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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Fidel Castro voices confidence that younger leaders will carry on his legacy. International and local artists gather at the Havana Biennale for the Arts. Raul Castro makes a call for the unity of all the militaries as guarantors of the continuation of the Cuban political process. A mob organized by Cuban authorities beat up dissident Martha Beatriz Roque and invade her home. The Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party announces the removal of one of its members and introduces changes in the auxiliary structure of the Central Committee.

Economy: Venezuela invests over \$800 million to start up the Cienfuegos refinery in Cuba. Iran finances important industrial projects in Cuba. Cuba and Canadian Sherritt International expand nickel and cobalt production projects. Cuba and Byelorussia sign contracts for \$12 million.

Exile Community: A radical pro-Castro group prevent Cuban writer Raúl Rivero from giving a conference in Seville. A Cuban exile is arrested for stashing more than 1,000 guns in his Upland home, in California.

Foreign Affairs: The Cuban government accuses Mexican authorities of being involved in an aborted human smuggling operation. Approximately 300,000 Latin Americans of scant means of support have received vision treatment free of charge in Cuba. The Cuban government denies a request to renew the visa of a Czech Embassy political counsellor. Two Cuban high official delegations meet in Teheran with Iran's President and Foreign Minister, respectively. Belarus Prime Minister meets with Fidel Castro in Havana. Cuba's Fidel Castro, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales of Bolivia sign in Havana agreements designed to strengthen the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and to launch the People's Trade Agreement.

Security: The Cuban government perceives the US military manoeuvres in the Caribbean as a demonstration of force.

US-Cuba Relations: The Cuban Coast Guard shoots three suspected migrant smugglers from the United States, killing one. A US Senator announces legislation to keep Cuba from oil drilling in the waters between the Caribbean island nation and the Florida Keys.



Domestic Affairs

April 1: The Cuban women's judo team picked up a silver medal and two fifth positions at the World Cup held in Birmingham, England. Sheila Espinosa -the silver medal winner- lost by Ippon to the Chinese athlete Yaling Yu, in the 57-kilo category finals, reports the website of that high-level international event. The fifth positions were attained by the Cuban novice Yamilka del Valle, 52 kg, who lost fighting for the bronze to the Portuguese Joana Ramos. Cuban veteran Ivis Dueñas, was also defeated competing for the bronze by Britian's Simone Callender in the over 78 kg division. (*CAN*, 3/4/06)

April 2: Fidel Castro voiced confidence that younger leaders coming up through the ranks of the Communist party, military and government will carry on his legacy. "In general I feel good. Most of all I feel energetic and enthusiastic about things," Mr Castro told Ignacio Ramonet, the director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, in an interview published by the Spanish newspaper *El País* on April 2. The publication of extracts from 100 hours of interviews, given from 2003 to 2005 and now to be turned into a book, comes as the US Central Intelligence Agency reports that Mr Castro has Parkinson's disease. The Bush administration has been voicing its concern that Mr Castro's younger brother, the defence minister Raul Castro, 74, will soon take over. "If something happens to me tomorrow the National Assembly will surely meet and elect him," Mr Castro says, "and so will the political bureau." But then Mr Castro, for the first time, admits that his brother, who will be 75 in June and has been at his side since the 1959 revolution, is also getting on in years. "But already he is getting near my age and this problem [succession] is more generational," Mr Castro says, adding later, "now there are new generations [coming forward] because our generation is already passing." Most top party officials, military officers and ministers are now between 40 and 60 years of age, though the few "historicos" left, in particular the Castro brothers, still clearly set policy. His strongest supporters believe he should remain as long as possible, especially given continued US hostility, but his detractors insist he should have stepped down long ago as his antagonism to the US and state domination of the economy are ruining the country. [[Interview with Fidel Castro](#)] (*Financial Times*, 5/4/06)

April 2: Well-known Cuban artists have done wonders for about 50 old US refrigerators by converting them into works of art for the "Manual de Instrucciones" show that opened in Havana as part of the 9th Biennial Plastic Arts Exhibition. Painters such as Roberto Fabelo and Flora Fong, actor Jorge Perugorria ("Strawberry and Chocolate") and Eduardo Abela, among others, for the next month will exhibit the appliances - many of them from the 1950s - that they augmented according to their creative visions, turning them into curious and surprising artistic pieces. (*EFE*, 2/4/06)

April 2: Cuban political prisoner and independent journalist Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez has been on a hunger strike since last March 21, protesting the abuses he is being subjected to in prison as well as the fact that he is being held without due process for over fourteen months now. According to his relatives, Roberto de Jesús wrote 17 letters to his relatives and prison officials never mailed them. The 27-year old independent journalist and promoter of the "Corriente Martiana" in Havana is being held in prison without due process since July 13 of 2005. On January 20th, 2006, he was transferred to the prison Nieves Morejón in Sancti Spiritu while his legal situation is still in limbo. (*Puente Informativo*, 2/4/06)

April 3: The International Baseball Federation (IBAF) has awarded international prizes to Cuban baseball players Eduardo Paret and Dayan Viciedo. Paret, captain of the latest national team and most valuable player at the Holland 2005 World Cup, was named the best player of the year. Viciedo was awarded the Ike Ikura prize for the best junior player of the year, given his outstanding performance in the 15-16 national selection that won the world championship. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/4/06)

April 3: The overcrowded tenement houses known popularly in Cuba by the name of "solar" are a dramatic reminder of the severe housing shortage still facing the country, despite the efforts made in recent years. While this a problem that now extends to all of Cuba's large cities, it is especially serious in Havana, where there are over 7,000 of these

typically precarious multi-family dwellings. Since 2004, roughly 1,000 tenement houses in Havana have undergone major repairs. Efforts like these have been underway since the mid-1990s and involve numerous local and foreign entities. One example is the Cayo Hueso project, created in 1995 under the auspices of the Ministry of Basic Industry to benefit this sprawling Centro Habana neighbourhood - the second founded outside the former city walls of Old Havana, which is home to just over 200 tenement houses. The financing from the project came from Oxfam-Canada, the Canadian branch of the international development agency, and the Martin Luther King Centre in Cuba. The renovation work itself was done by a government construction brigade, assisted by a number of the building's residents, who received a salary for their work. (*IPS*, 3/4/06)

April 4: United by their revolutionary ideas and loyalty to their country, young Cubans across the island celebrated the 45 th Anniversary of the Jose Marti Pioneers Organization and the 44 th Anniversary of the Young Communist League (UJC) in a ceremony at the Karl Marx Theater. During the ceremony, "Los Zapaticos de Rosa" award [named after a Jose Marti poem about sharing that all pioneers learn]; the national award for youths with an outstanding record of volunteer and school participation; and the UJC Flag of Honor were presented by different groups including the Cuban baseball team that recently placed second at the World Baseball Classic. (*Granma*, 4/3/06)

