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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Fidel Castro's government pays its last respects to Pope John Paul II. Cubans elect municipal assemblies in local elections.

Economy: Cubans experience the second revaluation of the "convertible peso" in less than a month. The worst Cuban sugar harvest in a century nears its conclusion, with output not expected at much more than 1.3 million tonnes of raw sugar. Fidel Castro announces an increase in the island's minimum wage, more than doubling salaries of nearly 1.7 million Cuban workers. Cuba and Venezuela sign trade agreements for over \$400 million, and PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela) opens an office in Havana for its transactions in the Caribbean.

Foreign Affairs: The United Nations Commission on Human Rights backs a US sponsored resolution on the situation of human rights in Cuba. Fidel Castro harshly criticizes the European Union and Mexico for voting against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission. Raúl Castro pays an official visit to China, Laos, Malaysia and Vietnam. The European Union's legislative branch expresses its dissent with the executive over policy toward Cuba. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro strengthen their political and economic ties.

US-Cuba Relations: Fidel Castro demands that the United States immediately arrest and deport the alleged terrorist Luis Posada Carriles. Activists from across the country gather in Washington to protest US sanctions against Cuba. Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez launch in Havana the ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas) initiative against the US sponsored FTAA (Free Trade Agreement for the Americas).



Domestic Affairs

April 1: In a rare appearance on state TV, Cuba's top Catholic leader informed the communist country of Pope John Paul II's health problems, paying tribute to a leader he called a "moral reference for humanity." For many, Cardinal Jaime Ortega's comments were their first word of the serious downturn in the pontiff's health. Ortega praised the pope for coming to Cuba, calling the visit "unforgettable." He said that the pope also spoke his mind about differences of opinion with Fidel Castro, calling for openings in the island's political system. John Paul also urged the world to reach out to Cuba. "He came to Cuba as a messenger of truth, of love, of hope," Ortega said. (*The New York Times*, 1/4/05)

April 3: Cuban Catholics gathered in Havana's towering cathedral for Mass, led by Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the island's top Roman Catholic churchman. Church bells had rung out on Cuba to announce the death of Pope Paul II, the only pontiff ever to visit the country. Ortega extolled John Paul's virtues and his message of peace, love and justice, saying, "The pope stirred humanity, just like Jesus did." The cardinal passed through the church after Mass greeting members of the crowd, some of whom kissed his hand. Ortega plans to celebrate a funeral Mass for the pope at the Havana cathedral on April 4, and then travel to Rome to attend the pope's funeral there and participate in the conclave of cardinals that will elect John Paul's successor. Though he clearly did not want to mention himself as a candidate, Ortega did not reject the possibility that the future pope could come from Latin America. Granma, the Communist Party daily and official government voice, devoted extensive coverage to the pope's death. (AP, 3/4/05)

April 4: Fidel Castro, paying his last respects to a man he called an "indefatigable warrior" for peace and the world's poor, attended a funeral mass for Pope John Paul II in Havana Cathedral. It was only the second time Castro had attended a service in the cathedral since his 1959 revolution. Castro, dressed in a dark business suit instead of his customary uniform, was accompanied by members of Cuba's ruling Communist Party hierarchy for the two-hour ceremony. At the start of his funeral mass homily, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana and Cuba's top Catholic prelate, thanked Castro and his government for the "heartfelt" way they had reacted to the Pope's death. State-run television has given wide coverage of the funeral preparations in Rome, presenting the Pope as a world leader who cared for the poor and opposed modern capitalism and the war in Iraq. The mass was also attended by the highest ranking government and communist party authorities, including the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, Vice-President Carlos Lage, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, Culture Minister Abel Prieto and other officials. (Reuters, Radio Habana Cuba, 4/4/05)

April 5: Inmates in a Cuban prison set mattresses and other materials ablaze in violence that left several prisoners seriously injured. The disturbance, later controlled by Cuban authorities, was the second in less than 20 days at the Combinado del Este Prison, which houses from 4,000 to 5,000 inmates according to unofficial sources. Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation, learned of the disturbance from prisoners' relatives who were contacted by authorities. Cuba's government issued no official report on the incident at the prison in Havana, and it was unknown how the disturbance was controlled. Sanchez said that the unrest was the result of excessive sentences, poor food and insufficient medical care at the prison. (AP, El Nuevo Herald, 8/4/05)

April 7: "We have brought about a revolution to bring freedom and dignity to the individual, and I think it's insulting not to respect a person's right to believe", said Fidel Castro at the Havana International Conference Centre upon the death of Pope John Paul II. "Every revolutionary or politician should respect the beliefs and sentiments of individuals, whatever they are, because we have not fought to disrespect human beings", he added. (Juventud Rebelde, 8/4/05)

April 7: Fidel Castro said his government is willing to "support" the activities of the Catholic Church but only "legal and truthful activities." The leader also indicated that "in recent years tensions between the Catholic Church and the State have diminished." (AFP, 7/4/05)

April 7: The Cuban National Capitol (Capitolio Nacional) is once more illuminated. Its gardens, pavements and cupola are displaying a new lighting system. Neighbors, passersby and visitors to the capital could once again enjoy, after more than 20 years, an illuminated Capitolio, fruit of the restoration plan underway for the building. The system comprises 302 lights, extending from the lantern at the highest level of the building (92 meters) on which the white cupola rests, to lights in the exterior gardens. (Granma International, 7/4/05)

April 8: A photo exhibition of John Paul II was inaugurated at the "José Martí" Memorial, in Havana's Revolution Square. It includes pictures of Fidel Castro's visit to the Vatican, 1996, and the Pope's visit to the island two years later. (Granma, 8/4/05).

April 8: Some 500 films from 13 countries will compete at the III International low-budget Film Festival to take place in the eastern Cuban municipality of Gibara, according to organizers. Filmmakers from Mexico, Spain, Brazil, France, Argentina, Bolivia, Iran, Algeria, Russia, Italy, Australia, Finland and Cuba will compete in the categories of fiction and documentary. (*EFE*, 8/4/05)

April 11: An inmate who suffered severe burns in an uprising at Cuban prison has died, officials said. Freddy Ibanez, 35, died in a Havana hospital, badly burned when rioting prisoners doused fellow inmates with gasoline. Inmates at the Combinado del Este Prison set mattresses and materials ablaze in violence that left several prisoners seriously injured on April 5, said Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. "According to our investigations and despite the strict official silence regarding the riots of March 19 and April 5, it is very probable that several inmates died as a result of those incidents," said the communique from commission head Elizardo Sanchez. An official at a mortuary in west Havana confirmed Ibanez's body was expected to arrive there. Sanchez said that Interior Minister Abelardo Colome Ibarra went to the prison on the occasion of the latest disturbance, accompanied by several army generals and police commanders. (*CNN*, *EFE*, *Reuters*, 11/4/05)

April 11: Dissident Jorge Olivera is waiting for an exit permit from the Cuban government to leave to the US. The independent journalist managed to get a visa to the United States in 2002, and was preparing to head north when he was picked up in a government crackdown on political activists in March 2003. After serving 21 months, Olivera was released from prison in December for medical reasons. He has been ready to leave the country ever since but is still waiting on an exit permit from the Cuban government. "It's like I'm still jailed," Olivera told journalists. "Here I am still, deprived of my rights." Olivera's wife and two sons are also ready to leave the island, and started the necessary paperwork last fall. But they couldn't get exit permits because Olivera was still in prison. All Cuban citizens need permission from their government to leave their homeland. Olivera, 43, said immigration officials told him on January 6 the exit permits would be ready in no more than 45 days. The maximum period passed more than seven weeks ago. (*AP*, 11/4/05)

April 12: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said in Havana that the rhythm of the Revolution's recovery is irreversible as the result of "a historic and collective heroic feat of the many contributions of the Cuban people". The Cuban official closed the Civic Society Meeting in Defense of Cuba's Sovereignty and Human Rights, which was held in Havana. The event's final declaration strongly condemned Washington's policy toward Cuba. [[Statement by Cuban organizations at the meeting on Civil Society](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/4/05)

April 13: Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, said in Madrid that dissident Raúl Rivero was convicted "not for thinking differently, but for collaborating with a foreign power which has declared war on Cuba." Prieto added that "there are no crimes of opinion in Cuba," in reply to questions from journalists at the International Press Club. Prieto also said that there has never been "any case of extrajudicial execution, or torture or mistreatment of prisoners" on the island." (*EFE*, 13/4/05)

April 14: In a nation dominated for generations by Fidel Castro and the Communist Party, one group is emerging as a refuge for those chafing under the constraints of daily life on this Caribbean island. Widely popular before the 1959 revolution, Cuba's Masons suffered a precipitous decline in the ensuing decades, but the group has since recovered its appeal as some Cubans look for an alternative to the uniformity inherent in the nation's one-party system. Cuba's Masons say discussions about democracy, human rights, abortion, globalization, cloning and other issues of the day are common, though members refrain from talking about the island's politics inside the nation's 316 lodges, or meeting places. Some Masons say the organization has a history of promoting civil liberties and could play a role in Cuba's political future, though top Masons say their mission is to foster ethical conduct and brotherhood. The group risks getting sucked into the battle between authorities and the island's weak and divided dissident movement. Twelve of the 75 opposition figures imprisoned by Cuban authorities in 2003 are Freemasons. All but one--independent journalist Jorge Olivera--remain incarcerated. (*Chicago Tribune*, 14/4/05)

April 17: Millions of Cubans elected municipal assemblies in local elections Fidel Castro defended as "the most democratic in the world." After voting at a Havana school, Castro told journalists that Cuban elections are impartial and free of fraud. "This election is the most democratic in the world, there is no doubt," Castro said. "No other country has a system like this." Cubans were electing 169 municipal assemblies across the island in elections that take place every 2 1/2 years. Preliminary results showed that 8,168, 253 Cubans, 96.27 percent, exercised their right to vote in the municipal elections. (*Sun Sentinel, Prensa Latina*, 18/4/05)

April 17: Fidel Castro claimed the dissidents in his country were only a fraction and comprised not even one percent of the population. In response to a question by a group of journalists gathered after Castro voted at municipal elections, about the planned congress of dissidents on May 20, the Cuban leader said that he has heard "nothing about this". "The only ones informed are you and the only ones concerned about this are you," he told the journalists. "It is evident that what I know is what I read in your correspondences every day and I know you artificially flatter people who do not exist," Castro added. (*ANSA*, 17/4/05)

April 18: Cuba's opposition faces a new crackdown, the wife of a former dissident prisoner said, a day after Fidel Castro slammed EU support for a UN human rights resolution last week. "Cuban dissidents foresee a massive wave of repression in the immediate future," said Miriam Leiva, the wife of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, a political activist released from prison two months ago after nearly two years of detention. Chepe was one of 75 opponents of the Castro regime detained in 2003, of which 13 have been released for health reasons. In a written statement to the press, Leiva noted that the government has mostly rebuffed European overtures to resume a political dialogue on Cuba, refusing to free any of the other Cuban prisoners of conscience. (*AFP*, 18/4/05)

April 18: Some 15 years after first trying to get to Cuba, UK musician Rick Wakeman has finally made it to Havana, launching a weeklong trip in which he plans to give three concerts in the Cuban capital. Logistical challenges such as shipping music equipment to the communist-run island have consistently created barriers that complicated the trip, the former Yes star told a news conference. "I tried for quite a few years (...) but there was always some reason I couldn't come," said the keyboard player. "It really was an amazing feeling getting off the plane yesterday." Wakeman and the New English Rock Ensemble, or NERE, will perform at Havana's Karl Marx Theater, then at an open-air venue next to the Malecon, the city's famed seawall. The artist, who is scheduled to perform in Mexico and Costa Rica after his Cuba tour, declined to talk politics about the communist country, but pointed out he has turned down invitations to countries whose policies he disagrees with in the past. "I am here because I want to be here, and I want to be part of what Cuba is," he said. (*AP*, 18/4/05)

April 18: Cuban officials said that nearly 97 percent of registered voters in the country participated in municipal elections over the weekend. Justice Minister Roberto Diaz Sotolongo, who presides over the National Electoral Commission, said nearly 8.2 million Cubans, or 96.66 percent of those registered, went to the polls to elect 169 municipal assemblies across the island of 11 million. (*The New York Times*, 18/4/05)

April 18: Three prisoners were dead and 25 seriously injured after a riot in the Combinado del Este prison—the largest penitentiary in Cuba—while local authorities "have yet to report the incident," said the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN). "We can confirm the deaths, as a result of burns, of inmates Javier Peralta, Alexis Tomes and Fredy Ibáñez," said the organization. The CCDHRN released an unofficial list of the 25 prisoners who were sent to hospital and deemed seriously or very seriously injured after the incident. (*AFP*, 18/4/05)

April 19: Bells tolled in churches across communist Cuba after the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as pope. The first appearance of the new Pope Benedict XVI was shown live on state television in the country which until 1992 was officially atheist. Dozens of tourists gathered outside the main cathedral in Havana to hear the name of the new pope and a spokesman for the conference of Cuban bishops said "we are very happy" at the election of Ratzinger. (*AFP*, 19/4/05)

April 20: Cuba's Finlay Institute announced the completion of clinic trials of a vaccine for cholera at the 12th International Fair "Health for All". Specialists from the institution said the product will soon be evaluated in Africa, where the disease is endemic. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/05)

April 20: Prominent dissidents in Cuba say they are being harassed by the government in advance of a gathering of dissident and pro-democracy forces scheduled to take place May 20 in Havana. Earlier this month, dissidents involved in planning the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba sent word that the government had embarked on an all-out effort to intimidate activists from attending the event. Three of Cuba's best-known dissident voices repeated those accusations in a telephone call to US lawmakers. "For us it is critical to receive international support because the Castro regime has focused its repressive apparatus on the leaders of the assembly at this point, so international support is critical," Martha Beatriz Roque, main promoter of the May meeting, said. Rene Gomez, another dissident leader in Havana, says they are fully prepared for additional government efforts to discourage attendance. (*VOA*, 20/4/05)

April 21: Cuban cinema's emblematic figure, Jorge Perugorria, is also passionate about art, and recently told the press that he is looking forward with excitement to an upcoming exhibition of his paintings in Florence. Perugorria, who is in the course of shooting the final scenes of the Spanish-Cuban co-production "Rosa de Francia" (Rose of France) under the direction of Spanish filmmaker Manuel Gutierrez Aragon, is also packing his bags for the trip to Italy. On April 28th, his one-man show opens at Enrico Coveri's Galleria del Palazzo in Florence. It features 30 canvases and 300 silkscreen prints of five original pieces. "Painting is something much more personal than film, because I think the actor is always bound by a script and a character, which is something more collective," said the actor, who shot to fame as the star of 1993's "Strawberries and Chocolate," directed by the late Cuban filmmaker Tomas Gutierrez Alea. (*EFE*, 21/4/05)

