of the city's mayor to help the authorities fight dengue fever, reported local press. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/3/02)

March 21: Fidel Castro ridiculed efforts by rich nations to reduce global poverty, saying they were masters of a "genocidal" economic system that condemns billions to misery and deprivation. Castro criticized the current world economic order as "a system of looting and exploitation". "The world economic system today is a gigantic casino", said Castro in his speech at the Summit of Monterrey within the framework of the United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development (ICFD). (Xinhua, Reuters, 21/3/02)

March 21: Fidel Castro made a sudden exit from the U.N. Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, citing "a special situation created by my presence at this summit." Castro left after addressing the opening session of the Conference, apologizing for his hasty departure by saying he found himself "obliged to return to my country immediately." Castro said Cuban National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon would head up the country's delegation for the remainder of the conference. (EFE, 21/3/02)

March 21: Fidel Castro met with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Colombian President Andres Pastrana before leaving the U.N. International Conference on Financing for Development. Officials of the Cuban delegation who attended the meeting refrained from revealing the details of what the leaders discussed. Officials of the Colombian delegation said Castro and Pastrana discussed the ongoing peace negotiations in Havana between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN). (Xinhua, 21/3/02)

March 21: Cuba announced that it would not adhere to the Consensus of Monterrey, the final declaration of the United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development. Cuba said that the text does not respond to the needs of the world's poor countries. "We won't uphold a document that seems to us far from meeting the needs societies demand at this moment,"

Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, told reporters. (Xinhua, 21/3/02)

March 21: Mexico did not receive any suggestion from the U.S. government to prevent a meeting between U.S. President George W. Bush and his Cuban counterpart Fidel Castro, Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda said. He said he was unaware of the circumstances referred to by Castro when he announced he was leaving the U.N. Conference on Financing for Development, but noted that the Cuban president had anticipated he would remain in Monterrey for "a minimum amount of time." "There was no pressure, influence, deal, request, or any other such thing from any sector of the United States, including the president (Bush), his aides or any other U.S. source," to prevent Castro from meeting Bush at the conference, Castañeda told a news conference. He also denied that last-minute changes had been made to the conference agenda to prevent the presidents from meeting or that Mexico had made any such suggestions to Cuba. "No authorized official of the Mexican government has made any such proposal in any way or at any time to the Cuban government," Castañeda insisted. (EFE, 21/3/02)

March 22: Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly when asked repeatedly why Castro had left, would say only that someone had offended his leader. "We received very senior people from the Mexican government before the conference who indicated they had been subjected to U.S. government pressure, specifically threats from President Bush that he would not come to Monterrey if Fidel Castro came," said Alarcón. "We hadn't said anything about the heart of this matter until now that we see that we have been forced to," Alarcón said. "It's unfortunate that this unjust action of the United States has had some degree of success." "This is not about a head of state not coming to the meeting, but rather about one who was prevented from coming," Alarcón added. Alarcón had harsh words for Mexican Foreign Relations Secretary Jorge Castaneda, who he said knew about the U.S. pressure when he denied at a news conference that he knew of any pressure placed on the Cuban leader. Alarcón said Castaneda's statements were "fundamentally false. He knew it and Cuba knew it." (AP, Reuters, 22/3/02)

March 22: Mexican Chancery spokesperson, Gloria Abella, has requested Cuba to reveal the names of the Mexican officials that allegedly asked Castro to leave the Monterrey Summit. (AFP, 22/3/02)

March 23: Peru is pushing for a Latin American mechanism that can look into the situation of human rights in Cuba in coordination with Cuban authorities, Peruvian Foreign Minister Diego García Sayán has told the press. García Sayán ruled out the possibility that the immediate political outcome of President Bush's visit to Lima would be Peruvian support of a U.S.-sponsored condemnatory resolution on Cuba at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. He said that a possibility of a dialogue with Havana is being considered, in search for options other than resolutions by the Commission in Geneva, to protect human rights on the island. (EFE, 23/3/02)

March 23: In Cuban TV's "Round Table", Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, reiterated that "there was U.S. pressure" so that President Castro would leave the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico. "(Fidel Castro) was asked not to attend, by an official with authority within the Mexican government" whom he refused to identify. (EFE, 23/3/02)