April 4: An address by Fidel Castro during the celebration of the 45 th Anniversary of the Jose Marti Pioneers Organization and the 44 th Anniversary of the Young Communist League Tuesday evening was broadcast live on Cuban television. In the speech at Havana's Karl Marx Theater, Fidel Castro said that the Cuban education system is inconceivable without the Pioneers Organization. "Today has been a great day for everyone and I am happy to have been able to share in this celebration with the children and young people who have attended today's event representing their peers from throughout the country," Commander in Chief Fidel Castro said. Castro praised the pioneers for their participation in 24 demonstrations in which they marched beside their teachers and parents and gave speeches. "The Cuban children participated in the process that reaffirmed the irrevocable socialist character of the Constitution and they signed 150,000 letters to President Bush, telling him about the life and work of Jose Marti. The Cuban children, the pioneers, know that the Cuban Revolution is invincible," said Fidel Castro. (*Granma*, 6/4/06)

April 4: The film "Una Rosa de Francia" (A French Rose) by the Spanish film maker Manuel Gutierrez, with script by Senel Paz (Strawberry and Chocolate) and actor Jorge Perrugorria, both Cuban, will be premiered in Havana. The premiere is scheduled at La Rampa theater, a downtown cinema, in which Gutierrez (Quartet in Havana) who is in Havana with part of the production team, will address the audience. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/3/06)

April 4: It was supposed to be a big scoop, one of those rare tell-all interviews with Fidel Castro that fills books and sells papers. But the interview published on April 2 in the prominent Spanish daily El País has some apparent problems: several quotes are verbatim from public speeches the Cuban leader gave. El País published an excerpt from "Fidel Castro: Biografia a dos voces" -- Fidel Castro: A Two-Voiced Biography -- written by French leftist intellectual Ignacio Ramonet and published by Debate, a division of Random House Mondadori. The headline said Ramonet, the editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a Paris scholarly review, got an unprecedented 100 hours of conversations with Castro. "When I read it, it sounded familiar," said Ernesto Hernández-Busto, a Cuban writer based in Spain who discovered the similarities. "It wound up being a cut-and-paste operation." The similarities between the excerpts from Ramonet's book and Castro's speeches were exposed by prominent Spanish blogger Arcadi Espada on his website, www.arcadi.espasa.com. Writer Hernández-Busto was the first to notice, but others followed with at least five paragraphs that matched word for word. Hernández-Busto said he figures Ramonet likely struck a deal with the Cuban government that required him to turn in his manuscript for approval prior to publication. The Cuban government "probably sent it back to him with corrections," Hernández-Busto said. (*The Miami Herald*, 5/4/06)

April 5: According to recent medical statistics, triplets occur at a rate of approximately one delivery per every 7,500 of single births. Periodico 26 Online reported on October 17, 2005 that Aracelys Jorge Perez, who lives in the northern town of Chaparra in eastern Las Tunas province, had become mother of three babies at the same time. Four months

later, a similar delivery took place in nearby Ernesto Guevara Hospital. Since Dania Bermudez Gutierrez gave birth to her beloved triplets on February 17, that event has been the talk of her hometown of San Manuel, in northeast Las Tunas province. They were the first triplets in the history of that town and everyone wants to know details of the new experience that their lucky mother is going through. (*CAN*, 5/4/06)

April 6: The Ministry of Culture and the National Council for the Performing Arts annual Cuban National Dance Award was given this year to dancers, choreographers and teachers Ramona de Saa and Santiago Alfonso. Indisputable masters in their respective areas of the performing areas, De Saa is considered one of the mainstays in the formation and preservation of the Cuban School of Ballet. Alfonso was part of the first line performers of contemporary dance in Cuba, and has obtained an infinite number of achievements in dealing with Cuban popular dances. (*Granma*, 7/4/06)

April 7: Coinciding with the World Health Day, Cuba immunized 524,000 children in the second stage of the anti-polio myelitis vaccination campaign. Nearly 384,000 under three-year-old toddlers, already vaccinated in February, received a second portion while the medication was reactivated for over 140,000 nine-year-old children. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/4/06)

April 7: A report issued by the illegal dissident organization, Cuban Foundation of Human Rights (FCDH), denounces the “critical situation that the Cuban people suffer in matters concerning human rights, as well as public freedoms”. Signed by Juan Carlos Leiva, president of the FCDH, based in the city of Ciego de Avila, in the eastern province with the same name, the report denounces the “acts of repudiation” as “the main weapon of repression and terror currently used by the Cuban government” against the dissidents and their families, and states that “in the last ten months, the government has carried out over 100” of these repressive acts. The report also denounces violations of civil and political rights, as well as the inhuman conditions in jail. “More than 500 political prisoners remain locked in Cuban prisons. Close to one hundred of them are prisoners of conscience. Almost daily, military officials in all the prisons of the country deal savage beatings to the prisoners in general (...) The prisoners are beaten with whips made from marabou, rubber straps, and hoses: they are also kicked and slapped. Food and water is cut back to insignificant quantities. The prisoners’ cells are enclosed (without light) with a hole in the floor for their bodily functions”, the report says. (*Netfor Cuba*, 7/4/06)

April 7: The Cuban University Students Federation (FEU) will discuss new ways to guarantee the invulnerability of the Revolution at their seventh Congress, the organization’s president Carlos Lage Codorniu said. The FEU hopes this congress will make a difference, and to that end it is stepping up its role as a popular organization with a deep social vocation, he stressed. He added that the FEU wants young people to become a social force that contributes to the revolutionary project of the Cuban people. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/4/06)

April 10: Fidel Castro's government has made a point of cultural diplomacy, inaugurating the Havana biennial 22 years ago with the aspiration of making the capital city the cultural hub of the Third World. Throughout the city, museums have been refurbished, and installed with many politically charged works that speak both for and against the revolution, displays that seem to demonstrate the government's tolerance of dissenting voices. But in the studios, we see many works that will not be publicly exhibited in Cuba. The artists know the consequences: irresolvable bureaucratic hang-ups, complicated exit visas, harassing calls from state security. These artists and curators function in a shadowy world, where freedoms and consequences are never clear. And nothing is quite what it seems. (...) It is censorship of a subtle, Kafkaesque sort. Yes, you can show the work; no, we cannot assure you the space. Uncertainty is a theme that runs through much of the best contemporary art made in Havana. Other works present utopian schemes for public spaces and housing projects, visionary speculations that inspire dreaming over despair. (...) In Cuba, it's a delicate dance between the government and the artists. The one thing they can agree on is the power of the visual in mobilizing thought. No one here is underestimating the power of art. (*The Globe and Mail*, 10/4/06)