April 21: The Vicar of the Archdiocese of Havana, Msgr. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, said that the new Pope, Benedict XVI, will not be an obstacle to the relations between the Catholic Church and the government of Fidel Castro. The prelate was convinced that with Joseph Ratzinger relations between the Church and the Cuban government "will remain at their current level," after the late John Paul II "raised them to a higher level." (*EFE*, 21/4/05)

April 22: Two years after his arrest, dissident Rafael Millet Leyva still hasn't been tried. Millet Leyva, 39, is confined in the maximum security prison of "El Guayabo", Isle of Pines. "In September of 2004, I filed a complaint to the General Prosecutor of the Republic because they keep him in jail without due process", María de los Ángeles Cruz Batista, Millet's wife said. Rafael Millet Leyva, president of the Martin Luther King Civic Resistance Movement, was arrested on March 24, 2003, during the wave of repression unleashed against the dissidents in the island. He has been charged of placing signs in buildings against the government. Amnesty International has considered Millet Leyva a prisoner of conscience and has demanded the Cuban government for his release. (*Lux Info Press*, 22/4/05)

April 22: Elián González, 11, made his public speaking debut at a political rally, thanking the American people for supporting his reunion with his father in Cuba five years ago and making his "dream of being a free child come true." The former castaway read a prepared speech recalling the day US federal agents seized him from the home of Miami relatives and turned him over to his father, Juan Miguel González. "When I saw him I got very happy," Elián said. "I could hug him. I could see my little brother. That was the happiest day of my life. "I want to thank the American people for supporting our cause, which greatly contributed to my return," Elián said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 24/4/05)

April 24: Some 1 075 275 (93.35% of those called to vote) turned out to vote on the second round of the Cuban municipal elections in 1174 constituencies, according to the National Electoral Commission. Under the current electoral law, the second round of the municipal elections takes place when two or more candidates end tied in the first round. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/4/05)

April 26: A Cuban court handed down prison sentences of up to 18 years for 23 men who stormed the Mexican Embassy three years ago in a bid to flee the country, a human rights group said. Pedro Plasencia, whom prosecutors said master-minded the break-in, received the toughest sentence of 18 years, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said. The others got sentences ranging from three to 15 years for violating a diplomatic mission, damage to property and theft of the bus. The jail terms were called "excessive" by the head of the rights group, veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez. "The accused hurt nobody and the Mexican government made no claim for minor damages to the metal gate," Sanchez said. (*The New York Times*, 26/4/05)

April 26: The National Electoral Commission decided to hold the third round of municipal elections in the only Cuban constituency that has yet to elect a delegate to represent its citizens in the People's Power Municipal Assemblies (local government). Candidates in Constituency 24 in the Cueto municipality, in the eastern province of Holguin, remain tied after two polling rounds. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/4/05)

April 27: The Democratic Solidarity Party (PSD), a dissident organization of liberal leaning groups in Cuba, confirmed it will attend a congress in May organized by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. The PSD thus joins other groups like the Christian Liberation Movement led by Oswaldo Payá, and Arco Progresista (Progressive Coalition). (*AFP*, 27/4/05)

Economy

April 5: Cuba's recent strengthening of its currency is designed to close the gap in the purchasing power of those who earn only pesos and those who receive US dollars from abroad, analysts say. But the peso's revaluation makes no economic sense because the communist-ruled island's economy is not strong enough to back up the 7-8 percent increase in the value of its currency, the experts added. A study released recently by Carmelo Mesa-Lago, one of the top US experts on Cuba's economy, called the currency changes "a symbolic, political decision geared to the outside world and (...) Cubans who only have pesos." The report was released at the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies. "The most important facet of what's going on here is that the basis Castro is using to trumpet these successes is solely the generosity of others" such as Venezuela and China, said John Kavulich, who monitors Cuba's economy. "How is that a sustainable economic policy and how can they be proud of that rationale?" (*The Miami Herald*, 5/4/05)

April 5: Low income families began receiving free TV sets donated by the Cuban government, in line with the announcement made by Fidel Castro last March 31. The distribution will start in all municipalities of the eastern province of Granma, including remote areas at the Sierra Maestra --the island highest mountains. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 5/4/05)

April 6: The operator of China's second-largest Shengli oilfield is stepping up overseas exploration, spending more on such ventures this year as the world's No. 2 oil user grapples with falling reserves, officials said. Shengli Oilfield Administration Bureau, a unit of state-run Sinopec Group, will spend about \$40 million drilling for oil and gas in Cuba, Iran and central Asia in 2005, company officials said. "This will be the heaviest spending in a year and we expect the pace to continue in the next few years," a Shengli executive told the press. Shengli, which is among the first Chinese companies to venture abroad, will sink a total of eight wildcat and appraisal wells this year, four in Kazakhstan, two in Iran, and one each in Cuba and Kyrgyzstan. (*Reuters*, 6/4/05)

April 9: Cubans awoke to a fresh revaluation of the "convertible peso," the second in less than a month. In recent days, many Cubans rushed to exchange their foreign currency before an 8 percent hike in the value of the convertible peso, until now on a par with the dollar, went into effect. In order to serve the flood of people wanting to exchange their

foreign currency, primarily dollars, for CUCs or "chavitos," as the convertible pesos are known, Cuban banks were open until 9 p.m. the day before, Cuba's Central Bank said in the official press. Bank accounts consisting of US dollars, both previously existing ones and those opened until April 9, won't be affected, Castro said in a special telecast on March 24. (*EFE*, 9/4/05)

April 9: Truong Tan Sang, the top economic official of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV), arrived in Cuba to promote bilateral cooperation. Sang, who is head of the CPV Central Committee's Economic Commission, discussed with Juan Carlos Robinson, a Politburo member of the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee, actions to promote economic, commercial, scientific and technical cooperation between Viet Nam and Cuba. Sang and his entourage are scheduled to hold working sessions with leaders of the Party, Government, the Ministries of Sugar, Tourism, and Health, and the Central Bank of Cuba. (*VNA*, 10/4/05)

April 12: While Cuba has joined most of the rest of the world in adopting anti-smoking measures, the Caribbean island nation's scientists have also developed a new, less harmful variety of tobacco to lessen the ill effects of this health-threatening habit. The recently developed strain of tobacco, called IT-2004, was created through traditional cross-breeding methods and has a lower tar and nicotine content. It will be used to produce cigarettes for the domestic market. According to the state-run Tobacco Research Institute (IIT), the new variety of tobacco is also better able to withstand drought, as well as being more resistant to pests and disease. It also boasts a yield of up to three tons per hectare. Cuban experts say the cancer-causing potential of cigarettes does not depend solely on the type of tobacco used, but also the way in which the tobacco plants are grown, in terms of the distance between seeds when planted and the processes followed for irrigation, fertilisation and other procedures. The way the tobacco leaves are processed after picking also plays a role. (*IPS*, 12/4/05)

April 13: Experts participating in the 4th International Meeting on Accounting and Finance that opened at Havana's Conference Center, are analyzing aspects of the decentralization of the accounting process in Cuban state-run companies and environmental management as an alternative for the sustainable development of tourism. Over 250 experts from eight nations are involved in discussions about internal economic control, its impact in public management, and the prevention of corruption. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/4/05)

April 14: Cuba has kept its foreign debt in check in recent years despite serious financial difficulties and a weaker dollar, according to a government report. The hard currency debt, based on preliminary figures, was \$12 billion last year, compared with \$11.3 billion in 2003 and \$10.9 billion in 2002, based on preliminary Central Bank figures, the report said. Cuba reports its foreign debt in dollars, but two-thirds is held in yen, euros and other currencies that have appreciated significantly against the US currency over the last two years. The report said official bilateral debt was up significantly at \$6.25 billion, compared with \$5.65 billion in 2003, due mainly to an increase to borrowing from foreign governments. Cuba's debt to suppliers was up \$100 million at \$2.16 billion, while debt to private financial institutions was reported virtually unchanged at \$3.56 billion. Some 80 percent of the debt was principal and 20 percent overdue interest. (*Reuters*, 14/4/05)

April 15: For a decade, capitalist Russia has sought to rebuild ties with Cuba. "We have good political and diplomatic relations. What is failing is trade," Russian Embassy counselor Eugenio Gliok said in an interview. Bilateral trade amounted to little more than \$200 million last year, a far cry from the billions of dollars in subsidized commerce -- mainly sugar-for-oil barter at preferential prices -- that benefited Cuba until 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union plunged the island into deep economic crisis. Cuba wants to buy Russian goods, such as new Ilyushin planes to renew its aging airline fleet including a last generation IL-96 for use by Fidel Castro, but the cash-strapped nation's debts have been a hurdle to signing deals. Moscow claims Havana owes 20.8 billion transferable rubles, or \$23 billion. Havana does not recognize this debt and has presented a counter claim of \$40 billion in damages caused by the demise of the Soviet Union, such as unfinished work on a nuclear power plant, an oil refinery and a nickel facility. "The problem is very complicated. Russia has forgiven many Third World debts. Talks are under way to resolve this but no

agreement has been reached with Cuba," Gliok said. Cuba has also run up post-Soviet debt and is in arrears on a credit line opened in 1993 to pay for imports from Russia. Gliok said the new debt has become a problem for Russian companies trying to do more business with Cuba. "The state can no longer tell companies to do business with Cuba. The Soviet command economy no longer exists," the diplomat said. Russia is still a big consumer of Cuban raw sugar, and bought 1.5 million tons last year but did so through traders on world commodity markets with no government involvement. (*Reuters*, 15/4/05)

April 15: Cuba, severely squeezed for hard currency since the fall of the Soviet Union, managed to boost its foreign reserves by \$1.48 billion in 2004 as it achieved its first current account surplus since 1993, according to a government report. The boost of nearly \$1.5 billion, all in hard currency, last year dwarfed the net \$107 million rise shown by central bank figures for the 1993-2003 period, when Cuba had been plunged into economic crisis by the loss of support from Moscow. The leap in hard currency on hand appears to provide a cushion as the Communist-ruled nation faces challenges including a stiffer US trade embargo and a rise in the world prices of its leading import items, food and oil. Cuba's central bank keeps its total reserve figures secret to hide information from its archenemy the United States, which has enforced sanctions against the Caribbean island since 1962. Last year Cuba achieved its first current account surplus since 1993, of \$176 million, and posted a \$1 billion increase in its capital account, the government report, parts of which was seen by the press, said. (*Reuters*, 15/4/05)

April 17: Fidel Castro reiterated his government's will of revaluating again the Cuban convertible peso that was recently revaluated by 8 percent. "We have revaluated our currency, we will keep on revaluating it, and nobody will stop that", Castro said to the press after voting in municipal elections. (*EFE*, 17/4/05)

April 19: Cuba has gradually increased oil consumption to 173,000 barrels per day, thanks to rising imports despite high prices, according to preliminary figures from the country's National Statistics Office. The NSO reported local production last year declined to 68,000 bpd, the same level as in 2002, after increasing slightly in 2003. Petroleum and derivative imports increased from 84,000 bpd in 2002 to 98,000 bpd in 2003 and 105,000 bpd last year, the NSO said. Canadian companies Sherritt International (S.TO) and Pebercan Inc. (PBC.TO), in conjunction with state-run Cubapetroleo (Cupet), account for 60 percent of the output, plus 2 million cubic meters of natural gas per day. (*Reuters*, 19/4/05)

April 19: Pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies from 29 countries, including the United States, are exhibiting their products in Havana at the XII International "Health for All" Fair. Among the 91 exhibitors are American Medrad, which produces medical equipment and Navarreta Group-Wotham Laboratories, a producer of clinical, biological and pharmaceutical products. (*EFE*, 19/4/05)

April 19: The governments of Venezuela and Cuba are setting aside \$200 million each to provide export credits to increase bilateral trade between the two Caribbean allies, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said. Left-winger Chavez announced the export scheme during a meeting in Caracas of business executives from both countries. Venezuelan manufacturers planned to increase exports to the Caribbean island of products like cocoa, sardines, clothes, shoes and condensed milk, Chavez said. "Both governments have decided to set aside \$200 million each to support exports," he told the meeting, which was attended by Cuba's Internal Trade Minister Barbara Castillo. The Venezuelan export credits would be channeled through state banks, he added. Chavez, who said he would attend a trade meeting in Havana next week, also announced a plan to create a Venezuelan-Cuban joint venture to study alternative sources of energy. (*Reuters*, 19/4/05)

April 20: Trade between Venezuela and Cuba could reach as much as \$1 billion by the end of this year, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said. "This year we could reach US\$1 billion in trade with Cuba," Chavez said in a televised speech during a visit by Chilean President Ricardo Lagos. There's a bad rumor that Fidel doesn't pay. That's not true. Fidel does pay," said Chavez, one of Castro's closest political allies. The Venezuelan leader met with Cuban business

representatives earlier this week and plans to visit the Caribbean island next week for a meeting to boost business between the two Latin American nations. (AP, 20/4/05)

April 20: The worst Cuban sugar harvest in a century is nearing its conclusion, with output not expected at much more than 1.3 million tonnes of raw sugar, barely half of last year's output, industry sources said this week. "We were just over a million tonnes when the month began, at 1.2 million last week, and should end milling in early May at a little over 1.3 million tonnes," an industry insider said, asking his name not be used. Cuba produced 2.52 million tonnes of raw sugar last year. A prolonged drought affecting much of the Caribbean island was viewed by local experts as the main reason for the close to 50 percent drop in output this year. But they added neglect of the state-run industry since the collapse of the Soviet Union denied it a guaranteed market at subsidized prices just as output peaked at 8 million tonnes, was also to blame. "Since the early 1990s there has been little fertilizer and other inputs to cultivate plantations," a Havana University professor who specializes in agriculture said. "Once privileged agricultural and industrial workers have seen their living standards deteriorate markedly and at the same time faced harsher working conditions," the academic added. (Reuters, 20/1/05)