March 23: Fifteen Cuban medical doctors were sent to the Chitungwiza General Hospital, in Zimbabwe. The team is part of the 106 doctors who were recruited from Cuba and will be undergoing a four-week orientation course at the hospital before they start work. The arrival of the Cuban doctors has helped alleviate the shortage of on-call doctors. (The Herald, 23/3/02)

March 25: European Union Development Commissioner Poul Nielson and Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Angel Dalmau Fernandez were meeting in Brussels to discuss bilateral relations, an EU

spokesman told the press. According to the spokesman, the meeting between Nielson and Dalmau Fernandez was requested by Cuban officials. Cuba is expected to ask permission to sign the Cotonu Convention, which has governed relations between the EU and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of nations since 2000. Cuba belongs to the ACP group but is the only one of its 78 members that has not signed the Cotonu Convention. The EU has not allowed Cuba to sign the agreement because of the communist-ruled island's poor human rights record. (EFE, 25/3/02)

March 25: Mexican lawmakers from the nation's three major parties criticized President Vicente Fox for reportedly pressuring Fidel Castro to leave early at the UN International Summit on Financing for Development in Monterrey. National Action Party (PAN) Senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos said Fox should better explain the incident and said Foreign Relations Secretary Jorge Castañeda may be asked to appear before lawmakers. (The News, 26/3/02)

March 25: Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, Ricardo Pascoe, denied news reports that he had submitted his resignation and refused to comment on the current state of bilateral relations. (Notimex, 25/3/02)

March 26: The official Cuban newspaper Granma accused Mexico's "diabolical" and "Machiavellian" foreign minister as the man responsible for President Fidel Castro's walkout from the UN Conference on Financing for Development. A statement by the ruling Communist Party blamed the Mexican minister, Jorge Castañeda, for pressuring Castro to stay away from the Monterrey meeting to avoid a politically awkward crossing with U.S. President George W. Bush. The statement also accuses Castañeda and the US State Department of organizing a "complot" against Cuba in the UN Commission of Human Rights, in Geneva. (Reuters, AFP, 25/3/02)

March 26: The Dominican government apologized to the Cuban ambassador to the Dominican Republic for the attack on the Cuban official delegation he was heading during the commemoration of the 107th anniversary of the signing of the Montecristi Manifest by Gómez and Martí. Several local newspapers printed that "anti-Castro exiles from Miami and the Dominican Republic hurled rocks" at the ambassador and other Cuban diplomats during an official event in Montecristi. (EFE, 26/3/02)

March 26: Any Latin American country that gives in to U.S. pressure to sponsor a resolution condemning Cuba's human rights record will be a "Judas," the Cuban foreign minister said. Felipe Pérez Roque told the 53-nation U.N. Human Rights Commission, in Geneva, that any country that made such a move would be acting out of lack of courage to stand up to Washington rather than real concern about the human rights situation in Cuba. (AP, 26/3/02)

March 26: The Foreign Affairs Commission of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies convened to approve a formal request to Fidel Castro's government for any proof they could provide that might lead to a resolution of the situation created by Castro's abrupt departure from the Monterrey Summit. (El Universal, 26/3/02)

March 26: In a speech before the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Mexican Chancellor Jorge Castañeda expressed indirect criticism of Cuba. Castañeda said that "(Mexican) President (Vicente) Fox's foreign policy does not exclude listening to groups that promote human rights and democracy in nations where they are precariously observed." (El Universal, 26/3/02)

March 26: Eight Cubans that remain at Barajas international airport in Spain have initiated a hunger strike after Spanish authorities refused their requests for political asylum. (Notimex, 26/3/02)

March 26: On Cuban TV's daily "Round Table", Cuban journalists called Mexican Chancellor Jorge Castañeda a "professional liar", a "political transvestite", "subservient", "machiavellian" and a "renegade without ideology", and accused him of attempting to give Mexican foreign policy an 180° turn. (Grupo Reforma, 27/3/02)