April 10: The Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue, in the western Cuban city of Cárdenas, is working to carve out a larger space for reflection in Cuban society. "If we are not part of the solution, then we are part of the problem" is one of the slogans of the center, which organizes workshops and retreats on issues like reconciliation, peace, conflict resolution, inter-religious dialogue, gender violence and sexuality. "The future is not about closing our minds, but about opening them, without losing the basic essence of our project," Pastor Raimundo García, executive director of the religious institution founded in the early 1990s in Cárdenas, 150 kilometers from Havana, told the press. He also said the country is still experiencing "a lack of dialogue and participation" that makes it difficult to improve the political system. "More than ecumenical, this is an all-inclusive institution," said García. "Our assembly and board of directors include Christians from different denominations, as well as people from other religions, non-believers and members of the Communist Party. We have achieved mutual respect for each other, and we have been able to reach a consensus." In his view, Cuba should not cut off any lines of dialogue. On the contrary, "they need to be deepened, to see what people think in different sectors, how we can work together on a shared project for the future. It is possible that some officials could start to think about the total centralization of the state once again, but it has already been proven that this doesn't work," he said. "We can't go back to what we were in the past. If we close our eyes and bury our heads in the sand like ostriches, then we will definitely destroy what we have," he said. (*IPS*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Notables from more than 15 countries are attending the 9th International Conference on African and African American Culture. The event in session at the Heredia Convention Theatre in Santiago de Cuba includes a symposium on Culture and Medicine. Issues under discussion include the historical heritage and universal significance of African and African-American cultures. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Over 400 delegates from 36 countries gathered in Havana to participate in the 5th Hemispheric Meeting Against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. In the inaugural speech, the president of the Department of Economic Affairs of Cuba's National Assembly, Osvaldo Martínez, said that this forum will "update, coordinate, and consolidate the social and popular movements' strategies" against the US sponsored FTA. (*EFECOM*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Cuban authorities allowed two bishops to broadcast Holy Week messages on the radio, confirmed Monsignor Emilio Aranguren, bishop of Holguín. According to the prelate, the Office of Religious Affairs, affiliated with the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, permitted him and Bishop Dionisio García Ibáñez of Bayamo-Manzanillo, to broadcast radio messages for the start of Holy Week in their respective dioceses. This is the first time that this happens in Holguín in 46 years. (*Zenit*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Cuba reduced infant mortality in the first quarter of 2006 to 5.3 for each 1,000 live births, down from the same period in 2005 when it reported 6.2 percent, Cuban health officials reported. María Cecilia Santana, director of the Cuban Public Health Ministry's (MINSAP) Maternal Infant Department, pointed out that this decrease was thanks to the work of all sectors of Cuban society. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/4/06)

April 10: The 11th International Gathering of Dance in Urban Landscapes: City in Motion is set to take place from April 12 to April 16. Havana's architecture will once again be the setting for the festival, which showcases national and international dances inside the buildings of one of the region's most architecturally interesting metropolises. As of 1999, the festival has been included as part of the International Cities that Dance Circuit, a network created in Barcelona in 1992 and made up of 12 European, and North and South American cities. Dance troupes from 14 countries will perform in the ancient plazas, streets and walls of Old Havana. (*Granma*, 11/4/06)

April 11: Medical services in Sibanicú, Camaguey, are scarce. Since its inauguration at the beginning of 2005, the municipal optical is deficient in prescription lenses. The laboratory of the municipal hospital lacks reagents to conduct clinical analyses, which affects diabetic patients and pregnant women. The X-ray department doesn't have plates for radiographies of the thorax. These scarcities add to a shortage of doctors, since many of them left their practice to work

in Venezuela. All this has created discontent in the population, opposing the massive arrival of foreign patients to undergo eye surgery as part of the so-called Operation Miracle. (*Cubamet*, 11/4/06)

April 11: A small number of Cubans have embraced Islam, gathering for prayers and attending religious events mostly sponsored by Iranian diplomats in Havana, one of the converts said. Some Havana residents place the total number of converts at 300; others, at 3,000. What's certain is that about 70 usually attend the gatherings hosted by the Iranian diplomats. "We are a small community that struggles on. (...) Many people associate Muslims with a not-very moderate Islam, but we are very moderate," said Alí Nicolás Cossío, a former foreign ministry official who now reports for the Voice of Islam, the official Iranian radio station. "The community owes much to the embassies' moral and human support, and the Iranian Embassy -- the only Shiite mission -- stands out in that regard," Cossío told the press. There are about 16 Arab diplomatic missions in Havana, Cossío said, but the Iranian embassy plays the leading role in contacts with the local Muslims. So the converts are now asking for permission to build a mosque in Havana. "Cuba is the only Latin American country without a mosque, and where there's no mosque it is very difficult to establish social exchanges," Cossío said. For now, though, that would seem unlikely. For years, the Islamic diplomatic community asked for one but had to resort to makeshift prayer halls in diplomatic compounds. And Cuba has been all but barring other religions from building new temples. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/4/06)

April 11: It does not appear that capital punishment will disappear any time soon in Cuba despite a de facto moratorium on the death penalty. April 11 marked the third anniversary of the executions of three Cubans who hijacked a ferry carrying dozens of passengers, including four foreign tourists, in an attempt to reach the United States in April 2003. At present, the Cuban government stresses that the death sentence is only handed down in "exceptional" circumstances, and is kept on the books as a judicial weapon that can be used by the country to defend itself from both external attack and potential internal activities aimed at destroying the state. "The possible abolition of capital punishment in Cuba would be linked to a cease in the policy of hostility, terrorism and economic, commercial and financial warfare to which its people have been subjected for over 40 years by the United States," the Cuban Foreign Ministry told the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2004. With regard to crimes against life and physical integrity, the Cuban Criminal Code establishes the death penalty for cases of homicide, rape, sexual abuse of minors involving violence, robbery involving violence and intimidation, and crimes in which corruption serves as an aggravating factor. "Right now there are around 50 people either sentenced to, or eligible for, the death sentence," opposition leader Elizardo Sánchez told IPS. Sánchez is the president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, an opposition group that has no legal status but is tolerated by the Cuban government. (*IPS*, 11/4/06)

April 12: Leaders of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT), met "to look into incidents of street violence" and to take strong measures against the "acts of vandalism" taking place in cities around the country. According to a source, one of the tasks of this commission will be to analyze "the outbreak of protests" against public transport - including the buses recently bought from China-, particularly alarming in the City of Havana. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/4/06)

April 13 The mortal remains of first lieutenant Hermes Peña Torres, killed in combat in Argentina on April 18, 1964, were buried with military honours close to those of Che Guevara in Santa Clara, in the centre of Cuba. Peña Torres was part of the People's Guerrilla Army commanded by Argentine journalist Jorge Ricardo Masetti, founder of the Cuban press agency Prensa Latina, in the Argentine province of Salta. His grave had been located in that country a few months ago. (*AFP*, 13/4/06)

April 14: Cuban prisons remain packed full of political prisoners and repression against dissidents, opponents of the regime, independent journalists and correspondents is on the rise. All this is made clear with the recent detentions and threats carried out by the forces of the State Security against members of the opposition on the threshold of the third anniversary of the wave of repression of March 2003. In the municipality of Consolación del Sur in Pinar del Río

province, the house of Felipe Gil Sanjudo, an independent journalist, was visited by two State Security agents and by the chief of the police in that territory. They threatened to jail Sanjudo if he participated in the activity commemorating the anniversary of the crackdown on dissidents of 2003. They also told him they wouldn't allow him to travel to the city of Pinar del Río. In the eastern zone of the island in the town of San Luis in Santiago de Cuba, Maura Isset was assaulted, together with her husband, in her own home by security agents. The agents insulted her verbally for her membership to a dissident organization. Isset is affiliated with the Federation of Latin American Rural Women (FLAMUR). (*Cubanet*, 14/4/06)