April 21: Fidel Castro announced an increase in the island's minimum wage, more than doubling salaries of nearly 1.7 million Cuban workers. Farmhands, plumbers and other low-wage workers currently making 100 Cuban pesos (about \$4.20) a month will earn 225 pesos (\$9.40) starting May 1, he said. Castro made the announcement in a televised address marking his eighth speech in the last 11 days. Castro said this would raise the average monthly wage in Cuba to 312 pesos (\$14.20) from 282 pesos (\$12.80) at a cost to the government of \$48.4 million. Cubans welcomed the raises, but said it was still too little to live on. Rent and public services are heavily subsidized in Cuba, but essential consumer goods are more expensive than in the United States. (Reuters, AP, Prensa Latina, 22/4/05)

April 21: Dealing with rising oil prices, Fidel Castro has made a call not to waste electricity. The Cuban leader recalled that 20 percent of the electricity generated in the country is lost in transmission and distribution. Hundreds of millions of dollars are wasted on energy because of problems in the systems used to take the electricity to the final consumer. The country needs to take short-term measures to cope with this problem. Cuba has already purchased modern equipment for the manufacturing of wire and the necessary raw material to produce insulation. "We will carry out an intense work on this regard and a total revision of existing networks," Fidel Castro said. Castro announced the purchase of a huge number of energy saving light bulbs and fluorescent lamps to substitute incandescent light bulbs units. (Prensa Latina, 22/4/05)

April 21: Cuba's 2004 production of unrefined nickel plus cobalt was actually little changed from 2003's level, despite a government report four months ago that said output increased substantially, industry and government officials said. Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez said in December that 2004 output rose 7.5 percent over 2003's production of 71,700 tonnes. "The initial report (on 2004 production) was a bit optimistic, more the plan than the reality. Preliminary data now show there was little change in production last year," a mid-level government official told the press. The official said 2004 output was around 72,000 tonnes of mainly nickel sinter and sulfides, with plans to reach 77,000 tonnes this year. Unrefined nickel plus cobalt had consolidated its position as Cuba's largest export over sugar even before high prices led to an estimated \$800 million to \$1 billion in revenue last year. (Reuters, 21/4/05)

April 21: A huge fire that scorched more than 2,600 hectares (6,419 acres) of forests in the mountains of the eastern Cuban province of Cienfuegos is under control, the AIN news agency reported. One section of the fire, covering 1,090 hectares (2,691 acres), affected the communities of La Sierrita, Cafetal and Vegas del Cafe, while the other, near Lake Habanabilla, burned some 1,560 hectares (3,851 acres). Forest rangers and workers from nearby agricultural centers, backed by aircraft, worked to put out the blaze. This was the first fire to break out in the mountainous Escambray region, in Cienfuegos, an area rich in plant and animal life. (EFE, 21/4/05)

April 23: Russia and Cuba wound up talks in Moscow during the 6th Inter-Governmental Commission for Economic, Commercial and Scientific-Technical Cooperation. Cuba expressed an interest in purchasing fertilizers, metals, pharmaceutical products, spare parts and Russia is interested in participating in the modernization of energy facilities. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 23/4/05*)

April 25: World Health Organization (WHO) inspector David R. Buckley praised the scientific and technological level of the Cuban pharmaceutical industry, local mass media reported. After giving a conference in the 3rd International Forum on Aseptic Processing in the Bio-pharmaceutical Industry, the expert highlighted the training of Cuban professionals and rigor of those regulations currently in force in the island for the production of medicines. The meeting was attended by experts from Spain, Italy, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Australia, Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay. (*Prensa Latina, 25/4/05*)

April 25: Malaysia agreed to allow Cuba to use Malaysians for clinical trials of vaccines in a bid to boost cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector between the two countries. The deal was reached between visiting Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro, the younger brother and designated successor of Fidel Castro, and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak. It involves procurement, manufacturing and research of vaccines and pharmaceutical products, Najib said. Cuba's strength is in production of pharmaceuticals and vaccines, having developed a cheaper vaccine to treat childhood meningitis in 2003. (*AP, 25/4/05*)

April 25: Cuba, facing its worst sugar harvest in a century, will import more sugar this year in order to have enough to meet its export contracts, local experts and industry sources said. Cuba has imported around 10,000 tonnes of low-quality whites each month so far this year, mainly from Colombia, according to international media reports. Local experts speculated imports would continue at least at a similar tonnage through the end of the year. "This year's export plan was 900,000 tonnes of raw sugar based on a minimum 1.5 million tonnes output, a tight fit anyway, but now it is clear we will come in around 200,000 tonnes short of our target," an industry insider said. "I think we have little choice but to keep importing, at least at the present rate. We are even importing alcohol," he said. Cuba traditionally exports all but 700,000 tonnes of the crop, mainly to Russia and China, but has imported sugar in the past to meet export commitments when production has fallen short of expectations. The always hermetic sugar ministry has not commented since January on the harvest. (*Reuters, 25/4/05*)

April 26: Venezuela's state-run company Petróleos de Venezuela, or PDVSA, will open an office in Cuba during a meeting aimed at boosting trade between the two Caribbean nations, the Venezuelan government news agency reported. The PDVSA office will be located in Havana, according to the Bolivarian News Agency. Hoping to further deepen economic relations, an estimated 400 Venezuelan business people will begin exhibiting their goods during a four-day trade fair in Havana. (*AP, BNAmericas.com, 26/4/05*)

April 27: Venezuela's government-controlled Banco Industrial de Venezuela and the state oil company Petroleos Venezolanos were opening offices in Havana -- moves that could help the growing bilateral trade. Venezuela has increased oil shipments to Cuba to 80,000-90,000 barrels a day and will make Havana the headquarters for its Caribbean energy operations, Venezuelan Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez said. Venezuela's state oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), will open an office in Havana when President Hugo Chavez visits Cuba to strengthen a growing political and economic alliance. Ramirez said PDVSA is now looking beyond oil supplies to the building of storage and tanker terminal facilities in Cuba, and exploring joint ventures to refine petroleum for distribution to other Caribbean islands. An agreement to build a lubricants plant in Cuba will be signed, and Brazil's state oil company, Petrobras (PETR4.SA) (PBR.N), has been invited to join the venture, he said. Brazilian diplomats said no agreement has been reached with Petrobras in ongoing talks on the lubricants project. Venezuela, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, is also studying involvement in the completion of the Soviet-built refinery in Cienfuegos, Cuba, to process Venezuelan crude for distribution in the Caribbean. Another refinery project under study by PDVSA would be in Matanzas, Cuba's main tanker port, he said. (*La Jornada, AP, Reuters, 27/4/05*)

April 28: Venezuelan state oil giant Petroleos de Venezuela SA will prospect for, pump and refine oil from Cuba's Gulf of Mexico economic zones, the company announced. The announcement came as Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez paid a visit to Cuba to bolster the countries' economic co-operation, and open a PDVSA office in Cuba. Spain's Repsol YPF SA also has been prospecting off Cuba. PDVSA will work with Cuba "in prospecting and production [on new wells located in territorial waters] as well as in refining and marketing," PDVSA said. In January, Brazilian ambassador Tilden Santiago said Brazil's state oil giant Petrobras SA, also now boosting energy co-operation in Cuba, could team up with Canada's Sherritt International Corp. or Repsol as it moves to explore two new prospecting zones off Cuba. Cuba is paying for the estimated \$1 billion a year oil bill with medical and educational services. Officials said 30,000 Cuban doctors and medical personnel are working in Venezuela. (*The Globe and Mail, Reuters, 28/4/05*)

April 28: With an eye toward boosting bilateral commerce, the Banco Industrial de Venezuela opened a branch in the Cuban capital with some \$400 million allocated for joint trade operations on non-petroleum products. Cuba is hoping to buy all sorts of consumer goods from Venezuela, everything from canned sardines to chocolate, clothing, furniture, electric appliances and more, all of which will be sold at subsidized prices at a chain of stores that is to open on the island. Banco Industrial de Venezuela chief Luis Quiaro told the press that the new office will operate under a special license, the first that Cuba has granted to a foreign bank, which will allow it to receive and authorize loans and financing. To explore the possibilities of the Cuban market, more than 200 firms are attending the 1st Venezuelan Products Trade Fair. Cuban ministers and their visiting Venezuelan counterparts also signed a range of future cooperation accords in the areas of nickel production, transportation and agriculture, among others. Chávez said the cooperation agreements with Cuba were "one more step (...) toward Latin American integration, but not under the instructions of Washington." (*Sun Sentinel, EFE, Reuters, 29/4/05*)

Exile Community

April 7: Cuban exiles in Spain accused the Department for Refugees, a branch of the Spanish Ministry of Interior of "negligence" for not responding to a request for asylum by Cuban heart surgeon Milvio Ramírez López. The Vice-president of the Cuban Liberal Union, Antonio Guedes, said the Cuban doctor had been an aide worker in Algeria, where he decided to break ranks with Fidel Castro's regime. To call attention on his case, according to his account, he "threw himself out a window". On a stopover on the way to Havana, Ramírez was admitted to a hospital in Madrid due to serious health conditions. The Spanish "Association Cuba in Transition" indicated he was accused by Cuban officials of "being a CIA agent, jeopardizing state interests and slandering Fidel Castro." (*ABC, 7/4/05*)

April 7: Miami congressional representatives are prodding the Social Security Administration to change a policy that denies benefits to scores of elderly Cubans who settled in the United States after overstaying their visas. US Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, both Republicans, fired off letters to SSA Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart demanding answers. A press article detailed cases in which elderly Cubans said they were struggling without Social Security benefits. Two public-service lawyers who are representing most of the Cubans, Jose Fons and Lizel Gonzalez, said their clients should be eligible -- just like Cubans who arrived without visas. (*The Miami Herald, 7/4/05*)

April 9: Some 30 Cuban exile organizations in Miami announced the creation of a promotion and support mechanism for [a meeting organized by] the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba on the island on May 20 th , in Miami, Silvia Iriondo, President of MAR por Cuba, announced the creation of a Support and Information Center for the dissidents' meeting. The support network includes organizations like Plantados por la Libertad, Brigada 2506, Unidad Cubana, Consejo Nacional del Presidio Político, Movimiento 30 de Noviembre, Agenda Cuba, Comando Martiano, Presidio Político Histórico, Unidad Cubana, Guías Espirituales del Exilio, among others. (*El Nuevo Herald, 10/4/05*)

April 11: Cubans who fled during the Mariel boatlift tend to have more middle-of-the-road views than Cubans who arrived before or after the 1980 exodus on issues such as invading Cuba or traveling to the island, according to a new poll. About half of Mariel exiles polled feel that US citizens should be allowed to travel to Cuba compared to about 34 percent of exiles who came before 1980 and about 60 percent of those who came after 1980. The poll -- conducted by Coral Gables-based Bendixen & Associates for The Herald's coverage of the boatlift's 25th anniversary -- also found that about half of all Mariel refugees questioned would support a military invasion to depose Fidel Castro compared to 60 percent of exiles who came before 1980 and just 38 percent of those who came after 1980. "Mariel exiles tend to have an intermediate point of view on most issues that impact Cuba policy," Pollster Sergio Bendixen said. "They are likely to be more conservative than those who arrived after 1980 but more progressive than those that came in the 1960s and 1970s." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/4/05)

April 11: As enthusiasts of Latin American cinema prepare for the start of the sixth annual Havana Film Festival in New York, some Cuban-Americans are denouncing the event as propaganda for the Castro regime. They also say the New York Times, as the festival's presenting sponsor, is shilling for a communist strongman yet again. The celebration is a New York City transplant of a festival that takes place in the Cuban capital every December, run by the island country's national film institute, ICAIC. The New York version culls films - particularly award winners - from the Havana festival, adds other motion pictures from Latin America to the screening schedule, and rounds out the program with tributes and discussions. (*The New York Sun*, 11/4/05)

April 12: A freed Cuban dissident expects more political prisoners to be released soon, but said there can be no real change in Cuba until Fidel Castro dies. "It's a shame that a country has to wait for the death of somebody to become democratic," poet and journalist Raul Rivero told a news conference in Spain, his new home since being released in November from 20 months in jail. Rivero said he expected a group of eight to 10 dissidents to be released soon because the Geneva-based UN Commission on Human Rights was due to conduct its annual vote later this week on a resolution - presented by the United States and backed by the European Union - about Cuba's human rights record. The dissidents - including Ricardo Gonzalez, Hector Palacios, Jose Luis Garcia Paneque and Luis Milan - have been moved to a prison psychiatric ward in a sign of their impending release, he said. "They move them into better conditions when they are about to be released so the sick can be cured and start looking better. Each day, their relatives have the hope that it could be today - maybe before Geneva, maybe after. I, too, think they are going to be freed," Rivero said. (*Reuters*, 12/4/05)

April 14: Cuban-American congressmen celebrated the passage of a resolution against Cuba by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Florida Republican Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, one of the party's four Cuban national lawmakers, expressed his gratitude to the governments who voted "in favor of human rights and dignity for the Cuban people." For his part, Pedro Lopez, the director of the Cuban National Coordinator, which groups a dozen exile organizations, told the press that "Cuba has obtained an impressive victory." "The Cuban people will be eternally grateful to the countries who voted against (Havana's) tyranny and will designate as traitors to democracy those who voted at the side of the (island's) regime," he added. In like manner, Luis Zuñiga, the director of the Cuban Liberty Council, hailed the vote on the resolution as "the only moment of justice each year for the Cuban people." (*EFE*, 14/4/05)

April 19: A group of Cuban exiles -- known to have to vastly divergent political and ideological views -- have set aside their differences to craft an 18-point blueprint of how the island should be governed after Fidel Castro. Representatives from 16 groups, including the Cuban American National Foundation, Agenda Cuba, the Cuba Study Group and members of the clergy, spent months working up the template called "Pillars for a Cuban Consensus." Among the ideals set forth by the group: the right of all Cubans -- both on the island and abroad -- to participate in the island's political future; the elimination of the death penalty and the release of all political prisoners; amnesty for political crimes "within the boundaries established by international law"; and unrestricted travel for Cubans to and from the island. The groups also advocate the signing over of titles of residential properties confiscated by the government to

current tenants, and they support allowing former owners or descendants to claim compensation for those properties from the state. While a broad range of political ideals were represented, the most conservative -- and arguably among the most influential -- groups did not participate, including the Cuban Liberty Council, and Cuba Democracy Advocates. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/4/05)