March 27: Mexican Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Gustavo Iruegas, and Cuban Ambassador Jorge Bolaños have held their first meeting to attempt to settle and resolve the diplomatic confrontation between the two countries. (El Universal, 28/3/02)

March 27: Mexican President Vicente Fox declared on Mexican TV's *Círculo Rojo* (Red Circle) that Cuban-Mexican relations are "very good, as always," without any further comment. (AFP, 28/3/02)

March 27: Fidel Castro bid farewell to Botswana's president Festus G. Mogae, who concluded an official visit to the island. This was the second time a head of state from the sub-Saharan African nation has officially visited Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/3/02)

March 28: Member countries of the UN Commission on Human Rights are drafting a condemnatory resolution against Cuba that asserts that Fidel Castro's government has made "unsatisfactory progress" with regards to human rights. It will also be demanded that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, visit the island to appraise the situation in situ. (El Universal, 28/3/02)

March 28: A diplomat assigned to the Cuban Embassy in Panama City disappeared along with his family in what is suspected of being an attempt to defect, the press reported. The newspapers *El Panama America* and *La Critica* cited unidentified persons who indicated that the diplomat, whose name has not been disclosed, worked in the Cuban Embassy's trade office. (EFE, 28/3/02)

March 28: The Czech Republic said that it has detected "positive, albeit insufficient indications" that the Cuban regime is willing to improve the human rights situation on the island, and signaled its support for talks to advance in this process. "Cuba still has a long road to travel," Czech Deputy Prime Minister Jan Kavan told a meeting of the 53-nation U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The Czech Republic not only "welcomes a dialogue between the European Union and Cuba, but also welcomes the efforts of all the countries of the international community who have not been indifferent to the human rights situation in Cuba," Kavan, who is also his country's foreign minister, told the assembly, "although we continue to be critical of the human rights situation in Cuba, we will continue to support dialogue and communication as the means to support the efforts to democratize Cuba which are included in the framework of bilateral contacts." (EFE, 28/3/02)

March 28: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque has affirmed that Cuba would be willing to subject itself to a human rights inspection if the same were applied to the rest of the world, particularly the United States. Speaking at a press conference in Geneva in the context of his participation in the 58th UN Human Rights Commission, the Cuban foreign minister stressed that no one at the commission even considers presenting a resolution of condemnation against Washington's human rights record. He said neither has he encountered anyone among the numerous ministers and delegates participating in the session who understands why the US government insists on condemning Cuba while opposing any condemnation of Israeli army abuse in occupied Palestinian territories. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/3/02)

March 29: Cuba and France signed several cooperation agreements on scientific research, public health, social development, and cartography. The accords, worth \$2.8 million, were signed

by Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Minister Marta Lomas and French Ambassador to Cuba Jean Levy. (EFE, 29/3/02)

March 29: The governor of the Venezuelan state of Lara, Luis Reyes, is in Havana to review the Oct. 20, 2000, bilateral cooperation agreement signed by Havana and Caracas. The Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement allows Venezuelan patients to receive free medical treatment in Cuba as part of the payment for the oil that Havana purchases at a discount. The agreement also encourages cooperation in agricultural products, tourism, education, sports and cultural relations. (EFE, 29/3/02)

March 30: Six Cubans who staged a hunger strike at Madrid's Barajas Airport in an effort to pressure Spain into granting them political asylum were flown to Moscow when their petitions were denied. (EFE, 31/3/02)

March 30: Speaking to a crowd of thousands at a village in Sierra Maestra, Fidel Castro confirmed his intent to call a truce of silence regarding the bilateral diplomatic conflict with Mexico. Explaining that he would not touch on the subject, Castro said that "Everything has its time and its place." (La Jornada, 31/3/02)

March 30: The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the Israeli "aggression being committed against the heroic Palestinian people and their authorities", an official note said. "We demand an end to the isolation and hounding of Yasir Arafat, and an immediate end to the crimes and abuse perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces." (Granma, 30/3/02)