April 15: Cuban photographer Raul Corrales, known as one of the leaders in his field in the post-Revolutionary period, died in Havana, state television reported. He was 81. Born in 1925, Corrales was for almost 60 years "a paradigm of Cuban photography" and his death represents "a regrettable loss" to Cuban culture, the station added. Along with Alberto Diaz "Korda," author of the most famous photo taken of Argentine-born Cuban revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara; and Osvaldo Salas; Corrales is recognized as one of the leading figures of the so-called "Epic Photography of the Cuba Revolution" period that followed Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959. He also is known for important photographs of the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. (*EFE*, 15/4/06)

April 16: On the same place the socialist character of the Revolution was declared 45 years ago, Cuba ratified the willingness and resoluteness to continue with its political, economic and social project irrespective of the ever-present US threats and aggressions. Cubans endorsed their stance at a public rally on 23 and 12 streets in the Havana borough of El Vedado, on April 16, 1961, when then Prime Minister Fidel Castro delivered a speech in the national mourning for victims of US air raids of several Cuban airports. In the political on meeting, Havana Communist Party First Secretary Pedro Saez recalled the US refused to accept that a small country like Cuba would decide on its own destiny, and organized a troop of Cuban exiles, but in less than 72 hours, they were defeated. The celebration was also headed by commanders Ramiro Valdés and Guillermo García, together with Communist Party officials, Esteban Lazo and Pedro Ross. Fidel Castro was not present at the event, nor was Raúl Castro, minister of Defence and number two in the country's hierarchy. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 16/4/06)

April 17: Seven women whose attempt to leave the island with their children was frustrated when Cuban coast guard officials opened fire on their alleged smugglers will be tried in court for endangering their children's lives, state media reported. The Communist Party daily Granma said the seven children, ages 1 to 14, had to walk through swampy terrain plagued with mosquitoes and without water or food for two days before April 5, when they were to be picked up by migrant smugglers in the western province of Pinar del Rio. "Once again it has been exposed how irresponsible and unscrupulous people put the lives of their children in twice as much danger: to drown during their voyage or get sick because of the bad environment chosen by the smugglers," Granma said. The newspaper offered no details on the specific charges against the women or when they would be tried. [[Nada ni nadie puede poner en peligro la vida de un niño](#)] (*AP*, 17/4/06)

April 18: The Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) criticized the "lack of basic guarantees" in the judicial process that authorities have announced against seven mothers who tried to flee the island on a boat used for "human smuggling". "The process is not transparent", said the president of the organization, Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz. "All 39 detainees are incommunicado and without access to basic guarantees", added the activist. (*EER*, 20/4/06)

April 18: Cuba is the second country in the world with the largest number of hyperbaric oxygen chambers, only following South Korea, Dr. Juan Chui informed. Dr. Chui, president of the Cuban Society of Hyperbaric Medicine and Undersea Activities, said that hospitals throughout the country are equipped with hyperbaric chambers, part of the health authorities' strategy to improve the quality of health care. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/4/06)

April 18: The wife of political prisoner Dr. Alfredo Pulido Lopez, denounced that her husband's health condition has significantly worsened. Rebeca Rodriguez said that Dr. Pulido, a dentist who was incarcerated in Kilo 8 Prison, Camaguey province, after the crackdown against dissidents in 2003, has lost a lot of weight and suffers from chronic bronchitis. Lack of air also affect Dr. Pulido's health, and recently, dark bruises of an unknown origin have appeared on his skin. He is now at least 20 pounds under what he weighed when he was incarcerated in 2003. Rebeca said that she had never seen her husband so depressed and psychologically distraught. According to the Cuban dentist's testimony, his condition is related to an increase of aggressiveness among the prisoners. He pointed out that a few days before his wife's visit, one prisoner had killed another. "We are constantly under inspection. They call those of us that are political prisoners 'counter-revolutionaries' and treat us like common criminals." Dr. Pulido, 46, practiced dentistry for 22 years until 1998 when he was expelled from his clinic for linking himself to the dissident movement through the Christian Liberation Movement. (*Netfor Cuba*, 24/4/06)

April 19: Cuba celebrated the 45th anniversary of its forces' humiliating defeat of a US-organized invasion of exiles, with the main newspaper saying Washington's belief that the invaders would be welcomed by a cheering populace was a major miscalculation that helped doom the effort. A politico-cultural event set for the evening in Havana will cap the commemorations of the Castro regime's triumph at the place known in the United States as the Bay of Pigs, but more commonly called here Giron Beach. Veterans of the battle will be among the more than 3,000 people on hand at the capital's Karl Marx Theater, according to state-run media. (*EFE*, 19/4/06)

April 19: A national poster exhibit celebrating the 45 th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs victory opened at the Pedro Esquerre Art Gallery in Matanzas, sponsored by the Cuban Association of Social Communicators. The show brings together 40 posters related to the heroic triumph in April, 1961 against the US financed and organized invasion of the Bay of Pigs. Posters are by artists from Guantanamo, Santiago de Cuba, Las Tunas, Pinar del Rio and the host city. A jury headed by cartoonist Manuel Hernandez awarded prizes to Jose Ramon Chavez for his overall work and Norberto Pena Caamano and Jorge Luis Abreu for specific posters. (*Granma*, 19/4/06)

April 19: Fidel Castro told a rally in Havana to commemorate the 45th Anniversary of the defeat of the 1961 Bay of Pigs mercenary invasion, that no power on earth will ever be able to make the Cuban people kneel down. In his speech, Castro remembered the Cubans who were killed in combat. The leader of the Cuban Revolution said that the United States has maintained a permanent aggressive policy against the Cuban people since then. "We do not provoke and will not provoke any wars, but we will never beg for peace, because we are confident that the victory was, is and will always be ours," said Fidel Castro. (*CAN*, 20/4/06)

April 20: The health of Doctor Oscar Elías Biscet González, a Cuban prisoner of conscience in the Combinado del Este prison in Havana, has "notably deteriorated", reported his wife Elsa Morejón. "Oscar is in a humid cell with no light, and without adequate food", denounced Morejón, who criticized the complete abandon in the administration of medicines to her husband. Biscet has been in prison under severe conditions for several years after being sentenced to 25 years in jail in the spring of 2003. (*Europa Press*, 20/4/06)