April 22: Five years ago, more than 150 federal agents stormed a modest Little Havana home, emerging from a cloud of tear gas with a 6-year-old boy. Today, Elián González is 11 years old, living in Cuba with his father and dreaming of a life as a gymnast. But the saga of Elián still lives with those who for 149 days fought to keep him in Miami. Marisleydis González, who emotionally championed keeping Elián in Miami, doesn't like to talk about the times when she was on television with the boy as his attractive and most-outspoken supporter at only 21. But she does say that she never saw or spoke to Elián again after the raid, which she has said at first emotionally destroyed her. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/4/05)

Foreign Affairs

April 1: One of Cuba's highest-profile dissidents and its premier contemporary poet arrived in Spain to take up residence four months after being released from jail. Raúl Rivero, who was released from prison for health reasons in November, had been sentenced to 20 years behind bars in 2003. The 60-year-old poet arrived in Madrid in the company of his wife, Blanca Reyes, his 11-year-old daughter and his mother. The Rivero family was greeted at the airport by Foreign Affairs Secretary Bernardino Leon, the ruling Socialist Party's foreign relations secretary, Trinidad Jimenez, and journalist Pablo Diaz Espí, a friend of Rivero's. "I left on a temporary permit. At the last moment, I was told I had a two-year period in which to return if I wanted to. I always want to return, but I think my return does not depend on me but on the Cuban government". (*EFE*, 1/4/05)

April 1: The Philippines signed with Cuba a memorandum of understanding establishing cooperation between the Senate of the Philippines and the National Assembly of the People's Power of Cuba, the Philippine Senate said. Senate President Franklin M. Drilon and Jaime Crombet Hernandez-Baquero, vice president of the Cuban National Assembly for People's Power, signed the memorandum of understanding, along with the formation of the Philippine-Cuban Parliamentarians' Friendship Association. (*Xinhua*, 1/4/05)

April 2: Canadian Luther College, Cuban Schola Cantorum Coralina, and other three choirs from the island announced a concert in Havana. The Canadian-Cuban choral performance in San Francisco de Asís' Minor Basilica, in old Havana, will include works by famous composers, as British Elton John, Peruvian Chabuca Granda, US Kirby Shaw, Cuban Gonzalo Roig, and others. Cuban choir conductor Alina Orraca, the concert hostess, told the press that the children and youth choir of the Schola Cantorum, and the Chamber choirs of the Music Higher Institute and the National School of Art will also perform in the concert. This event will be sponsored by the Canada-Cuba Cultural and Sports Festival organization, presided over Jonathan Watts. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/4/05)

April 2: The Spanish government's president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero met with Cuban dissident Raúl Rivero for almost two hours. According to a communiqué from the President's office, the two talked about the political situation in Spain and Cuba. (*AFP*, 2/4/05)

April 2: The Cuban government expressed condolences for the death of Pope John Paul II and declared three days of official mourning on the communist-run island. In a letter to the Vatican read by Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, Fidel Castro called the pope's passing "sad news" and expressed "the most heartfelt condolences of the Cuban people and government." "Humanity will preserve an emotional memory of the tireless work of His Holiness John Paul II in favor of peace, justice and solidarity among all people," Castro wrote. The Cuban leader also

highlighted the pope's historic January 1998 visit to the island, saying it will remain "engraved in the memory of our nation as a transcendent moment in relations between the Vatican State and the Republic of Cuba." The Cuban flag was to fly at half-staff on public buildings and military installations for three days, and several events, including anniversary celebrations for communist organizations and baseball games, were suspended. The decree praised the pope for all of his efforts "in favor of solutions for many social ills affecting humanity," as well as for publicly criticizing four decades of US trade sanctions against Cuba. The government said it would send a high-level delegation to the Pope's funeral, but it was not yet clear who would head it. (*AP, Canadian News, Radio Habana Cuba, 3/4/05*)

April 4: Fidel Castro added his name to the long list of Cubans who have signed a condolence book at the Vatican Embassy in Havana after the death of Pope John Paul II. Dressed in a black suit rather than his usual olive-green uniform, Castro looked emotional as he read out his message: "Your departure pains us, dear friend. We wish with fervor that your example will endure." "Rest in peace, tireless fighter for friendship among peoples, enemy of war and friend of the poor," Fidel Castro wrote in the condolences book at the Papal Nunciature. Accompanied by his younger brother and designated successor, Defense Minister Raúl Castro, Castro also recalled John Paul as an "unforgettable friend" who would be remembered on the island for speaking out against the US trade embargo during his January 1998 visit. "This earned you the gratitude and the affection of all Cubans forever," Castro wrote. Cuba never broke ties with the Vatican, even during the years that the island was officially atheist after the 1959 revolution that brought Castro to power. The government removed references to atheism in the constitution in 1991 and allowed religious believers to join the Communist Party. (*CNN, The New York Times, 4/4/05*)

April 4: During a funeral mass for the Pope attended by Fidel Castro, the Papal Nuncio in Havana, Luigi Bonazzi, called for dialogue with Cuba, in accordance with the wishes of Pope John Paul II during his historic visit to the island. The Nuncio alluded to the "unforgettable" visit to Cuba of the late Pope on January 21-25, 1998 and cited some of the most significant phrases from his speeches. According to Bonazzi the Pope "was deeply impressed and amazed by the admirable expression of affection received from the Cuban people." (*EFE, 4/4/05*)

April 4: A high ranking government delegation traveled to the Pope's funeral, according to Round Table (Mesa Redonda), a daily official TV show. The TV show's host, Randy Alonso, announced that the Cuban delegation to the funeral will be presided over by the President of the National Assembly of People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón, and made up of the head of the Communist Party's Religious Affairs Department, Caridad Diego, the head of the Cuban Foreign Ministry's Europe Division, Teresa de Jesús Vicente, and the island's ambassador to the Holy See, Raúl Roa Kouri. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 4/4/05*)

April 4: Panama and Cuba could re-establish diplomatic relations this year, after Cuba broke them off in 2004 in the wake of the pardoning of four Cuban anti Castro exiles by the government of Mireya Moscoso. Panama's First Vice-President and Foreign Minister, Samuel Lewis Navarro, said relations between Panama and Cuba remain at the consular level. (*EFE, 4/4/05*)

April 5: The plenary of the Mexican Senate urged the federal Executive to refrain from voting at the UN Human Rights Commission in favour of any resolution regarding human rights in Cuba. (*Notimex, 5/4/05*)

April 5: Fourteen Cubans were rescued near the *Isla Mujeres* coast, in the Mexican Caribbean waters, after their fragile wooden boat went adrift, according to official sources. The migrants—ten men and four women—were rescued 12.8 km from the Mexican coast. (*EFE, 5/4/05*)

April 6: Cuba's ambassador to the Dominican Republic called on Latin American countries to abstain from voting on any UN resolution condemning the island's human rights record. "The international community, and in particular Latin American countries, know Cuba doesn't violate human rights," Cuban Ambassador Omar Córdoba told reporters in Santo Domingo. Fidel Castro's government was pushing for abstentions, Córdoba said. The ambassador accused the US

of putting heavy pressure on economically dependent nations to vote "yes," claims that Washington has denied. (AP, 6/4/05)

April 7: In a long speech broadcast live by radio and television, Fidel Castro denied the extent of the Pope's role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe at the start of the 1990s. Castro asserted that the fall of the socialist block was rather due to strategic errors and the communist leadership at that time. "It is true that the pope was very critical" of socialism, but "when the Soviet Union and the socialist camp disappeared, the pope became very critical of the capitalist system," Castro said, adding: "If, one day, Cuban socialism collapses, no one is to blame but ourselves." He said that "the Pope was not born or educated to bring down socialism." Castro assured that Cubans felt honored by the visit of such an outstanding personality as Pope John Paul II. (AFP, *Prensa Latina*, 7/4/05)

April 7: In reference to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Fidel Castro said "I couldn't care less" and added that Europe will have the decisive vote in the upcoming vote in Geneva on a resolution drafted by the US against Cuba. The outcome of the vote "will largely depend on the Europeans; we'll see what they say and what they do," said Castro during a live speech broadcast on Cuban television. (AFP, 8/7/05)

April 7: The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry played down the scandal that emerged in relations with Belarus and Cuba after President Viktor Yushchenko signed with his US counterpart George W. Bush a declaration calling to promote freedom in the two countries and in Iraq. "Ukraine remains open for a frank dialogue and fruitful cooperation for the benefit of the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Cuban peoples. Ukraine highly values relations of friendly cooperation that exist between Ukraine and other world states, including Belarus and Cuba. However we proceed from the notion that true friends can always frankly speak about existing problems", the ministry said in a statement. "The development of democracy, respect and protection of basic freedoms and human rights are the cornerstone of the activities of the new Ukrainian authority in the domestic and foreign policy. We follow with interest the development of democratic processes in every state", the ministry said. (*Itar Tass*, 8/4/05)

April 7: Cuba was outraged by the declaration of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry in relation with the promotion of freedom in Cuba. A government delegation that was in Kiev at the moment cut short its visit and Havana issued a protest to the Ukrainian government. Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Eumelio Caballero Rodriguez said "it is incredible for us that the president of such a friendly country as Ukraine joined the strategy of the United States that has been for the last 40 years carrying out an aggression against our country through economic blockades and by staging over 600 terrorist acts against our country". (*Itar Tass*, 8/4/05)

April 7: Ukrainian ambassador to Cuba, Viktor Pashchuk, died after experiencing chest pains. Pashchuk spent an hour and a half in intensive care in a Cuban hospital, but it did not help. Before that, the ambassador had been at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, where Cuban officials expressed their dissatisfaction concerning critical statements about Cuba made by Ukrainian officials during President Viktor Yushchenko's visit to the USA. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry has denied any connection between the Ukrainian diplomat's death and his visit to the Cuban Foreign Ministry. Pashchuk was 59 years old. (*One Plus One TV*, 8/4/05)

April 8: Venezuela and Cuba began the discussion of common social programmes during a Friendship and Solidarity Meeting held in Caracas. The common social programmes will concern issues such as health services, education services and sports. The two Latin American countries are also expected to create a number of common social institutions. (*Latin American News Digest*, 8/4/05)

April 8: Fidel Castro awarded George Cadle Price, known as Belize's Father of Independence, with the island's highest honor, the Jose Martí Order in recognition of his extraordinary merits. Cuba Council of State Secretary, José Miyar Barrueco, underscored the important role played by the veteran politician in Belize's independence, which was proclaimed September 21st, 1981. George Cadle Price, honorary president of the United Peoples Party in Belize, a

country of some 230 thousand inhabitants, expressed his gratitude for Cuba's cooperation in the area of health, a scholarship program under which students from Belize are studying in Cuba and for the friendship and good relations between the two governments. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/4/05)

April 9: Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has said he will work "for democracy in Cuba" and "against the (US economic) blockade" of the communist-run island, the newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* reported. "We have a lot to do for democracy in Cuba. We must help in the struggle against the US economic blockade (sanctions). Brazil has a chance to help normalize Cuba's relations," Lula told the daily in Rome, where he attended the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Lula, of the Workers' Party, made his remarks after meeting at Brazil's embassy in Rome with Cuban National Assembly speaker Ricardo Alarcón. (*AFP*, 9/4/05)

April 10: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev joined intellectuals worldwide in urging a UN commission to avoid supporting a resolution sponsored by the US on the situation of human rights in Cuba, the government's writers and artists union said. Gorbachev, who in the past has called for an end to US trade sanctions against the country, recently joined more than 4,000 signatories who signed a letter backing Cuba, the union said in a press communique. [[Let Us Stop a New Maneuver Against Cuba](#)] (*AP*, 10/4/05)

April 11: The United States has filed a new resolution at the UN Human Rights Commission criticizing Cuba's record on abuses and requesting that the world body keep the communist country's record under observation, officials said. Keeping up its pressure on Cuba, the United States proposed the renewal of top UN investigator Christine Chanet's mandate to report to the commission on the human rights situation there. Washington requested that the commission renew resolutions from previous years condemning Cuba's human rights record, according to the draft text of the resolution. According to Joel Danies, a US diplomat at the UN Commission in Geneva, 37 countries including the European Union, Canada, Australia and Japan support the resolution. (*AFP, ABC Online*, 11/4/05)

April 11: Fidel Castro vented his anger at the European Union for planning to support a US resolution at an upcoming meeting in Geneva of the UN Committee on Human Rights calling for a review of the state of human rights in Cuba. "Its shameful that they should support a government guilty of monstrous war crimes, that advocates extrajudicial actions, that is responsible for torture in Iraqi prisons," Castro said. "We call on them to say something," he said referring to the European nations after reading a list of terrorist activities allegedly attributed to Luis Posada Carriles, who was convicted and sentenced to eight years in jail in Panama for trying to murder Castro during a Latin American presidential summit in 2000. (*AFP*, 11/4/05)

April 11: The circulation in Russia of the call "Let Us Stop a New Maneuver Against Cuba" has prompted a wide movement of support among political and intellectual figures, manifested by the addition of close to 600 signatures, including ex-president Mijail Gorbachov and Serguei Baburin and Vladimir Kuptsov, vice presidents of the Duma. With the signature of Gorbachov the total of Nobel Prize winners that have signed the statement has risen to six: the former Russian president, Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú and Argentine Adolfo Pérez Esquivel were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, while Portuguese José Saramago, South African Nadine Gordimer and Italian Dario Fo received nobel prizes in Literature. (*Granma International*, 12/4/05)

April 12: Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, Rodrigo Malmierca, expressed his government's willingness to continue the dialogue with the Twenty-five despite its "disappointment" over the European Union's co-sponsorship with the US of a resolution condemning Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. "We have always hoped that the EU would maintain an independent policy toward Cuba and not simply align itself with the US on any initiative against Cuba," said Malmierca. (*AFP*, 12/4/05)

April 12: Antiguan Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer is visiting Cuba for talks on agriculture, health, tourism and education, the Antiguan government said. Spencer, who left the Caribbean island for the five-day trip, will meet with

Fidel Castro and visit Antiguans studying in Cuba, the prime minister's office said. Talks between the two leaders are "expected to center on medical cooperation, cooperation in agriculture, tourism, construction and education," the office said. (AP, 12/4/05)