Security

March 19: Ana Belén Montes, the Defense Intelligence Agency's senior analyst for Cuban issues pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Washington to being a spy for Fidel Castro's government. Montes admitted that for 16 years she used her highly classified position to steal top-secret information and pass it along to Cuba. Ana Belén Montes apparently was motivated not by money, but by her moral outrage at U.S. policy toward the island. Espionage could carry the death penalty, but federal prosecutors agreed to a 25-year term if she tells the FBI and other investigators all the details she knows about Cuban intelligence activities, according to the plea agreement. Judge Ricardo M. Urbina set a September sentencing date, meaning Montes has six months to be debriefed by investigators. (The Washington Post, 20/3/02)

Terrorism

March 4: The Panamanian Public Ministry has requested that Luis Posada Carriles and three other anti-Castro exiles in police custody in Panama be tried on four charges, which did not include the attempted murder of Fidel Castro. (Notimex, 4/3/02)

March 6: Representatives of the Colombian government and the guerrilla organization National Liberation Army (ELN) have initiated a new round of negotiations in Cuba during which both parties will study the possibility of a truce, reported the Colombian Presidency. (EFE, 6/3/02)

March 6: Cuba will remain on the US State Department list of terrorist nations. Although Cuba has offered its condolences, blood and airports for diverted airliners after the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States, and provided intelligence to help the United States track the culprits, the US State Department considers it is not enough. "We were convinced that it was deliberately of no assistance. Given Cuba's history there could have been more information at their disposal to provide us," a State Department official told the press. "There is no inclination in this building or

anywhere in the executive branch to consider that Cuba is anywhere near qualified to come off the terrorism list," he said. (Reuters, 6/3/02)

March 12: Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an official statement in relation with the Posada Carriles case in Panama. (Granma, 12/3/02)

March 14: The Panamanian government has not received any request from El Salvador for the extradition of Luis Posada Carriles, Panama's Foreign Minister Jose Miguel Alemán said. Posada Carriles, together with three other men, were arrested in Panama on November 17, 2000, for attempting to murder Cuban leader Fidel Castro during the Ibero-American Summit. Posada Carriles entered Panama with a false Salvadoran passport under the name of Franco Mena. (Xinhua, 14/3/02)

March 16: A scheduled meeting in Havana between the Colombian government and the ELN has been cancelled "so that both parties can deliberate. (World Data Service, 16/3/02)

March 18: Cuba's Ambassador to Panama, Carlos Zamora, has denounced a plan by four terrorists, including Luis Posada Carriles, to break out of prison. The four were arrested in November 2000, charged with planning to assassinate Fidel Castro during the 10th Ibero-American Summit in Panama City. According to the Cuban diplomat in Panama, a terrorist cell led by Santiago Alvarez Madrina and coordinated out of Miami plans to break the terrorists out of their prison cells in Panama City. The Cuban ambassador said that Alvarez Madrina is also responsible for numerous terrorist actions against tourist sites in Cuba, including an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the world famous Tropicana nightclub in Havana. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/3/02)

March 28: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque urged Panama's authorities to open a trial of the four people arrested in Panama during the 10th Ibero- American Summit for their involvement in a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro. "Cuba expect these terrorists to be brought to trial, or the Panamanian government will take enormous international responsibility if these individuals do not face justice," Pérez Roque said in Geneva. (Xinhua, 28/3/02)

March 29: Colombian Ambassador to Cuba Julio Londoño Paredes reported progress in peace talks between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group launched in Havana. "There have not been any disagreements, since both the government and the ELN want to reach a full accord with a cease fire and an end to hostilities," the ambassador told the press. Also participating in the talks in Havana are Colombian Peace Commissioner Camilo Gómez and ELN leaders Pablo Beltrán, Ramiro Vargas and Oscar Santos. Furthermore, diplomats from Spain, Cuba, France, Norway and Switzerland are taking part. (EFE, 29/3/02)

US-Cuba Relations

March 1: The United States urged Cuba to be fair to 21 men it whisked out of the Mexican Embassy to an unknown destination after they stormed the Havana compound in a bid to flee the island. "We believe they must be treated justly, transparently, without reprisals and in accordance with international humanitarian standards," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told a news briefing. (Reuters, 1/3/02)