April 21: Cuban pianist and composer Hilario Duran was named Best Latin Jazz Artist at the 2006 Canadian National Jazz Awards. Also nominated in this category was young Cuban pianist David Virelles. Duran was also nominated in the Best Contemporary Jazz Album category for his album "Encuentro en La Habana" and in five other categories: Musician of the Year, Keyboardist of the Year, Arranger of the Year, Acoustic Group of the Year, Big Band of the Year. Hilario Duran's latest recording, "Encuentro en La Habana", was also recorded in Havana in the EGREM studios in February 2005. In addition to the Canadian National Jazz Awards nomination, the album was also nominated to the 2006 Canadian Juno Awards. (*Granma*, 21/4/06)

April 20: A total of 220 dogs are competing for the title of "most beautiful" at Cuba's biannual dog show. It's an opportunity for this communist island's dog lovers to show off their Miniature and Giant Schnauzers, Chow Chows,

English Pointers, Siberian Huskies and other breeds. Love for dogs in Cuba runs deep, but in a country where a state salary averages about US\$12 (euro9.72) a month and dog food is rare and expensive, dog owners often have to make sacrifices to pamper their pets. With breed dogs costing between US\$200 (euro162) and US\$300 (euro243), having one seems a luxury. Dog grooming at a state-run pet shop costs between US\$6 (euro4.86) and US\$7 (euro5.67) and dog owners said they spend an average of US\$15 (euro12.15) weekly on food per dog. (*AP*, 20/4/06)

April 23: Raul Castro made a call to the unity of all the militaries as guarantors of the continuation of the Cuban political process after the death of current leadership in the island. The designated official successor in Cuba after Fidel Castro, addressed a group of veterans during a political and military ceremony to celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the founding of the Cuba's Eastern Regional Army. "I am optimistic about the future of this Revolution once we all have disappeared in a short time due to biological or any other reason", the Minister of Armed Forces said. "Once I am gone (...) it will be with great satisfaction as long as we are able to continue what we just saw here today, the unity of civilian and militaries". Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez, Member of the Political Bureau and Communist Party First Secretary in Holguin province, also addressed the ceremony. "Only a legitimate Revolution, made up of common people in uniform, can achieve the miracle of a close alliance between the Army and the population", Diaz-Canel said. (*La Jornada, Granma*, 24, 27/4/06)

April 24: The Third Cuban Olympiad will offer athletes sound sports, technical and scientific competition, said Fidel Castro in his inaugural speech of the games, at Havana's Ciudad Deportiva Coliseum. The leader of the Revolution affirmed that "this modest event" is "taking place after the joy left in the country due to the brilliant performance" of the Cuban team, who won second place in the Classic. "From today all of you are to be involved in a beautiful fiesta of sports, friendship and solidarity. While violence and unjust wars are expanding, we are here paying tribute to peace, fraternity and the finest values of human beings," Fidel added in an inaugural speech of 20 minutes. The ceremony in Havana's Sports Coliseum included a parade by the delegations and a colorful cultural show. (*CAN, Granma International*, 25/4/06)

April 25: Over 120 members of an international brigade of solidarity with Cuba are in Havana to carry out voluntary work and visit sites of historic and social interest in the country. Starting a 15-day visit, the group denominated "Primero de Mayo" are due to attend the Workers' Day's central act in Havana, and the following day they will hold a world meeting of solidarity with Cuba and other delegates. The brigade members came from nations from five continents and, in addition to working in agriculture and construction, they are expected to meet with representatives of social, economic, political, religious, cultural and scientific institutions. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/4/06)

April 25: Knowledge is the decisive resource for competitiveness and economic growth, declared America Santos, the vice minister of Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA), during the inaugural conference of the International Workshop on Intellectual Property that is taking place in the Jimaguayu Hall of Havana's Capitol Building. At the meeting, specialists on Intellectual Property pointed out that 87 percent of invention patents and registered trademarks worldwide belong to transnational corporations. The seminar is co-sponsored by CITMA and the Andres Bello Agreement, an intergovernmental organization that brings together twelve Latin American nations for educational, scientific, technological and cultural integration. (*Granma*, 26/4/06)

April 25: A gala celebration dedicated to the 168 th anniversary of the Garcia Lorca Hall of the Gran Teatro of Havana put the finishing touches on the 13 th International Gathering of Ballet Academies and the 9 th International Ballet Competition for students. The gathering, held over two weeks, brought together teachers, students and guests from 46 ballet academies and 17 countries to take part in workshops, exchange experiences and socialize. In this environment of cultural vitality, students from the Alejo Carpentier School of Ballet delighted the public during the gala evening with three performances choreographed by Eduardo Blanco: "Obertura cubana", "Mojito criollo" and "Zapateo por derecho"(by Cuban musician Frank Fernandez). (*Granma*, 26/4/06)

April 25: A mob organized by the Communist government's secret police beat up a prominent dissident and invaded her home, a human rights group and the victim of the aggression said. Marta Beatriz Roque told the press that the incident occurred when a group of people stationed themselves in front of her house in the capital to prevent her from attending a meeting at the home of the head of the US Interests Section in Cuba, Michael Parmly. She said that when she tried to leave her home, about 10 men and two women pushed and beat her in the passageway that leads from the house to the street, and a man entered her residence and slugged her in the face. She acknowledged she had shouted, "Down with Fidel!," referring to the aging autocrat who has ruled this island nation since 1959. Roque, an economist and former university professor, said that after being beaten she had problems seeing out of one eye and had bruises on one of her legs and an arm. The Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) denounced what it called the "brutal aggression" against Roque. Also the Christian Liberation Movement, led by dissident Oswaldo Paya, denounced the aggression as a "cowardly" and "fascist" assault against a woman. [[Sobre golpiza a Martha Beatriz Roque](#)] (EFE, *El Nuevo Herald*, 26/4/06)

April 25: "We realize that the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) speak a different language now, because we have heard self-critical speeches that recognize shortcomings", said Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, member of the Political Bureau, during an address at the Sixth National Session of the CDRs underway at the EXPOCUBA exhibition grounds. Machado Ventura also said during his address that it was evident that the CDRs' leadership was well aware of the main problems facing neighbourhoods, and were trying to find solutions, working directly with the base community. "Today we are witnessing a much stronger organization, with better results. The Party has great confidence in the CDRs." (*Granma*, 26/4/06)

April 26: Little Cuban girls fantasize about being flamenco dancers -- strong, beautiful women in ruffled skirts and swept up hairdos, who evoke wondrous, thunderous magic by stomping their black strapped shoes. In a country that gained its independence from Spain a little more than a century ago, the Spanish dance remains highly popular among young Cuban girls, in the same way ballet enthralles girls in the United States and tango in Argentina. Still-thriving cultural societies formed by Spanish immigrants to Cuba represent regions such as Asturias and Andaluz and offer flamenco dance and other programs. But the leading school is run by the government's Ballet Espanol de Cuba, operating under the auspices of the grande dame of ballet, Alicia Alonso, and the leadership of classically trained dancer Eduardo Veitia, the company's general and artistic director. Reynaldo Ibanez, technical director of the school for 12 years, says the best of the best have the chance of joining the dance company as they mature. (*AP*, 25/4/06)