April 12: Carlos Martí, president of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) presented to the Cuban and international media in Havana a text titled "To our friends all over the world", a brief response to the gesture of solidarity made by over 4,500 intellectuals and artists in the world who have signed the document "Let us halt the new anti-Cuba maneuver" against the US sponsored resolution on Cuba in Geneva. At the UNEAC offices, Carlos Martí recalled that the international appeal was made public on March 14 in Casa de las Américas and published in various newspapers around the world, on the occasion of the opening of a new session of the UN Human Rights Commission (HRC). More than 1,600 Cuban artists, writers, filmmakers, musicians, dancers, choreographers, and critics were the first to sign the brief letter, headed by Alicia Alonso, Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Roberto Fabelo, Harold Gramatges, Leo Brouwer, Abelardo Estorino, César Portillo de la Luz, Carilda Oliver Labra, Chucho Valdés, Celina González, Omara Portuondo, Frank Fernández, Kcho, Daysi Granados, Julio García Espinosa, Rosita Fornés. [[To Our Friends All Over the World](#)] (*Granma International*, 13/4/05)

April 12: The President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Sports for All Commission, Walter Troger, expressed satisfaction over his first working visit to Cuba, according to AIN News Agency. Troger told the press in Havana, that the main objective of his visit was to review and coordinate activities for the Sports for All Conference to be held in the Cuban capital in November 2006. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/4/05)

April 13: Fidel Castro held closed-door talks with the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Baldwin Spencer, touching on matters of bilateral interest, the Caribbean and the world, according to government sources. The visiting Prime Minister - who is on a five-day visit at the invitation of Fidel Castro - expressed his pleasure at returning to Cuba three decades after his first visit, this time to enhance bilateral ties in education, health care and agriculture. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/4/05)

April 14: The United Nations top human rights body backed a call by the United States to keep pressure on Cuba by renewing the mandate of a special investigator into alleged abuse there. The public vote, one of the most politically charged at the annual session of the 53-state UN Commission on Human Rights, was 21 in favor to 17 against, with 15 abstentions. The European Union co-sponsored the US resolution. Of the 12 Latin American states on the commission, only Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico voted in favor of the resolution. With the exception of Cuba, which opposed it, the others abstained. [[Votación por países, MINREX, UN Resolution on Cuba](#)] (*Reuters*, 14/4/05)

April 14: Cuba said that its budding rapprochement with the EU "is on the verge of sinking" and asked the Europeans to join Havana in urging a UN forum to investigate the situation of detainees at the US Navy base in Guantanamo. Reacting to the vote in Geneva, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told a press conference in Havana that Cuba "acknowledges no legitimacy in this resolution and will in no way cooperate with this spurious mandate." The minister added that Havana will continue to deny entry to the French jurist named by the UN panel several years ago to serve as rapporteur for the situation on the Communist-ruled island. Perez Roque sharply criticized the EU's backing for Washington's resolution, calling it confirmation of Europe's adherence "to the aggressive policy of the United States" and saying that it jeopardizes the recent normalization of ties between Cuba and the 25-member bloc. He called the European Union stance at Geneva "pathetic". "The European Union knows what it has to do, what it has to rectify, and if it doesn't know that, then it doesn't know anything," Perez Roque said. "We will be alert and anxious to see what they do," he added, maintaining that the Cuban proposal offers "an opportunity for the EU to give proof of its ethical coherence." [[Press Conference by Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister](#)] (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 14/4/05)

April 14: Cuba accused Mexico of having gone back on its word to Havana by voting to approve a UN resolution censuring the island's government over human rights. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque also claimed at a press

conference that Mexico City had supported the US-drafted text before the UN Commission on Human Rights in exchange for Washington's backing of the Mexican candidate to head the Organization of American States. "Once again, the Mexican government has opted for confrontation with Cuba," said Perez Roque. "Under pressure from the United States, (Mexico) has broken the commitments previously reached with us" at ministerial levels, he declared. The Mexican government "privately transmitted to the Cuban government more than once its position of abstaining" on the vote, Perez Roque asserted. "It's evident that (Fox's government) is using the Cuba issue as a bargaining chip" to get US support for Mexico's OAS candidate, said the foreign minister. "The consequence (of Mexico's vote) is that it reopens the confrontation and convinces the Cuban government that the attempts at dialogue and normalization with us were not honorable. It was purely a tactic," he added. [[Press Conference by Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister](#)] (*EFE, El Tiempo*, 14/4/05)

April 14: Fidel Castro said that the Geneva-based United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which earlier in the day voted to censure Havana for what it called its poor human rights record, was a "comedy." The Cuban leader made his remark at the beginning of a speech he delivered to regime officials focusing on anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles. "Today a comedy took place in Geneva (...) What's it called? The (...) the Commission on Human Rights (...)" said Castro, referring to the commission's US-European-backed resolution condemning the Cuban regime for not extending full human rights to its citizens. Castro called the 21 commission members who voted in favour of the censure of Cuba, presented by the United States, "states serpents" (*EFE, ANSA*, 14,15/4/05)

April 14: In Mexico City, Mexican Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez said that notwithstanding the UN vote in Geneva, his country "is not ready" to go back to the increased tension that existed in recent years with Cuba. "The Mexican government is in no way ready to have a situation in which our relationship with Cuba could sink to the levels of past years," he said. "I'm convinced that that will also be the case on the part of the Cuban government, because the relationship between the two countries is on terms that their peoples and they appreciate and value," added Derbez. He said that he personally informed Perez Roque of the Mexican decision to vote for the UN resolution, but he did not reveal what the Cuban minister's response had been. The Mexican foreign minister denied any link between his bid for the top OAS post and his government's vote in the UN Commission. Derbez warned that he would not tolerate "offensive remarks" by representatives of the Castro government, or a further deterioration in relations between the two countries. (*EFE, IPS*, 14/4/05)

April 14: A court order has forced 96 Cuban doctors working in a health program in the Brazilian state of Tocantins to return to Cuba, reported the local government. Federal judge Marcelo Bernal ruled in favour of a demand from the Regional Medical Council requesting that foreign doctors be forbidden to practice in that state. (*AFP*, 14/4/05)

April 14: The Spanish government's president, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said that his "new commitment" is to make every effort for the release of more political prisoners in Cuba. During a ceremony in honour of Cuban poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, Zapatero indicated that he would do everything possible to get more Cuban dissidents out of prison so that "we have more friends and colleagues here and not in jail, but free, on the streets writing poetry and news articles." (*El Mundo*, 14/4/05)

April 14: The government of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva indicated it abstained from supporting a resolution on Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission "because that, in the current circumstances, does not truly contribute to improving human rights" on the island. The Brazilian Foreign Ministry urged the government of Fidel Castro to "take new measures to ensure the full validity of all human rights not only economic, social and cultural but civil and political as well." (*AFP*, 14/4/05)

April 15: The European Union rejected a Cuban call to back a UN human rights probe into the situation of terror suspects held by the United States at Guantanamo Bay. "The EU has never done so and does not have any intention of doing so," said spokeswoman Krisztina Nagy. And she rejected Cuban criticism of European support for a resolution at

the UN Human Rights Commission that chastised Cuba's record. Nagy told reporters the resolution's call for UN investigators to report on Cuba was "an opportunity for the Cuban authorities to show human rights are respected." Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Thursday Cuba had presented a resolution to the UN 's Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva asking the United States to authorize an independent and impartial investigation into the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. (AP, *Europa Press*, 15/4/05)

April 15: Spain's prime minister cautioned Cuba against backing off from dialogue with the European Union, after the UN Human Rights Commission approved a resolution criticizing Havana's record. European nations backed the U.S.-sponsored resolution Thursday in Geneva, "I think that what the government of Cuba should do is listen to what is being said by the international community," said Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. "The government of Cuba should not, in my opinion, go down the road that it may have insinuated after hearing of the United Nations' formulation," Zapatero told a news conference marking his first year in office. (AP, 15/4/05)

April 15: Venezuela, Cuba's staunchest ally in Latin America, came to the defense of Havana after the Fidel Castro regime was criticized by the UN Human Rights Commission, saying the worst abuses these days on the Communist island are being committed on a part of it controlled by the United States. "The great violations of human rights lately have been committed on Cuban territory controlled by the US," said Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel. (EFE, 15/4/05)

April 17: Cuban Defense Minister General Raul Castro arrived in the Chinese capital on the first leg of a tour that will also take him to Laos, Malaysia and Vietnam. Castro, the No. 2 man in the regime of his brother, Fidel Castro, met with the head of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, Wang Jiarui, shortly after his arrival in Beijing. The Cuban official is also scheduled to meet with President Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Wu Bangguo. Castro plans to visit a special economic zone in Beijing before traveling to China's financial capital, Shanghai, where he is slated to visit another of the development areas. Castro's delegation includes former Interior Minister Ramiro Valdes Menendez, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Cuban Communist Party International Relations Department chief Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz. (*Xinhua, Granma*, 17,18/4/05)

April 17: Fidel Castro mocked the European Union for failing to back Cuba's call for a UN investigation into US treatment of terror suspects at the Guantanamo Bay. Cuba asked the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva to ask Washington to authorize an independent investigation into the situation at the US naval base in eastern Cuba. "We were thinking too highly, and too honorably, of the European community" to imagine they would back the project, Castro said. Castro also downplayed the importance of the European Union to Cuba, saying the island doesn't accept financial support from EU governments. "We've renounced humanitarian aid (from Europe), we don't need it," Castro said. The Cuban leader also lamented new alliances between formerly communist Eastern European nations and the United States, saying former Soviet satellites "are now rotating in the orbit of the (American) empire." (AP, 17/4/05)

April 17: Mexico should explain how Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles passed through its territory undetected en route to the United States, Fidel Castro said. Posada, who is linked to assassination plots against Castro and wanted in Venezuela for a 1976 Cuban airliner bombing, entered the United States illegally through Mexico in March. He filed papers seeking political asylum in the United States last week. "The Mexican government should speak, because it's strange that such a notable gentleman should pass through Mexican territory and the authorities not say anything," Castro told reporters in Havana after casting his vote in countrywide municipal elections. "I'm only asking Fox to clarify, to give details, exact number of hours, who were with him [Posada Carriles], how long did they stay (...) Posada and his companions in the Mexican Caribbean". "The honor and prestige of Mexico are at stake," Castro added. (*La Jornada, AP*, 17/4/05)

April 17: Fidel Castro predicted that Mexican Foreign Minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, would lose as a candidate for Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS). "All the peoples and governments of Latin America and the Caribbean know who the US-backed candidate is," said Castro. He then targeted Derbez sarcastically linking him to the vote at the UNHRC in Geneva: "I suppose the Mexican will drop out of the race because by now I don't know who the devil would vote for him, especially after his government behaved so properly, so honourably in Geneva, so concerned about human rights." (*La Jornada*, 17/4/05)

April 18: Fidel Castro attacked once again Mexican Foreign Minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, calling him a traitor for voting against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission. Castro added that the Mexican minister is an "agent" of the United States. According to the Cuban government, Mexico, in particular Foreign Minister Derbez, had promised to abstain during the vote at the UNHRC but at the last minute changed his mind due to pressure from the US. According to Castro the change of heart was part of negotiations by which the US would support Derbez's candidacy as Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS). "It's a dishonour to be the empire's candidate to lead that rubbish," said Castro and advised talking to the Caribbean governments to prevent "this gentleman from going out there politicking and making promises." (*BBC Mundo*, 18/4/05)

April 18: Cuban dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe, released from prison on health grounds, asked Brazil's President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, for his support of the release of the other 61 of the Group of 75 oppositionists who are still in jail. (*EFE*, 19/4/05)

April 18: The Honduran government rejected 25 out of 45 medical scholarships that Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine offered to Honduran students, officials said. Honduran Health Minister Merlin Fernandez said they were trying to "reorient the program" with Cuba and that they only wanted "to prepare laboratory technicians, anesthesiologists and other specialties that the country's health service needs." At least 650 Hondurans have studied at the Latin American School of Medicine since 1999. The rejected scholarships prompted speculation that the Honduran government had been pressured by Honduras' Medical College, which has at least 5,000 professionals, and the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa. But Fernandez said no such pressure exists. (*AP*, 18/4/05)

April 18: Guatemala's Foreign Minister, Jorge Briz, recalled his Ambassador to Cuba to "exchange views", after Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque accused the Guatemalan government of betraying Havana at the UN Human Rights Commission. "I want to hear his opinion from a political standpoint and in the area of cooperation," said Briz at a press conference. (*AFP*, 19/4/05)

April 18: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez obliged all the nation's broadcasters to carry a speech in which he called Cuba's Fidel Castro his "elder brother" and dubbed the United States "a negative force that generates violence and wars among ourselves." The world has been made to believe - he said - "that Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez have an evil plan to destabilize Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and the whole continent (...)" (But) the destabilizer of this continent is and always has been the US government." "That is the great destabilizer of the region," he asserted at the graduation ceremony for a new group of former illiterates from a state-run - and Havana-aided - program to teach people to read and write. Washington is "a negative force that generates violence and wars among ourselves, (as well as) divisions to keep us as if we were its colonies, its back yard." This is the second direct verbal attack Chavez has made against the United States in less than 24 hours. (*EFE*, 18/4/05)

April 19: "China greatly values relations with Cuba, which are moving toward a new era of full growth and development," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told the press. In light of the Cuban vice president and defense minister's visit to Beijing, Qin said China wished to "take bilateral relations to a new level" in the political, economic, educational, scientific and technological areas. Specifics of concrete accords were not announced. (*EFE*, 19/4/05)

April 19: Mexico would support the Cuban government's proposal to create an international commission to visit and inspect the living conditions of the prisoners of war that the US keeps in Guantánamo, indicated the Foreign Minister. "I hope we can vote on it this year so that we can demonstrate the coherence of Mexico's position vis à vis human rights" said the Minister. (*La Crónica de Hoy*, 19/4/05)

April 19: Fidel Castro harshly criticized the European Union (EU) for not joining Cuba's denunciation of the situation of prisoners held at the US base in Guantánamo saying that the European bloc "obeys" the "empire", in reference to the United States. Europe is a "mosaic" of nations "whose main characteristic shared by all is, on the whole, to obey the orders of the empire, supporting despicable acts in Geneva," said Castro in a speech. Castro reiterated that he "could not care less" about the United Nations Human Rights Commission, adding that just like the Organization of America States, Geneva "stinks." Fidel Castro also insisted in calling the OAS "garbage and nonsense," from which Cuba was expelled in 1962. (*EFE*, 20/4/05)

April 19: The President of the Medical Federation of Venezuela (FMV), Douglas León Natera, asked the government of Hugo Chávez to expel Cuban doctors from the country, like Brazil did after a court banned Cuban physicians who had not validated their degrees from practicing. "We are pleased with Brazil and we encourage the government to follow the example," said León Natera. "The FMV has always said that (...) Cuban doctors have taken the place of Venezuelan doctors," added León Natera. (*AFP*, 19/4/05)