March 2: A young Cuban man broke into the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana in an apparent bid to get out of the island. "He asked to go home and we facilitated his way home," said U.S. Interests Section spokesman Gonzalo Gallegos. The US official said the man was apparently "under the influence of alcohol" when he cleared the 15-foot metal fence surrounding the American mission in Havana. (Sun Sentinel, 2/3/02)

March 2: US Secretary of State Colin Powell said that he does not expect democratization or an improvement in the human rights situation in Cuba so long as Fidel Castro remains in power. "He has demonstrated over the many, many years of his rule that he is not interested in human rights and democratization of his society, or opening up the economic system," Powell said. "So as long as he's there, I doubt that we will see the kinds of improvements that the Cuban people deserve and which would allow Cuba to become a democratized nation in this hemisphere," Powell said. (AFP, 2/3/02)

March 3: The former head of the U.S. war on drugs, General Barry McCaffrey praised Fidel Castro's efforts against the world-wide scourge and said the country represented no threat to the United States. "Cuba is an island of resistance to the drug threat," McCaffrey, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy from 1996 through 2000, said after a meeting with Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl Castro. He added, "I asked President Castro to release 250 political prisoners," noting Fidel Castro gave no response. "There is no question this is not a democratic system and the economic system does not work," McCaffrey said, although he insisted on the need for more dialogue between the two countries. Gen. Barry McCaffrey, now a university professor visited the island with the Center for Defense Information. (Reuters, AP, 3/3/02)

March 4: Cuba has accused Washington of pressuring the European Union in order to regain its lost seat at the United Nations Human Rights Commission. A press release by Cuba's permanent UN mission affirmed that at a gathering with Latin American ambassadors last February 15, the US ambassador said that his job depends on getting that seat back. The US ambassador called on Latin American diplomats to vote against Cuba at the commission's upcoming session in Geneva. (Radio Habana Cuba 4/3/02)

March 4: The government of Cuba continues to violate most of the political, civil and religious rights of its citizens, according to the State Department's annual human rights report for 2001. The document states that the Cuban government "continues to violate systematically the fundamental civil and political rights of its citizens." (EFE, 4/3/02)

March 4: The widow of William Morgan, an American who was part of Fidel Castro's Cuban guerrilla army, has asked that his remains be returned to his hometown. "This is where he belongs," said Olga Goodwin. Her husband, William Morgan, was executed by a Cuban firing squad in 1961 at age 33. Morgan was charged with state treason and faced execution. U.S. State Department and FBI documents that have since been declassified contain no evidence that Morgan was associated with the CIA as the Cubans had said. Goodwin said she had not received an answer to her request from the Cuban Interests Section in Washington but will continue asking the Castro government for a resolution. (AP, 4/3/02)

March 4: The Cuban government has signed a new round of contracts to buy \$32 million of food from American agricultural firms. Cuba last year agreed to buy \$35 million in American food to replenish its reserves after Hurricane Michelle battered the island in early November. The second round of sales has no link to the hurricane, the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council said. (AP, 4/3/02)

March 5: In an address on Cuban state TV, Fidel Castro referred to the recent US State Department report on human rights in Cuba: "There's so much hypocrisy, so many lies, so much demagoguery, so much cynicism, that I think that document is only useful as toilet paper," he said, suggesting the report was timed to coincide with the Mexican Embassy events. (Reuters, 6/3/02)

March 6: The Bush administration has begun a review of Cuba policy that will include an assessment of whether Cuba can disrupt U.S. military communications through the Internet, a

senior official said. That issue will be examined along with others to determine Cuba's potential to damage U.S. interests, the official said. The senior official said Cuba's involvement in international terrorism also will be part of the review. In addition, the administration is examining the possibility of seeking an indictment against Fidel Castro in the 1996 shutdown by MiG jet fighters of two Miami-based private planes near Cuban air space, the official said. (AP, 6/3/02)

March 8: The Cuban government published an official statement denouncing the United States for the steps it has taken to condemn the Caribbean island at the coming session of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (World Data Service, 8/3/02)

March 11: Two months after President George W. Bush nominated him, Cuban-American diplomat Otto Reich was sworn in Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, the State Department's top official for Latin America. (EFE, 11/3/02)