April 27: The Cuban government supports a project to build a Russian Orthodox church in Havana, said Caridad Diego, head of the Department for Religious Affairs at the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. The Cuban leadership and the Moscow Patriarchate made the decision to build the church two years ago, Diego told a news conference in Moscow. However, the best ideas were articulated during a recent meeting between Fidel Castro and the Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kyrill, she said. "It was decided to build not just a church for Cuban Russian Orthodox believers, but a large cathedral, where Russian Orthodox priests will be trained not only for Cuba, but for the whole Caribbean Basin and Latin America," she said. "It is no secret that the construction of the Russian cathedral will become a symbol of friendship and cooperation between our nations," she said. (*Interfax*, 27/4/06)

April 27: Cuban dissident Guillermo Fariñas, three months into a hunger strike, is in stable condition under doctors' care but continues to refuse food or liquids, family members told the press. Fariñas, who remains hospitalized in the central city of Santa Clara, launched the hunger strike on January 31 to press his demand for Cubans to be allowed unrestricted access to the Internet. Cuba's 47-year-old one-party Communist government limits legal access to the Web in an effort to control what the populace may read and see. The dissident's mother, Alicia Hernandez, said that her son has experienced a "slight improvement" in recent days after surviving repeated kidney failure and an infection accompanied by very high fever. (EFE, 27/4/06)

April 27: Papal Nuncio in Cuba, Luigi Bonazzi, called as "positive" the results of the dialogue between the State and the Church in the island, and requested from Cuban top officials more space to develop the work of the Church. Monsignor Bonazzi read his message during a reception for the first anniversary of Benedict XVI pontificate, attended by the president of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, the minister of Health, José Ramón Balaguer, and other government representatives. (*MartiNoticias*, 27/4/06)

April 28: Cuban ornithologists have received permission to search for the long-lost, ivory-billed woodpecker in heavily wooded areas of the island that have been off-limits even to scientists since Fidel Castro seized power here almost 50 years ago. Backed by a grant from Birdlife International, a British conservation group, the search began in the pine forests of the Sierra Maestra mountains of eastern Cuba. "I believe the bird is here," said Arturo Kirkconnell, co-author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba and one of the island's top researchers. "We have a chance now to go to areas never visited before. The habitat is ideal, and there has been no evidence that the woodpecker is not there." The reason that some remote areas of Guantanamo province, in the eastern end of the island, and in Pinar del Rio, to the west of Havana, are now open for scientific exploration are not exactly clear, even to the scientists involved. Outsiders familiar with the project suggest the reasons for earlier prohibitions may be a combination of state security and bureaucratic whims. (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/4/06)

April 28: The Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party (PCC) announced the removal of one of its members and changes in the auxiliary structure of the Central Committee, amid the "continuing process for the improvement of the party's role." According to a note by the Political Bureau, a meeting headed by its first secretary Fidel Castro assessed "the regrettable, unusual ineptitude of a political figure to overcome his mistakes," alluding to its member Juan Carlos Robinson. After being criticized, warned, and encouraged more than once by the PCC leadership to overcome his faults, Robinson pretended he had admitted them and left them behind, the text added. Far from accepting the reprimands and warnings, he behaved even more arrogant, with increasing abuse of authority, imprudence, and softening of his ethical principles, the note reads. As a result, a new, thorough analysis of his behaviour was made, which led to the final decision to remove him from the Political Bureau, the Central Committee, and the PCC. The Political Bureau agreed to suggest that the Central Committee re-establish its Secretariat as auxiliary leading organ of the Political Bureau in the Party's daily task, and organize and watch over the implementation and fulfilment of its agreements. Similarly, it was agreed to create the departments of culture, public health, and science in addition to the other ten that form part of the Central Committee's auxiliary structure. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/4/06)

Economy

April 2: Syrian Minister of Transport Yarub Badr conferred with Ambassadors of Belgium and Cuba in Damascus on means of cooperation between Syria and each of the two countries in different transportation fields. During his meeting with the two ambassadors, each separately, the Minister of Transport discussed ways of activating agreements signed between the two sides as well the possibility of making use of expertise and technology of the other sides. Cooperation prospects include developing railways and modernizing compartments. (*SANA*, 2/4/06)

April 3: Workplaces across Cuba are characterized by "disorder" and many of their employees can be described as slackers, according to the results of an investigation that appeared in the official daily Granma as part of an anti-corruption drive. The daily wrote that "irregularities in the opening and closing schedules, delays in services and not creating the (proper) conditions before opening an establishment" occur repeatedly at workplaces and the public is suffering "mistreatment stemming from labor indiscipline." Granma said that there are establishments that do not open at the proper hour or that do so but are not ready to begin serving clients or customers. In addition, many workers leave their jobs during the day to do personal tasks and some workplaces interrupt their service to the public to hold meetings

and other gatherings. The paper said that last September inspections were performed at 3,500 state-owned workplaces nationwide which found that 76 percent of the sites were "deficient" in their administrative activities. (*EFE*, 3/4/06)

April 4: Cuba is racing to install thousands of container-sized diesel generators across the island to avoid another situation like the one last summer when widespread blackouts fanned popular unrest. Fidel Castro has taken personal responsibility for what he calls an "energy revolution" prompted by widespread complaints about the failings of Cuba's obsolete power plants. His supporters say the first-of-its-kind energy plan is a stroke of audacious genius. His critics see it as a desperate blunder. The generators are being grouped in clusters and connected to the electrical grid so they can feed the national system or operate independently in all 14 provinces. Around \$800 million has been spent so far to import generators, mainly from Spain, Germany and South Korea. Castro has promised to put an end to the frequent outages that Cubans have had to live with since the collapse of Soviet communism plunged their country into economic crisis. He has also vowed to provide every Cuban home with new electrical appliances from China that use less power, from stoves and fans to refrigerators, in many cases replacing inefficient US-made products dating back to the 1950s. (*Reuters*, 4/4/06)

April 4: The Third Joint Committee Meeting between Malaysia and Cuba will be held in Havana, from April 3-5. The ministerial-level meeting on April 5 will be co-chaired by Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar and Cuban Informatics and Communications Minister Ignacio Gonzalez Planas. The JCM will provide both countries with an opportunity to review the progress in various areas of cooperation, including biotechnology, trade, agriculture, youth and sports exchange programmes, health, medicine, science and technology, education and training. The Malaysian senior officials delegation will be headed by the Foreign Ministry's Secretary-General Rastam Mohamed Isa while the Cuban side will be headed by Raul Torres Perez, Director of Asia, Middle East and Oceania of its Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Ministry. (*Thai News Service*, 4/4/06)

April 4: Fidel Castro said Cuba has bought from China 100 train engines and more than 7,000 buses for delivery this year, as part of his "energy revolution" to save fuel and improve public transport on the communist island. "One hundred train engines (...) We've also signed contracts for 1,000 20-ton trucks," Castro, 79, said at the Karl Marx Theater, on the anniversary of two communist youth organizations. Castro said more than 7,000 buses would be delivered by China this year, and "thousands of passenger railroad cars are being repaired" for future service in Cuba. (*AFP*, 5/4/06)