April 19: Raul Castro arrived in Shanghai, travelling from Beijing, to hold a two-day visit to the eastern Chinese city. The Second Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party was accompanied by Wang Jiaru, director of the Chinese Communist Party International Department. Chinese Vice President Zeng Qinghong received the visiting Cuban top official, before he held extensive meetings with political leaders and government officials such as Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and the People's National Assembly Permanent Committee Chairman Wu Bangguo. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/05)

April 19: Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, lamented the lack of a shared will in the heart of the European Union (EU) to normalize relations with Cuba, and warned reticent member states that without dialogue there is no way of improving the situation. Michel asked for a debate among the member states to clearly determine "what is the objective that the EU is proposing in relation to Cuba." In that context he stressed that, "it is not about closing the channels of communication but improving the situation." (*Granma International*, 20/4/05)

April 20: Fidel Castro called on the governments of Guatemala and Honduras to reveal what they know of the whereabouts of anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles, whom Cuba accuses of terrorism. "Guatemala and Honduras, I beg you not to hold back from explaining what you know of Posada Carriles' comings and goings," Castro said in his seventh televised speech in just over a week given over to demanding the CIA-linked anti-Castroite be brought to trial. "It would be good to ask both governments whether the monster was there or not, and how it was possible not to find him despite the stench and the nauseating smell of death he carries about him," Castro said. (*EFE*, 20/4/05)

April 20: The first vice president of the Cuban Councils of State and Ministers, Raúl Castro Ruz, said his visit to China proved very fruitful for strengthening bilateral relations. China is the first leg of an Asian tour that will also take the Cuban defense minister to Malaysia, Laos and Vietnam. Following his respect for local heroes, the Cuban Communist Party second secretary met with Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Permanent Committee of the People's National Assembly (unicameral Parliament). The visiting top official also held talks with Jia Ginglin, Chairman of the Chinese People's National Consultation Conference Committee, which is considered the largest social body engaged in consults with the government. Raúl Castro also visited the monoclonal antibody plant built accompanied by Revolution Commander Ramiro Valdés Menéndez and Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, director of the Cuban Communist Party International Relations, and Alberto Rodríguez Arufe, Cuban ambassador to China, also accompanied Raúl Castro. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/05)

April 20: Fidel Castro again lambasted the Europeans for failing to support Cuba's resolution in Geneva calling for an investigation into the condition of the more than 500 terror suspects being held at the US Navy base in Guantanamo in eastern Cuba. The EU's stance "demonstrates the demoralization, the absolute lack of ethics, of shame, of character of countries that are described as independent and as noble and good," Castro said. (*EFE*, 20/4/05)

April 20: Fidel Castro said that Ecuadorian President Lucio Gutierrez' ousting was foreseeable. I had the conviction that the "little gentleman" (Lucio Gutierrez) was not going to last long, Castro said while addressing leaders from all sectors of national life, and military institutions. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/4/05)

April 21: Cuba's foreign ministry slammed the UN Human Rights Commission, saying it is plagued by "hypocrisy and double standards," after the body rejected Cuban calls for the United States to allow an independent probe of the Guantanamo Bay detention center. The vote is "a fresh example of the hypocrisy and double standards that reign at the Human Rights Commission, which our country has repeatedly denounced," the ministry said in a statement. [[Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)] (*AFP*, 21/4/05)

April 21: The delegation from Argentina and Brazil to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva released a statement asking the Cuban government to guarantee the protection of "all human rights not only economic, social and cultural rights but civil and political as well." While both countries abstained during the April 14 vote, they expressed the obligation of "every state to guarantee the full validity of all human rights," given their universal, independent and inalienable nature. They also urged Cuban authorities to take "new measures" similar to those by which political prisoners were recently released from prison. (*AFP*, 21/4/05)

April 22: Cuba reasserted its commitment to adopt measures against organized transnational crime at the 11th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice taking place in Bangkok. Dr. Carlos Zaragoza, president of the Criminal Court in the Supreme Court of Cuba, stressed at the meeting the reasons causing crime, as well as criticized the Cuban Adjustment Act, applied by the US to encourage illegal immigration of Cubans to that northern country. Among the international topics of the event are drug trafficking, people smuggling, money laundering and sale of weapons and explosives. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/4/05)

April 22: Cuban Defense Minister, Raul Castro, arrived in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, where he was welcome by Prime and Foreign Minister Somsavat Leng Savat and other top officials. Shortly after his arrival, Raul Castro and his delegation went to the Ho Kiang presidential palace, where Laotian Vice President and Permanent Member of the Revolutionary Popular Party's Political Bureau, Shomali Sayasone, extended a warm welcome to the Cuban visitors. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/4/05)

April 23: At the conclusion of a visit to Laos by Cuban Defense Minister, Raul Castro, Laotian Prime Minister, Khamtai Siphandon, said that the visit was more than an official visit, it was like that of a friend, or a brother. Malaysia is the Cuban delegation's next stop in an Asia tour which will also take them to Vietnam. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/4/05)

April 25: The Zimbabwean government is in the process of recruiting doctors and medical specialists from Cuba and Egypt to alleviate the shortage of health workers in the country, an official said. The official from the Health and Child Welfare Ministry said teams from Zimbabwe were already in Havana, Cuba, with orders to recruit as many doctors as they could. (*Xinhua*, 25/4/05)

April 26: Cuban Defense Minister Raul Castro, the country's second-in-command, began a weeklong visit to Vietnam, where he will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. Castro, the younger brother and designated successor of Fidel Castro, arrived in Vietnam as part of an Asian tour that also includes stops in China, Laos and Malaysia. Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai welcomed Raul Castro. Castro is scheduled to hold talks in

Hanoi with Van Khai, Communist Party leader Nong Duc Manh and President Tran Duc Luong. He is also expected to travel to Ho Chi Minh City to celebrate the communist victory on April 30, 1975, when northern forces crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace in the former US-backed capital of South Vietnam, reunifying the nation. (AP, 26/4/05)

April 26: The Guatemalan government conveyed its appreciation to Cuba, which doubled to 90 the number of scholarships for youths interested in studying medicine in Havana. Public Health Vice Minister Salvador Lopez said the Guatemalan government was "very proud and satisfied" with the flourishing of a project that started in 1998, when Cuba allowed Guatemalans to study medicine in its schools free of charge. Lopez' remarks followed those by Cuban Ambassador to Guatemala Angel Abascal, who asserted the number of scholarships would be doubled, besides the 40 usually granted to study at the Latin American School of Medicine. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/4/05)

April 26: Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX) called on for the political situation in Ecuador be solved without foreign interference in the wake of President Lucio Gutierrez' dismissal by Congress. "The current situation in Ecuador must be solved by Ecuadorians themselves, without any kind of foreign interference, in strict accordance with the principles of sovereignty, independence and self-determination," states a MINREX statement. [[Declaración del MINREX](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 26/4/05)

April 26: Fidel Castro suggested in a speech that Mexican President Vicente Fox take an early retirement to prevent instability or even violence in the current political flap over Mexico City Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador. For Fox to take an early retirement from his post "is preferable to tensions or violence," Castro said in a meandering speech of more than four hours on state television. "This situation isn't looking good," Castro said of the brewing political crisis involving López Obrador, a presidential aspirant. (AP, 26/4/05)

April 27: The Mexican government said it will "keep holding its hands out seeking positive relations" with Cuba, despite the criticism it receives from Fidel Castro. At a press conference, the Mexican Foreign Minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, said that "relations among nations should be based on international law and mutual respect." Senators from all three main political parties in Mexico, including the left, condemned the criticism made this week by Fidel Castro against President Vicente Fox. (EFE, 27/4/05)

April 28: The European Union's legislative branch expressed its dissent with the executive over policy toward Cuba, condemning a shift seeking rapprochement with the Communist-ruled island that included suspension of diplomatic sanctions. The European Parliament approved a document with a paragraph on Cuba that "condemns the sudden change of strategy and lifting of sanctions by the Council," which comprises heads of state and government from the bloc's 24 member nations. By a vote of 251-64 with 255 abstentions, Euro lawmakers accepted that portion of the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2004, a text dealing with the state of basic liberties in more than 70 nations. Most of the abstentions were by Socialist members of the body. [[Annual Report on Human Rights](#)] (EFE, 28/4/05)

April 28: Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro strengthened their economic ties amid uncertain hopes of wooing other Latin nations into an alternative trade pact not led by the United States. The meeting between Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro in Cuba coincided with an international meeting in Havana of opponents to the US-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas, or FTAA, which failed to take effect as scheduled early this year. Together, they were to promote their own Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, which would tie together the region's developing nations without US direction. The name refers to South American independence hero Simon Bolivar, frequently invoked by the Chavez government. (AP, 28/4/05)

April 28: Cuban Ambassador to the UN Orlando Requeijo asserted proposals to reform this international entity, currently under analysis, were superficial and excluded the true cause of its "bereavement." Orlando Requeijo contended that several member states defended only their own interests, and imposed their policies and models on the

majority. "We cannot speak of a more democratic and effective UN if its General Assembly does not exert the powers its Charter grants," stressed the Cuban diplomat. Requeijo called all member states to recognize the Assembly as the only true democratic and representative body of the UN, that should develop a more active role. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/4/05)

April 29: Qatar and Cuba talked about energy cooperation and world politics during the visit of Sheik Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah that served to broaden the ties between the two countries. "We've come to keep expanding and strengthening the relations that our Emir and President Fidel Castro had forged and to help each other in ways that we agree upon," the second vice President of the Council of Ministers of Qatar told the press. The Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani opened the path for improved relations with Cuba when he visited Havana in 2000. Fidel Castro paid back the visit to the Gulf state in 2002. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/4/05)

April 29: The leaders of Cuba and Venezuela, who form a regional "anti-imperialist" axis, called on other nations in the hemisphere to join their alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas being pushed by Washington. Hugo Chavez's goal during his visit this week to Havana has been to flesh out the preliminary charter he and long-time friend Fidel Castro signed in December establishing what the Venezuelan calls the "Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas," or ALBA. Speaking at an anti-FTAA event in Havana, the fiery Venezuelan populist said Latin America must exploit the "wave of liberation" washing over the hemisphere and grasp the "historic opportunity" ALBA offers for regional integration. "It must go beyond Cuba and Venezuela," Chavez said. The most prominent of the other attendees at the anti-FTAA gathering were Bolivia's Evo Morales, who leads the Movement Toward Socialism and finished a close second in the country's 2002 presidential election, and former Salvadoran guerrilla Schafik Handal, leader of the Central American nation's leftist main opposition party. "For me it is an honor to be beside this great destabilizer and these two distinguished rebels," Castro said as he stood among Chavez, Morales and Handal after his hour-long address to the forum. (*EFE*, 29/4/05)

April 29: Fidel Castro called the withdrawal of Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez from the race for the vacant leadership of the Organization of American States (OAS) another defeat for Washington's interests in the region. One more fall, one more defeat, said the Head of State while addressing the 4th Hemispheric Meeting of Struggle Against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (ALCA), on learning of Derbez' decision to withdraw. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/4/05)

Terrorism

April 26: John Bolton, President Bush's nominee as UN ambassador, battles complaints that he tried to get two US intelligence analysts fired or reassigned because they disagreed with his words on Cuba. John Bolton's confirmation hearings and previous congressional testimonies do not reveal any hard evidence on whether Cuba is or is not working on bioweapons. But they do offer an intriguing vision of how the US intelligence community has handled the semantics of the issue. The dispute arises from a secret National Intelligence Estimate on worldwide bioweapons capabilities, produced by the CIA and other intelligence agencies in 1999. U.S. officials who have seen it say that, for the first time, it expressed strong concern over Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/4/05)

Security

April 6: Fidel Castro stressed his country is ready to ward off any enemy, while highlighting the nation's military readiness at a meeting on the results of a recent military strategic exercise, Bastion 2004. Castro highlighted that the

nation's security level is increasing because of the control over the enemy and awareness of its strength. Castro also considered that it was impossible to seize Havana, after the perfection achieved by Cuban troops in the handling of weapons. If Cubans do what they have to do, Castro said, there will be less risk of military aggression. The meeting also included the participation of Army General Raul Castro and the main leaders of the Cuban Communist Party, Government and Armed Forces. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/4/05)

April 6: US officials said there is no evidence that China is seeking to boost its military presence in Latin America, but for the first time warned about Chinese intentions to establish an intelligence and cyberwarfare beachhead in the region. Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Latin America, and Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, the top Defense Department official for the Western Hemisphere, testified before a House panel as several legislators argued that China is trying to fill the void left by the lack of US involvement in the region. Pardo-Maurer said that "we need to be alert to rapidly advancing Chinese capabilities, particularly in the fields of intelligence, communications and cyberwarfare, and their possible application in the region," he told the Western Hemisphere subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee. This is the first time that a senior Pentagon official warned so directly about Chinese cyberwarfare capabilities in the region. Some US officials have previously and privately expressed concern that Chinese personnel may be working at an electronic listening post in Bejucal, Cuba, believed to be also capable of carrying out cyberwarfare operations. Pardo-Maurer would not elaborate during the House panel's public hearing, and offered to brief members in a classified session. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/4/05)

US-Cuba Relations

April 1: Twenty-five years ago, a Cuban guard was killed in the crossfire after a bus carrying six asylum seekers crashed into the Peruvian embassy in Havana, launching a series of events that culminated in the 1980 Mariel boatlift that saw 125,000 Cubans set sail for the United States, including hundreds of mental patients and inmates from Cuba's prisons. The guard, Pedro Ortiz Cabrera, was remembered by several hundred Cuban diplomatic police with a simple ceremony, in which the United States was blamed for the killing and subsequent mass exodus. "The whole world knows that the United States encourages the people to leave the country," said Victor Hugo Pares, director of a small municipal museum nearby where some of Ortiz Cabrera's belongings are displayed in a glass case. "What happened at the Embassy of Peru was a propagandistic maneuver that turned against them," he added, referring to US officials. The official Cuban media made no mention of the 25th anniversary of the start of the Mariel boatlift. (*AP, EFE*, 3/4/05)

April 6: The President of the US company Calhoun Foods, Gregory Calhoun, underlined the need to put an end to the US embargo on Cuba. At the opening in Havana of a food business exhibit organized by this Alabama company, Calhoun said: "we are working to end the trade obstacles with the island. Calhoun and Buffy Donlon, president of Ala Caribe Initiative Inc., also from Alabama, are heading a US delegation to the food exhibition in Havana. (*Prensa Latina, ABC*, 6/4/05)