March 12: Cuba will buy apples and dried peas from various companies located in the state of Washington. The U.S.-Cuba Economic Trade Council said in its weekly newsletter that Alimport, Cuba's official agency for buying food, will purchase around 1,000 metric tons of apples and 20,000 metric tons of dried peas with a combined market value of \$4.5 million U.S. dollars. All sales with Cuba, by law, are on a cash-and-carry basis. (CNSNews, 13/3/02)

March 12: The Bush administration will not open its markets to Cuba, the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Otto Reich said at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Reich said providing Cuba, under Fidel Castro, economic assistance would not bring democracy. "One way we can help, by the way, is not throwing a lifeline to a failed, corrupt, dictatorial, murderous regime. (...) We are not going to help Fidel Castro stay in power by opening up our markets to Cuba," he said. (Reuters, EFE 12/3/02)

March 13: The Bush administration opposes a proposal pending in Congress to allow private U.S. financing of food sales to Cuba, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman said. "The administration strongly objects to any changes in existing law regulating the sale of food and medicines to Cuba," Veneman said in a letter to negotiators. "We oppose repeal of prohibition on private financing by U.S. persons of sales of agricultural commodities to Cuba." (Reuters, 13/3/02)

March 14: In a fast-escalating war of words between the White House's new Latin America policy chief and Fidel Castro's government, Havana called Otto Reich a "terrorist" with a "sick" hatred of the Cuban Revolution. Cuba's Communist Party, in a short communique on the front page of its daily Granma, announced state TV would air a round-table discussion on "Otto Reich: a Terrorist in the U.S. Government." (Reuters, 14/3/02)

March 14: Former Russian president and Nobel laureate Mikhail Gorbachev addressed E.N. Thompson Forum on World Issues on US policy towards Cuba: "This is my view, and I speak my mind," said the former president, as he urged more than 2,000 spectators at the Lied Center to call a halt to the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba and not "demonize Fidel Castro." Without the embargo, "the democratic process in Cuba would have started some time ago," Gorbachev suggested. (Lincoln Journal Star, 15/3/02)

March 15: During an interview with the press, US Secretary of State, Colin Powell said on Castro and Cuba: "He and his regime are anachronisms in a world that is rapidly changing. (...) As a result of remaining outside of this (democratic trend in the hemisphere), it has not thrived in a way that this exciting people with such talent could thrive if they were under a different system. (...) I think historic forces and pressures are such that Cuba eventually will be a part of this American revolutionary 21st century. How it will happen I don't know." (AP, 15/3/02)

March 15: Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill said that if Bush administration policy would let him, he would cut back on tracking down and fining U.S. citizens who travel to Cuba. Those resources would be used better in chasing terrorists, O'Neill said at a Senate hearing where his comments were a departure from official policy. O'Neill bypassed the chance to criticize Fidel Castro or his 43-year tenure in Cuba, never mentioning the man or the island by name. (AP, 15/3/02)

March 18: In an official statement published in the Communist Party daily Granma, Cuba announced it was holding Rafael Miguel Bustamante, an alleged Colombian drug trafficker sought in his homeland and the United States and challenged the U.S. government to sign an agreement allowing the two countries to cooperate in the fight against narcotics smuggling. (AP, 18/3/02)

March 19: Smugglers brought 71 Cuban migrants to the Florida Keys over a 29-hour period in the last days, according to the U.S. Border Patrol. A group of 18 migrants landed in Marathon and officials took 10 men, seven women and a child into custody. Later that night, Border Patrol agents took two Cuban men suspected to be the smugglers into custody. The next day, a group of 28 migrants were found in Key Largo and, hours later, a second group of 25 migrants landed at mile marker 73.5, officials said. Thirty-one men, 16 women and six children were taken into custody from those groups. Cubans who reach American soil generally are allowed to stay while those intercepted at sea are repatriated. (AP, 19/3/02)