April 5: Cuba narrowed opportunities for foreign investment in 2005, closing down nearly two businesses per week and approving just seven new joint ventures, government sources said. The reduction was part of a general trend toward increased centralization and control of the more than 90 percent state-run economy after a liberalizing period in the 1990s following the demise of former benefactor the Soviet Union. In 2004, the communist-run country shut down four businesses per week and approved less than 10 new joint ventures, but overall the numbers are down in 2005. "There were 258 joint ventures and 115 cooperative production contracts at the close of 2005, compared with 313 and 133 respectively the previous year," said a mid-level official, who had read the Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation's annual report. Cuba's most important ventures in telecommunications, nickel, energy, tobacco, beverages, tourism and construction have weathered the increased regulation, while smaller ones in the mechanical, light and food processing industries, for example, have done less well, the sources said. "Spain, Italy and Canada account for more than 50 percent of direct foreign investment, but these days we are prioritizing China and Venezuela," according to a Cuban economist who spoke on condition of anonymity. "All, except one of last year's ventures were signed with China and Venezuela and the trend will continue," she said. (*Reuters*, 5/4/06)

April 5: Colombia and Cuba are putting aside their ideological differences to negotiate a trade deal. The two countries have agreed to talks aimed at removing trade barriers and extending preferential tariffs, Colombia's government said in a statement. In pursuing a trade deal with Cuba, President Alvaro Uribe, who fashions himself as a dogged free market reformer, seems more concerned about economics than he is about falling in line with Washington's hardline attempts

to isolate the communist island. The talks will be similar to free trade talks Colombia recently launched with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In February, Colombia signed a landmark free trade agreement with the United States. Nonetheless, commercial ties between the two nations are barely in an infant state. The sale of goods and services to Cuba represented just 0.3 percent of Colombia's exports last year and Cuba's share of Colombia's import market was an even more faint 0.03 percent. (*AP*, 5/4/06)

April 5: A Cuban delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Pedro Luis Padron is in Vietnam to attend the Hanoi 2006 Trade Fair. Padron said that this fair is Vietnam's most important trade event and Cuba's objective is to promote Cuban exports and increase business ties between both countries. "We will be in Vietnam with samples of the most important Cuban companies, mainly in the health sector and although there is a working relationship in this area, we want to explore new alternatives," said the Cuban representative. The Cuban diplomat emphasized that during Expo Hanoi the third session of the Cuba-Vietnam bilateral Business Committee will be held with the objective of increasing commercial contacts. (*CAN*, 5/4/06)

April 6: A government ban on the transportation of pigs has increased the price of pork in eastern Cuba. The ban was imposed in an attempt to stop the sale of pork in private markets in Camaguey. Since then, the shortage of pork has caused the price to reach a record 25 pesos a pound. Pork is not available at government stores where it is covered by a ration book. (*Cubanet*, 6/4/06)

April 6: As co-chair of the Third Session of the Intergovernmental Commission for Bilateral Economic and Scientific-Technical Collaboration, taking place in Havana, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Sued Hamid Albar noted that cooperation between Malaysia and Cuba has increased to satisfactory levels, especially in the spheres of biotechnology and computer sciences. In this regard, he noted that arrangements are underway for the creation of a joint company to provide computer services, and that there has been a boost in the ties between Malaysian universities and the University of Computer Sciences in Havana. New possibilities of cooperation were also identified in the areas of trade, biotechnology, finances, investments, sports, culture, technology, oil, gas and transportation, among others, said the Malaysian foreign minister. (*Granma*, 7/4/06)

April 8: Cuba's Minister Without Portfolio Ricardo Cabrisas and Minister of Transportation Carlos Manuel Pazo in separate meetings with Iran's Ambassador to Cuba Ahmad Edrisian in Havana called for expansion of bilateral ties. As the Head of the Iran-Cuba Economic Commission, Cabrisas reviewed joint achievements in the domain of trade and economy and stressed that his country is determined to bolster its economic exchanges with Iran. He hoped that given the recent visit of Majlis Speaker, Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel to Havana and those of numerous Cuban delegations to Iran in the current year, the next joint commission meeting will be more fruitful. For his part, Pazo, who is just back from his recent visit to Tehran, expressed satisfaction with the result of his trip and the growing trend of mutual ties. (*IRNA*, 8/4/06)

April 8: Cuba will supply several types of vaccines to Vietnam for the immunization of its population, following a contract the two countries signed in the framework of the 16th Vietnam International Fair -EXPO 2006. The agreement was signed by the vice chairwoman of the Hanoi Pharmaceutical Company (Hapharco), Nguyen Thi Minh Tu, and the Asian sales manager of Cuba's Heber Biotec S.A., Mai Thao. It includes the supply of anti-hepatitis B vaccines, and the new synthetic vaccine against the Haemophilus influenzae type B, which is known to cause a sort of meningitis, and other diseases. (*Granma*, 8/4/06)

April 9: They sink their boats in the shallows by night, hiding them in watery nooks to evade authorities. By day, the shrimp fishermen lean inside shady doorframes, wiggling their index fingers as cars pass -- a signal that discreetly advertises their illegal catch. "If they caught me hunting shrimp, they'd leave me like a chicken without feathers," said the fidgety fisherman who asked not to be identified. It is against the law to sell shrimp privately in communist Cuba, and he risks steep fines if detected. Fishermen like him are among those feeling the deepest pain from an ongoing

government campaign to tighten the screws on the Cuban economy. Tagged "recentralization," the move began in 2003, clamping down on private enterprise and the black market, and raising state salaries and pension payments. Castro contends the economic clampdown will refresh socialist ideals, punish pilferers and combat US trade sanctions. Detractors say the program is meant to bring every aspect of Cuban life under government control, battering the hatches ahead of an eventual leadership change. What's clear is that hardship remains. Economic snapshots from different walks of life suggest that most Cubans struggle to make ends meet despite government pay hikes, while the island's small entrepreneurial sector feels the reforms snapping at its heels. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/4/06)

April 10: With Fidel Castro looking on, Cuban officials signed contracts for the purchase of five new Russian passenger planes to replace Soviet-era aircraft. The contracts were for two long-haul, wide-bodied Ilyushin Il-96-300s and three medium-range Tupolev Tu-204s, one of them configured for air freight, state-run Cuba media said. Cuba did not divulge the cost of the planes to be delivered in 2006-2007 by Ilyushin Finance Co., a Russian leasing company. Russian news agency Itar-Tass said the five aircraft cost \$250 million and that Cuba will make a 15 percent down payment, with three Russian banks financing the rest with a 12-year loan guaranteed by the Russian and Cuban governments. Cuba has already purchased two Il-96s for an estimated \$110 million to overhaul the fleet of its flag carrier Cubana de Aviacion, which is still flying 30-year old Il-62s. In March, Cubana received the second Il-96 furnished with a VIP cabin for use by Castro for travel abroad that can be reconfigured for commercial flights, Russian diplomats said. (*Reuters*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Russia and Cuba considered new projects in the transport industry. Fidel Castro is interested in the development of bilateral trade ties, said the head of the Federal Agency for Industry Boris Alyoshin who headed a Russian delegation in Cuba. At a meeting with the Russian delegation Castro spoke about the plans to develop the transport network in Cuba. He noted that Cuba may purchase Russian buses, trucks and trains, Alyoshin emphasized. During the meeting the sides reached agreement that the delegation of the Cuban transport ministry will arrive in Moscow soon. This delegation will consider the possibilities of concluding commercial contracts on supplies of the Russian machinery in the Caribbean country. According to Alyoshin, some offers in the energy industry were also discussed. (*ITAR-TASS*, 11/4/06)