April 6: A press release issued by the US Interest Section in Havana (USINT) said that Fidel Castro lied during a TV appearance on March 30, when he said that "the US Interests Section selects teachers, architects, engineers and other professionals to resettle permanently in the US as part of the US Government's obligation to issue 20,000 travel documents a year". The USINT "wants to set the record straight", the note says. "USINT processes self-selected Cubans for resettlement in the US, without regard to profession or job". "Some Cubans, and their immediate family members, meet the definition of refugee because they have suffered persecution by the Cuban regime, and the US Government recognizes their refugee status. Others are petitioned by family members in the US", the note adds. "The majority of Cubans paroled into the United States – 60% of the average annual total – registered for a special Cuban visa lottery. In this random selection process, professional background plays no role. The last time Mr. Castro permitted the United States to hold a lottery registration, in 1998, 541,000 Cubans registered to leave Cuba in just 30

days. The regime has refused to permit us to hold another lottery registration, despite our annual requests to do so and Cuba's obligation under the Migration Accords to allow this". (*Notimex, Reuters, 7/4/05*)

April 6: The US Senate voted to keep the government-backed broadcasts aimed at Cuba. The broadcasts by Miami-based Radio and TV Marti are funded through the US Information Agency and the budgets are often disputed in Washington. An amendment on a State Department spending bill this year would have cut the \$21.1 million budget for Radio and TV Marti, including \$8 million for airborne TV broadcasts. The Senate defeated the amendment by a 65-35 vote. US Senator Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota), called the broadcasts a "colossal waste of taxpayer money." "It is absurd to spend \$21.1 million to send TV signals to Cuba that no one sees," Dorgan said. But US Senator Bill Nelson said the money will help the messages reach Cubans. (*AP, 6/4/05*)

April 7: In a reference to US president George Bush, Fidel Castro said that the "US emperor's visit to Rome" to pay his last respects for Pope John Paul II is an affront to the deceased prelate's memory, calling it a hypocritical attitude. "Now they have gone to cry before the cadaver of John Paul II, who so opposed the war, who so opposed the Imperialist order, who so often condemned consumerism and this brutal war in Iraq," Castro said during his televised address. "How far will this hypocrisy go. In my judgment (Bush's presence) is an outrage to the memory of John Paul II," he said. Castro made the statement at a televised and radio appearance before Communist Party, union and grass roots leaders, Interior Ministry and Armed Forces members. He harshly criticized Bush's attitude, adding that the Pontiff was a very strong critic of war, including the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, whose promoter was the US President himself, and of nuclear weapons, the largest arsenal of which is kept precisely in the United States. The Cuban leader highlighted that unless Bush had knelt down before the body of the deceased Pontiff to ask for forgiveness for all the evils he is causing on the world, his attitude was completely hypocritical. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Reuters, 8/4/05*)

April 7: The Reverend Jesse Jackson plans to travel to Cuba to promote US trade with the Communist-run island, a friend said. Jackson visited Cuba in 1984 when he secured the release from jail of 22 Americans and 26 Cuban political prisoners, and again in 1991. This time he will be going to endorse free trade with Havana. "He thinks we should bring the walls down and do business with Cuba," said Alabama businessman Gregory Calhoun, owner of the distribution company Calhoun Foods, who spoke to Jackson from Havana. "He said he would come to Cuba and told me to work on the dates for him," Calhoun said before signing with Cuban authorities food sales worth \$14.3 million. (*Reuters, 7/4/05*)

April 7: Maine Agriculture Commissioner Robert Spear is recovering in a Havana hospital from illness apparently brought on by an infection, a Cuban official said. "The commissioner is receiving an appropriate medical treatment and the possibility exists that he will leave soon for the US, but he personally asked us to remain a few days to continue being treated here," said the president of state-run import company Alimport, Pedro Alvarez. He told reporters that Spear fell ill while on a visit to Cuba to discuss sales of his state's agricultural products to the island. (*EFE, 7/4/05*)

April 8: The US government is cracking down on certain religious organizations that promote licensed travel to Cuba, restricting the number of visitors they can send to ensure that limits on US citizen travel to -- and spending in -- Cuba are enforced. The Office of Foreign Assets Control sent letters to dozens of organizations that have US-issued religious licenses for travel to Cuba, warning them not to abuse their privileges and announcing investigations into alleged wrongdoing. The regulators also imposed a limit on the number of people who can travel to Cuba under the auspices of these religious groups: 25 every three months. There were no limits previously. (*The Miami Herald, 8/4/05*)

April 9: Unlike 1980, when US officials had to scramble to deal with the Mariel crisis, the government now has a detailed sea, air and land plan to handle mass migrations from Cuba, Haiti or any other nation to the Southeast US coast. "If there is a mass migration threat to Florida, there's lots of plans in place," said Amos Rojas Jr., special agent in charge of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Miami office. "My sense is it's better to be prepared than to have the chaos we had in 1980." The plan, dubbed "Operation Vigilant Sentry," was developed by the Homeland

Security Department along with Florida officials and the military. Its central goal is to intercept migrants at sea -- preferably close to their home shores -- and immediately return them in hopes of deterring more people from attempting a dangerous ocean crossing. (AP, 9/4/05)

April 11: Juan Emilio Aboy, a Cuban exile detained for almost three years on suspicion of being a Cuban spy operating in South Florida, has been on a hunger strike for the past month -- demanding release from the Krome detention center in West Miami-Dade County. Nina Pruneda, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman in Miami, confirmed that Aboy is on a hunger strike but did not provide details on his condition. In a phone interview with the press, Aboy said he heard officials were trying to obtain a federal court order to insert a feeding device into his body. Aboy, 44, is fighting a deportation order that cannot be executed because Cuba generally refuses to take back exiles. He has been linked by federal investigators to the so-called Wasp Network of more than a dozen Cuban government operatives rolled up in the late 1990s. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/4/05)

April 11: A militant, anti-Communist Cuban exile who was jailed in Panama and then pardoned in connection with a plot to kill Fidel Castro is in the United States and will apply for asylum, his lawyer said. Luis Posada Carriles is an archfoe of Cuba's Communist government, which views him as a terrorist and has linked him to a series of attacks on Cuba, but is seen as a hero by some hard-line exiles in Florida. Lawyer Eduardo Soto confirmed media reports in Miami that Posada Carriles was in the country, saying he entered illegally across the US-Mexican border. A spokeswoman for US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Nina Pruneda, said the agency did not comment on such databases. She said the agency was "working with law enforcement partners reviewing his case. We can confirm he's not in our custody." Soto did not say when his client arrived in the United States or where he was. He said Posada Carriles had good grounds for asylum because if he were deported he would be "squarely in the path of danger." "Mr. Posada Carriles has done nothing that would make him inadmissible (to the United States)," Soto said. (*Reuters*, 11/4/05)

April 11: In a nationally broadcast speech Fidel Castro said the United States was harboring anti-Cuban terrorists. "That monster has been living there for 19 days," Castro said of Luis Posada Carriles, who was convicted and sentenced to eight years in jail in Panama for trying to murder Castro during a Latin American presidential summit in 2000. Carriles, 76, was pardoned and released from jail by Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso last year. Press reports said he recently moved to Miami, Florida, together with three accomplices. Castro wondered what motives "that perverse empire" -- the United States -- may have to hide a terrorist in its territory after proclaiming to the world "its alleged commitment to fight terrorism." Changing a well-known phrase, he said that "the devil raises them and the same devil unites them" referring to links between some Cuban American organizations based in the US and the successive US administrations. "That is clear, they treat him like a son", said Fidel Castro with irony. Castro said Cuba delivered a diplomatic note demanding that Carriles be arrested and deported to Cuba to face charges of international terrorism, or if that proved politically impossible, that he be tried in the United States. (*AFP, Prensa Latina, Reuters*, 11/4/05)

April 12: Luis Posada Carriles, a CIA-trained Cuban exile implicated in a series of terrorist incidents, applied for political asylum in the United States, prompting at least one congressman to assert that granting the request would undermine the nation's credibility in the war on terrorism. Posada is in hiding after recently slipping into the United States, said Eduardo Soto, the Miami area lawyer handling Posada's asylum application. "If he is in the United States, he should be arrested and deported under the norms of international law," said Representative William D. Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts), who wrote a letter to leaders on the House International Relations Committee calling for an investigation into how Posada entered the country. "Given the enmity between the Cuban and US governments, it is possible that US officials may have turned a blind eye to Posada's entrance into our country -- or even worse, facilitated it," Delahunt wrote. "If that were true -- and even if it were not and Posada is allowed to remain here -- it would obliterate America's credibility in the war on terrorism, because it would suggest that we share the views of those who

support al Qaeda and Iraqi insurgents that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.' (*Washington Post*, 13/4/05)

April 13: Venezuela said it would demand Washington hand over an anti-communist Cuban exile wanted for terrorism by Havana after his attorney said he had travelled to the United States to apply for asylum. Luis Posada Carriles, who holds Venezuelan citizenship and who once escaped from jail in Caracas, has been accused by Havana of several attacks, including the bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed dozens of people. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had called for Posada's extradition after he was arrested in 2000 in Panama. "We're going to step up our demands for extradition," Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel told reporters. "I hope Mr Bush will take note of his own anti-terrorism policies and hand over Posada Carriles." (*ABC Online*, 13/4/05)

April 13: Spain's foreign minister has found a generally unsympathetic audience among both Republican and Democratic US legislators in the first part of his fence-mending mission to Washington. Miguel Angel Moratinos defended the need to intensify the two nations' bilateral dialogue in his first meeting with lawmakers on his visit to the US capital, however the legislators expressed their incomprehension over Madrid's policy toward Cuba and Venezuela. Moratinos met with members of the House International Relations Committee. There, both Republican and Democratic congressmen informed the Spanish minister that they did not understand the strategy being pursued by the government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero toward Havana and Caracas, diplomatic sources said. (*EFE*, 14/4/05)

April 14: Cuba, only hours after being formally criticized by the UN Commission on Human Rights for its lack of respect for individual liberties, presented a resolution of its own calling for an investigation into treatment of detainees at the US naval base on the southeastern coast of the island. Cuban ambassador Jorge Ivan Mora said the resolution asks that a representative of the UN commission be sent to the base at Guantanamo, sovereignty over which is exercised by Washington, to investigate treatment of the more than 500 people the United States has been holding there without trial, some for more than three years. Washington contends that the prisoners, some of whom reportedly have been subjected to deprivations and interrogation techniques tantamount to torture, are "enemy combatants" and suspected Islamic fundamentalist terrorists bereft of most legal rights. The Cuban-proposed measure notes that the European Parliament called last October for "an independent and impartial investigation" into allegations of abuse of detainees at the base. (*EFE*, 14/4/05)

April 14: Fidel Castro urged the United States to refrain from granting political asylum to Luis Posada Carriles, saying the Cuban militant should instead be sent to an international tribunal or Venezuela, where he is wanted for a 1976 Cuban airliner bombing. In his second speech on the Posada case this week, Castro said that the government has no intention of trying to bring Posada, who is also linked to assassination plots against the Cuban leader, to the island. "We are not going to ask for him, the whole world knows we won't," he said. "Send him to Venezuela (...) or an international tribunal in a neutral place where criminals are judged." Castro negated the possibility that Cuban intelligence agents would be after him. "We don't want him to disappear from the face of the earth," Castro said. "What we want is for him to appear -- him and all those who trained him." (*Reuters, AP*, 15/4/05)

April 15: A US senator who wants more food sales to Cuba blocked action on a popular nominee for the No 2 job at the Agriculture Department to draw attention to the issue. Senator Larry Craig, an Idaho Republican, acted a few days ahead of a potential Senate vote on a measure that would make it easier to sell US farm goods to Cuba. The Bush administration toughened the rules on February 22 over the protests of farm groups and their lawmaker allies. "We want to be assured we can trade with Cuba," said a Craig aide. He confirmed Craig put a hold on the nomination of White House agriculture advisor Chuck Conner to become deputy agriculture secretary. As a matter of courtesy, senators traditionally defer action on a nomination if a senator puts a hold on it. (*The News*, 17/4/05)

April 15: US Ambassador Kevin Moley, a representative to the UN Human Rights Commission at Geneva, said the resolution on Cuba passed with a larger majority than it has in the recent past. Last year's vote was 22-21 with 10

abstentions. This year's 21-17 vote was cast with 15 abstentions. "I think it reflects the president's energy and efforts he is putting behind his push for democracy around the world," Moley said. "We're very pleased. Weeks ago, I would have said that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to prevail," he said. In a telephone interview with the press Moley said Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine were responsible for the margin. (*UPI*, 15/4/05)

April 15: A Cuban official demanded that the United States immediately arrest and try "international terrorist" Luis Posada Carriles, who has sought political asylum and is believed to be hiding in Miami. Dagoberto Rodríguez, Cuba's top diplomat in the United States, also said that Cuba would not abide by a US-sponsored resolution passed in Geneva extending a 2003 mandate charging a UN expert with examining Cuba's human rights situation. "For us, the resolution passed on Cuba is just garbage. It is a piece of poor quality toilet paper. We are not going to abide by that," Rodríguez said, questioning the moral authority of the United States to sponsor such a resolution. (*AP*, 15/4/05)

April 15: A judge cleared the way for federal officials to have a feeding tube inserted in a Cuban exile who is on a weeklong hunger strike to protest his detention as a suspected spy. Juan Emilio Aboy was at Jackson Memorial Hospital's inmate ward, hospital spokeswoman Lorraine Nelson said. A day earlier, US District Judge Paul Huck agreed with another judge's order to "involuntarily administer nutrients" to Aboy through a stomach or intravenous tube, and to restrain him if he attempts to remove it. (*The Seattle Post*, 17/4/05)

April 17: Fidel Castro denounced obscure dealings by some US government officials and the "anti-Cuban terrorist mafia" based in the United States. Castro pointed his finger at the US government for its relations with terrorists such as Luis Posada Carriles, who is currently requesting political asylum in that country. Fidel Castro included John Bolton, Otto Reich and Roger Noriega on the list of US officials who have ties with terrorists. He said they have been characterized by their aggressive stance against the Cuban revolution from their government posts. Castro sustained that possible asylum granted to Luis Posada Carriles in the United States would undermine the country's alleged struggle against terrorism around the world. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/4/05)