March 19: President George W. Bush condemned Cuba as "an incredibly repressive regime," and urged UN condemnation of the regime in Havana. Asked whether he would urge voting against Cuba in meetings of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Bush replied: "I wouldn't say voting against." "I'm just going to remind the Human Rights Commission to remember that Cuba is an incredibly repressive regime. It's the one non-democratic government" in the Western Hemisphere, he told a roundtable of Latin American reporters. (AFP, 20/3/02)

March 19: The top U.S. drug enforcer thanked Cuba for capturing a Colombian drug smuggler but said Washington will continue anti-drug cooperation with the island only on a case-by-case basis. "Any capture of a fugitive that is known and wanted for drug trafficking is a strong step forward, and we are very pleased with that result," said Asa Hutchison, head of the Drug Enforcement Administration. "We are very grateful that the Colombian trafficker was apprehended," he said. But Hutchinson added the Bush administration had decided that future cooperation, arranged through telephone calls and other channels, would continue on an informal basis. "We certainly have a common interest there," he said. "By and large, we do not have formal relationships with them, and that is a decision of the government." (Reuters, 19/3/02)

March 19: The White House expressed approval of the Cuban government's recent deportation of a number of criminals wanted in the U.S. but denied the possibility of a future bilateral agreement on judicial cooperation. (Notimex, 19/3/02)

March 21: A bipartisan group of House members, including two from Missouri, unveiled controversial agenda to alter U.S. policy toward Cuba. House members criticized the Bush administration's Cuba policy, calling for an easing of the trade embargo and an end to restrictions on travel to Cuba by Americans. "Quite simply, our Cuba policy has failed," said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, a member of the House International Relations Committee. "After 40 years, the U.S. policy toward Cuba has yielded few results. I think it's time to try something new," He said that only through engagement can the United States promote democracy and improve human rights in Cuba. At a news conference, Flake recommended an end to restrictions that limit legal travel for Americans to those who have a professional interest in the island. For the most part, he said, Americans are unable to see what Fidel Castro has wrought. "Every American should have the right to see firsthand what a mess he has made of that island," Flake said. (AP, St. Louis Dispatch, 21/3/02)

March 21: Former president Jimmy Carter said he expects to win approval from the Bush administration to travel to Cuba -- the first former U.S. president to make such a trip during its more than four decades of Castro rule. "I expect to get their tacit approval, not their blessing," the Democrat said after a luncheon at the Carter Center. "We can't go, obviously, without the permission of the government. My understanding is that they will give that approval." He added: "The best way to bring about democratic changes in Cuba is obviously to have maximum commerce and trade and visitation by Americans and others who know freedom." "That's the best way to bring about change and not to punish the Cuban people themselves by imposing an embargo on them, which makes Castro seem to be a hero because he is defending his own people against the abuse of Americans." (CNN, The Dallas Morning News, 21, 23/3/02)

March 23: The United States bluntly denied that it had a hand in Fidel Castro's surprise departure from UN summit in Monterrey. Asked whether there was any truth to the Cuban allegations and reports that the United States was behind Castro's departure from the meeting a senior US official who declined to be named bluntly replied: "No." "We heard from the Mexicans that he was coming, and that he was leaving," said the official, who uttered another "no" on being asked a second time whether Washington had said or done anything to effect the departure. [For more on this, see section Foreign Affairs.] (AFP, 23/3/02)

March 25: The Bush administration is studying former President Carter's request to travel to Cuba this year. If he gets the green light, the White House wants Carter to push for human rights, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said. "The law is clear, the law will be obeyed," Fleischer said. And added that President Bush would want Carter to carry a "very direct, straightforward message" to the Cuban leadership. "In order to have human rights in Cuba, it's important for Fidel Castro to allow democracy to take root, to stop repression, to stop imprisonments, to bring freedom to the people of Cuba," Fleischer said. (AP, 25/3/02)

March 26: During a daily press briefing, the US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher avoided to add anything new on the recent Cuba-Mexico situation. Asked about the official Cuban newspaper accusations of Foreign Minister Castañeda Boucher answered: "I thought they accused somebody by name last week, too, but I don't remember completely the reports. But I thought last week they accused President Fox by name, and this week they're accusing Foreign Minister Castañeda by name. No, I don't have anything new to add to that". [For more on this, see section Foreign Affairs.] (US Department of State Daily Briefing, 26/3/02)