April 18: Fidel Castro demanded that the United States immediately arrest and deport an alleged terrorist who is a former US army officer and ex-CIA agent. Castro in a speech commented on the reported presence in Miami of Cuban-exile radical Luis Posada Carriles, who he said should be sent to Venezuela to be tried there by an international tribunal. "What would be best for the United States, for its prestige, for the war on terrorism, would be to display no vacillation on this, to look for Posada Carriles," he said. "We already waived our right to try him, though no one has more of a right to do so, but we don't want anyone to think that we want to put on a show. We are not interested in any of that," Castro said. He also repeated his proposal to have an international court try Posada Carriles in Venezuela, where there is no death penalty. Castro has dedicated five televised speeches to the topic of Posada, whose exact whereabouts are not known, over the last week (*EFE, AP*, 19/4/05)

April 19: A Cuban spy suspect who had been on a hunger strike for 38 days demanding freedom from immigration custody was abruptly deported to his homeland -- only the second such removal of a non-Mariel Cuban back to the island since 1982. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention and removal officers returned Juan Emilio Aboy to Havana aboard an American government plane that took off from Miami and flew directly to the Cuban capital, said Barbara Gonzalez, an ICE spokeswoman in Miami. Aboy was admitted and paroled into the country on March 2, 1995. He became a lawful permanent resident on May 7, 1996. Aboy was arrested in May 2002, but has never been charged criminally. Instead, he was put in deportation proceedings. He had been linked by investigators to the so-called Wasp Network of more than a dozen Cuban government operatives working in South Florida in the late 1990s. He has denied the allegations, and investigators have not produced specific evidence other than to indicate the information came from Wasp Network members who were government informants. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/4/05)

April 19: Cuban's resistance will be invincible if the United States ever decided to launch a military aggression against the island, stressed Fidel Castro when recalling memories of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Addressing a ceremony

on the victory 44th anniversary, Castro warned that the US administration of President George W. Bush is portraying Cuba as a terrorist country to psychologically prepare the ground for a military attack. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/4/05)

April 19: The United States should allow UN human rights monitors, including the special rapporteur on torture, to visit detainees held at Guantánamo Bay, Human Rights Watch said. Cuba put forward a resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights demanding such access for the rights monitor. Cuba should permit the UN rapporteurs to visit detainees in its own prisons as well. "The international community should get commitments from both the United States and Cuba to grant UN investigators access to detainees on all parts of the island," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. "The European Union put its weight behind this effort." (*HRW Press Release*, 19/4/05)

April 20: The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) concluded discussion of agenda items, although the European Union dodged the Cuban proposal concerning prisoners of the US in Guantánamo. Several participants in the Commission have already said their farewells, although one burning issue remains - the answer to the Cuban initiative concerning the situation of the persons being held by the United States in the military base it illegally occupies in Guantánamo. The proposal has already been through three sessions of consultations, during which the Cuban mission considered opinions proffered, and modified the document accordingly. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/4/05)

April 20: Recent US Treasury Department rulings threaten a growing US market for rice and other commodities, a representative of the US Rice Producers Association and USA Rice Federation told members of Congress. "Cuba has grown to be among our top five largest single-country export markets for US rice," says Dennis DeLaughter, a rice producer from Edna, Texas, who testified at a hearing held by the House Agriculture Committee. "Since December 2001, \$1 billion of agricultural goods have already been delivered and paid for by Cuba, he said. "These purchases included shipments of nearly 320,000 tons of US rice worth a reported \$81 million. In 2004, the Cubans bought \$64 million worth of US rice — more than their purchases of any other commodity." (*Southwest Farm Press*, 20/4/05)

April 20: The abrupt deportation of an alleged Cuban spy in Miami -- the first such removal to the communist-ruled island -- came after Havana expressed an unusual willingness to take back the spy suspect, US officials told the press. Washington authorities had sought Juan Emilio Aboy's return to his native Cuba since late last year, but it wasn't until April 18 that Havana unexpectedly issued a diplomatic note saying his return would be accepted. Cuba has generally refused to take back exiles. US officials said no special negotiations or deals were tied to Aboy's return. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/4/05)

April 20: A pocket-size leaflet with a reprint of Bush's January 20 inaugural address in which he vowed to free the world of tyranny, and a second pamphlet containing the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, arrived anonymously in the dead of night on "patios" and doors of Havana. They are part of an escalating US government program to spur political change in Cuba. The clandestine, door-to-door leafleting is the latest in the Bush administration's stepped up effort to reach citizens who have little access to public information outside Cuba's government-controlled media. In Zamora, a neighborhood of concrete homes and wood shacks packed tightly together, the pamphlets were met with dread, suspicion and curiosity. Although rumors about anything out of the ordinary usually spread like wildfire in Cuba, Zamora residents have largely kept quiet about the mysterious pamphlets. Daniel Erikson, director of Caribbean programs at the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington policy group, said the leaflets are designed more to irritate Castro than to cause change on the island. Erikson said Cubans have become extremely "risk adverse" because they live in a police state. Cuban authorities have made clear that anyone associated with the US government-financed program is a traitor who could be jailed. "Cubans do not see it to be in their own interest to be accepting or reading these flyers," Erikson said. "It's not that people are not interested in democracy. But the US is not the best messenger." (*Chicago Tribune*, 20/4/05)

April 20: A US House of Representatives Subcommittee passed a resolution in support of the meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, which will be held on May 20 in Havana . The bipartisan resolution, introduced by Republican legislator of Cuban origin, Mario Díaz-Balart, serves as an expression of solidarity with the more than 360 organizations that make up the Assembly. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/4/05)

April 20: The UN Human Rights Commissioner rejected Cuba's attempt to force an investigation into the treatment of detainees at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay. The vote on Cuba's resolution was 22-8, with 23 other nations abstaining. The other nations supporting Cuba were China, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Sudan, Malaysia, Guatemala and Mexico. The resolution, which noted the "serious concern" expressed by UN experts about the conditions for detainees at Guantanamo, would have asked the United States "to authorize an impartial and independent fact-finding mission" to the centre. (*AP*, 21/4/05)

April 21: Fidel Castro charged that Washington might be planning the deportation of international criminal Luis Posada Carriles to El Salvador. He said that sending the terrorist to the Central American nation would be like sending him home, since, according to the Cuban leader, Posada Carriles planned many of his terrorist actions there, including the bomb explosions in several Havana hotels in 1997. Fidel Castro made the statement at a televised and radio presentation before victims and survivors of US terrorism against the Caribbean island, Communist Party, union and grass-roots leaders and Armed Forces and Interior Ministry members. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/4/05)

April 24: The leader of a Baptist group in Cuba will be preaching at a Birmingham church as part of a program that promotes cultural exchange between US and Cuban Baptists. Manuel Delgado, executive secretary of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba, will speak at Baptist Church of the Covenant. Delgado's group has ties to the Alliance of Baptists, a coalition of moderate Baptists of which Church of the Covenant is a member. The Alliance promotes exchanges between churches in Cuba and the United States. (*Birmingham News*, 24/4/05)

April 25: A move to limit travel from Florida to Cuba died in the Florida Senate when committee members said they don't want to stop anyone from visiting a sick or dying relative. The plan championed by Representative David Rivera, Republican-Miami, was designed to stop Floridians from traveling to and helping the economy of terrorist nations, mainly communist Cuba. It would have stripped Cuban expatriates of any state and federal benefits if they returned home within three years of arriving in Florida and called for stiff fees on charter flights to the island nation. "You'd be able to travel to a terrorist country, just not do it on the taxpayer's dime," said Rivera, one of South Florida's most vocal supporters of President George W. Bush's tough restrictions on travel and gift parcels to Cuba announced last May. But members of the Senate Commerce and Consumer Services Committee openly wondered why they should stop someone from visiting family. (*Sun Sentinel*, 25/4/05)

April 25: The Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations demanded that the United States arrest and extradite a Cuban-born militant who supposedly arrived in Miami. Ambassador Orlando Requeijo considered Luis Posada Carriles "one of the most monstrous terrorists on this continent." At a UN Security Council meeting on terrorism, Requeijo said that the alleged militiaman was trained and used by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to plan attacks against Cuba for 40 years. (*AP*, 25/4/05)

April 26: More than thirty companies, state agencies, and organizations from 19 states announced the official formation of the US-Cuba Trade Association (USCTA). Charter members of the newly formed association include ADM, Caterpillar, Cargill, National Foreign Trade Council, USAEngage, USA Rice Federation, North Dakota Farm Bureau, Port of Galveston, Louisiana Department of Economic Development, AgBioTech, Buffalo Int'l., Arthur Savage & Sons, Port Manatee Commercial Center, Virginia Department of Agriculture, US Wheat Associates, and other companies. The mission of the U.S.-Cuba Trade Association is to protect current trade with Cuba, expand and increase the potential for future business, and promote the full normalization of commercial relations between the US and Cuba. (*PRNewswire*, 26/4/05)

April 26: In a show of the growing clout of Cuban-American lawmakers in Washington, a bipartisan group of legislators is forming a caucus to strengthen measures designed to weaken Fidel Castro's regime and to promote Cuba's civil society and pro-democracy movement. The Cuban Democracy Caucus had yet to finalize its agenda and membership, but a draft of a 10-point agenda shows the caucus may push for aggressive new tactics to undermine Castro. Among the moves being pushed, the agenda supports current US law behind the embargo and fight legislation that would allow US tourists to visit and spend money in Cuba; insists that US interests be allowed to lobby the Havana government as much as Washington allows lobbying by the Cuban government; demands accountability for crimes committed by the Cuban government against US citizens, such as the shoot-down of the Brothers to the Rescue planes in 1996, which resulted in four US civilian deaths. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/4/05)

April 26: The University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection has received the Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar Collection, consisting of thousands of documents - correspondence, memorabilia, photographs, and books - owned by the former Cuban President. This invaluable part of Cuban history was donated by Batista Zaldivar's widow Martha Batista and his children. The Cuban Heritage Collection, in the University's Otto G. Richter Library, is the largest repository of Cuban historical, literary and cultural materials outside the island. The Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar Collection contains documents dating from 1958 to 1973. (*Business Wire*, 26/4/05)

April 27: The US Congress urged the European Union to press Cuba on its human rights record and condemned the communist-led island for its crackdown on dissidents. The House of Representatives voted 398-27 for a resolution that "condemns in the strongest possible terms" Cuba's arrest of 75 dissidents in March 2003 and its "continuing repressive crackdown against the brave internal opposition and the independent press." It also "calls for the European Union, as well as other countries and international organizations, to continue to pressure the Cuban regime to improve its human rights record." (*AFP*, 27/4/05)

April 27: North Dakota firms expect to sell 25,000 metric tons of dry peas to Cuba in the next 18 months, an agreement that officials say will bolster the state's trade relationship with the communist nation. The first shipment of 5,000 tons of peas should be sent to Cuba in the next three months, said Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson, who returned this week from a three-day trade mission to the country. Cuban officials also are interested in buying several other North Dakota commodities, including sunflowers, soybeans and potatoes, along with cattle, Johnson said. (*AP*, 27/4/05)

April 27: Business leaders and current and former elected officials from throughout the South will gather at the Mobile Convention Center to attend the 2005 National Summit on Cuba in Mobile, Alabama. Special presentations will be made on US Cuba policy's economic impact on the American South. Speakers include Alabama Secretary of Agriculture Ron Sparks; Louisiana Secretary of Economic Development Mike Olivier who just traveled to Cuba with Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco; US Representatives Jo Bonner (Republican-Alabama) and Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona) among other local and US elected officials, corporate representatives and others. (*PR Newswire*, 27/4/05)

April 27: Activists from across the country gathered in Washington to protest US sanctions against Cuba. In a ballroom of the Hyatt Regency hotel, more than 700 activists gathered to hear members of Congress talk about legislation that would repeal travel restrictions to the island. One of those members said that those who support sanctions against Cuba are organizing because they are worried about losing ground in the fight. In reference to the creation of the Congressional Cuba Democracy Caucus, an organization that focuses attention on human rights violations in Cuba and on the dissident movement in Cuba, Representative Jeff Flake said as he left the Hyatt ballroom, "they look at a group like this and they say, Hey, this issue is slipping away from us." (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/4/05)

April 27: The United States has lost out on \$300 million in agricultural sales to Cuba since February when the Bush administration imposed stricter financial regulations on firms doing business with the country, a Cuban government

official told a new pro-Cuba trade group. Pedro Alvarez Borrego, chairman of the Cuban food import agency Alimport, told the US-Cuba Trade Association in a telephone conference that the "uncertainty of supply and financial losses" had forced Alimport "to detour" to other foreign markets for \$300 million in purchases, according to a copy of his speech. Alimport has imported \$179.4 million in U.S. food products this year, which USCTA said is on par with imports of recent years. Traders, however, say the Cuba business is not growing this year. Alvarez said Cuba will honor the contracts it has signed and hopes to continue to expand US purchases. (*Congress Daily*, 28/4/05)

April 29: The leaders of Cuba and Venezuela relished their roles as Washington's bad boys in Latin American and vowed to build a socialist alternative to US policies in the hemisphere. Fidel Castro and the younger and equally loquacious Hugo Chavez mocked Bush administration charges that their burgeoning partnership threatens to undermine democracy in Latin America. "I'm realizing that your friendship is hurting my image," Castro joked to Chavez during a meeting with hundreds of free trade opponents from across the Americas. Among the attendees were Bolivian coca farmer Evo Morales, whose peasant movement helped oust a US ally from the presidency in 2003, and former Salvadoran guerrilla Shafik Handal, leader of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front. "If we are speaking of an axis, that axis is spreading in all directions and turning into masses of people that are rising up," said Chavez. We must congratulate (US Secretary of State) Condoleezza Rice for the death of the FTAA. The FTAA is dead, the ALBA is coming," declared Castro, calling her "Condolence" Rice. The only country that has joined ALBA is Cuba, which has turned to Venezuela for oil to pull up a cash-starved economy crippled by the demise of the Soviet Union. (*Reuters*, 29/4/05)

April 29: President Bush ordered that \$198,000 in frozen Cuban funds be sent to a Miami woman who sued Cuba for rape because her husband turned out to be a spy for Fidel Castro's government. Ana Margarita Martinez married Juan Pablo Roque in 1995 but months later he left her to go back to Cuba and admitted in a television interview he had been sent to Florida to gather information on the exile community. A Miami judge ruled that the couple's sexual relations constituted rape because of the deception. (*Reuters*, 29/4/05)