March 26: During a press briefing, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was asked what President Bush and President Fox say about a direct request from the U.S. government to the Mexican government, forcing Castro to leave the Monterrey summit. Fleischer answered: "That question was asked to the president directly and he answered it. And I think that the world knows that any time they have a choice between what Fidel Castro says and what anybody else says, you can believe anybody else". (CNN, 26/3/02)

March 27: Fidel Castro welcomed a plan by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to visit Cuba. In a public speech, Castro stressed that Carter -- under pressure from the White House to use such a trip to press Havana over human rights -- would be free to criticize his government while on Cuban soil. "We want him to see our country, not so that he supports us or anything like that, indeed so that he may make all the criticisms he wants," Castro said. "If he wants, we'll fill Revolution Square so they can criticize us as much as they want, because we are so convinced of the moral, ethical, ideological, political and human strength of our revolution." (Reuters, 28/3/02)

March 28: The Bush administration has stepped up support for a growing dissident movement in Cuba in an effort to speed up a peaceful transition to democracy, the top U.S. diplomat on the island said. Human rights activists have grown in numbers and become the voice of the Cuban people, persuading them to lose their fear, she said. Dissidents have collected more than 10,000

signatures calling for an unprecedented referendum on political reform of Cuba's one-party state. Their Varela Project has been publicly backed by the U.S. government. "The transition, in fact, is under way. I believe it started when Fidel Castro fainted in public," Vicki Huddleston, chief of the U.S. interests section in Havana, told reporters on a visit to Washington. The momentary collapse of the 75-year-old leader in June as he gave a speech under blistering sun reminded Cubans that he was mortal and a "biological solution" was possible, she said. When a minister cried "Long live Raúl" to the crowd, referring to Castro's brother and army chief Raul Castro, Cubans realized a political succession was planned that involved more of the same, "Fidelismo without Fidel," she said. "The people of Cuba don't want a succession, they want a transition. There is so much pent-up frustration," she said. "They want a name change and a generational change," Huddleston said. Fidel Castro will be 76 in August; Raúl, who is second in the Cuban hierarchy, will be 71 in June. (Reuters, AP, 28/3/02)

March 28: Radlo Foods LLC, headquartered in Watertown, Massachusetts, has announced that it has agreed to supply ten million fresh shell eggs to Cuba projected to begin in April 2002. This will mark the first time since the Cuban Revolution in 1959 that an American egg production and export company will sell US eggs to the Caribbean island nation, and the first time Cuba has bought eggs in more than 30 years. The agreement has been achieved in co-operation and support from the United Egg Producers of Atlanta, Georgia, the egg industry's trade association, and the New England Brown Egg Council, based in Augusta, Maine, representing New England's brown egg industry. The first shipment to Cuba will be New England brown eggs while on-going supplies of white eggs are expected to come from several states across the country. (PR Newswire, 28/3/02)

March 28: A Conference on US-Cuba Relations was organized by the Cuba Policy Foundation, the U.S.-Cuba Legal Forum, two members of the U.S. House of Representatives -- Jeff Flake, Republican of Arizona, and Bill Delahunt, Democrat of Massachusetts, who are part of a bipartisan initiative launched in the House to press for a change in policy--, and other US organisations. Academics, anti-embargo groups and politicians met to discuss ways to change Washington's long-standing policy of isolating Cuba, hailing the venue -- the Cuban exile-dominated city of Miami -- as a breakthrough in itself. They called it a challenge to the traditional portrayal of south Florida's large Cuban community as largely and vehemently committed to the four-decade-old U.S. economic embargo to pressure Fidel Castro into change. Speakers said America's economic embargo of Cuba must end and U.S. tourists allowed to visit the communist island while Fidel Castro is alive to pave the way for political change and rebuild ties between the two nations. U.S. representatives William Delahunt, Democrat-Massachusetts, and Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, were among a cadre of former U.S. diplomats, academics and activists addressing some 300 conference attendees, most of them Cuban-Americans from South Florida. (AP, Reuters, 28/3/02)