April 10: Friendly ties between Fidel Castro's Cuba and Hugo Chavez' Venezuela are now much more than political, opening the way to a burgeoning trade relationship estimated to reach more than \$3.5 billion (euro2.9 billion) this year -- about 50 percent richer than in 2005. The favorable balance converted Cuba last year into Venezuela's third most important trade partner, after the United States and Colombia. The bulk of trade comes from the 90,000 barrels of crude petroleum that oil-producing Venezuela sends to the communist-run island daily, but the South American nation also has increased non-petroleum exports to Cuba in recent months, selling products from construction supplies to chocolate. "The potential grows every day," Adan Chavez, Venezuela's ambassador to Cuba and Hugo Chavez's older brother, told the press in an interview. Among private Venezuelan companies that now have a presence in Cuba is Lamigal, the country's No. 1 manufacturer of galvanized steel sheeting for construction. As for other Venezuelan goods, the president of the government's Industrial Bank of Venezuela, Luis Quiaro, said his country is already exporting a wide variety of products to Cuba, including workers' uniforms, boots, construction materials, and food products such as chocolate, tomato sauce, canned sardines, gelatin, fruit jams and juices. (*AP*, 10/4/06)

April 11: Cuban water engineers are set to visit South Africa to learn how this country and its partners build and manage big dam projects, the Department of Water Affairs announced. It said the fact-finding mission, to take place in the next few months, followed a visit to Cuba by Water Affairs Minister Buyelwa Sonjica. Cuba has also said that as they have a need to build new concrete dams, they are interested in some of the projects... (for example) the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Their interest is to see how such big projects work, and to further understand the concepts behind such projects. "Cuba will send a fact-finding mission over to South Africa within the next few months," the department said. (*SAPA*, 11/4/06)

April 11: Venezuela and Cuba will invest \$800 million to \$1 billion to start up an unfinished Soviet-era refinery on the island, the Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba, Adan Chavez, said. "The aim is to completely reactivate the Cienfuegos refinery," the envoy, an older brother of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, said at a news conference. The initial investment will be approximately between \$800 million and \$1 billion in shared costs, he said. Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA formed a joint venture with Cuba to revamp the unused refinery on the shore of Cienfuegos Bay in south-central Cuba, and signed an agreement guaranteeing Venezuelan feedstock of 70,000 barrels per day. (*AFP, Houston Chronicle*, 11/4/06)

April 11: The Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) will finance the development of two industrial projects in Cuba, Iran's ILNA news agency said. In its bid to export technical and engineering services abroad, EDBI will finance water treatment projects and the building of water pumping stations in the Latin American country, the managing director of the bank said. The bank has undertaken to finance 85 percent of the 4.5-billion euro contracts, the director added. The funds are scheduled to be repaid in ten consecutive installments and in a five-year period, he explained. The Export Development Bank of Iran is also planning to, in the near future, finance the export of train carriages to the Caribbean state. (*IRNA*, 12/4/06)

April 13: Cuba is seeking direct foreign investment in sugar milling and cultivation for the first time since nationalizing the industry soon after the 1959 revolution, Cuban and foreign sources said. At least three companies, all with long-term business experience in Cuba, have made proposals to invest in and administer mills and adjoining cane plantations, though the companies wish to remain anonymous as negotiations proceed. "They told us they were given the green light at the highest level to discuss milling and cultivation," a potential investor said. The sources cautioned that hard bargaining lies ahead before the first milling venture could be signed. "There are many issues still to be resolved. Investors want to administer the mills, higher percentages of shares and pay sugar farmers and workers more," a Cuban sugar expert said. Theoretically, the state-run sugar industry has been open to direct investment for a decade, but in practice there has been no interest up to now on the government's part except in a few derivatives and mechanical ventures, the sources said. Cuba shut down and dismantled 71 of 156 mills in 2003 when raw sugar prices were around \$.05 per lb, and relegated 60 percent of plantations to other uses. Last year's disastrous 1.3 million tonne harvest, the lowest in a century, led to more closings, with just 42 mills opened this year, though shut mills were conserved. But sugar prices have more than tripled since 2003 as high oil prices have led to increased interest in sugar-based ethanol as an alternative fuel for motorized vehicles. (*Reuters*, 13/4/06)

April 15: In Cuba, windmills have spread rapidly over the past century, mainly in the central province of Camaguey and in the eastern portion of the island. It has been estimated that currently there are 7,000 windmills operating across the island, used mostly to pump water for cattle and agriculture activities. Their efficient use has special importance today, considering that experts estimate that a single windmill used for pumping water can save a half ton of diesel fuel annually. But power generation capacity through the transformation of wind power into electricity has not yet been fully exploited on the island. Currently Cuba is promoting the use of windmills for that purpose. In this respect, studies to measure the intensity and frequencies of the winds that blow over different parts of the island are being finalized. (*Periódico 26*, 15/4/06)

April 17: Cuba is able to start exporting hydrocarbons to the Caribbean countries, under the agreement for the establishment of a joint oil refining company PDV-Cupet SA with Venezuela's state-owned oil giant Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), the Venezuelan press reported on April 17, 2006. Cuba's state-owned monopoly Cuba Petroleo and PDVSA established at the beginning of April 2006 PDV-Cupet S.A. in which Cuba holds the majority stake. The project will revive Cuba's refinery Cienfuegos which was paralysed in 1991. PDV-Cupet will receive some 150,000 barrels of crude oil per day (bpd). The company has the opportunity to export fuels mainly to the Caribbean countries. The agreement for the establishment of PDV-Cupet SA was signed by Fidel Castro and Venezuelan Energy and Petroleum Minister and PDVSA President, Rafael Ramirez. (*Latin America News Digest*, 17/4/06)

April 17: Venezuela's plans to refurbish an idled Soviet-era refinery in Cuba represent a lost investment for this oil-rich South American nation, a former president of the state-run oil company said. The Cuban government and state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA, announced an agreement for PDVSA to invest US\$83 million (euro69 million) to rehabilitate the facility in the southern coastal city of Cienfuegos to refine, store and distribute crude oil. But former PDVSA president Guaicaipuro Lameda criticized the deal, saying the refinery is too old to run profitably and too many of its Russian-made parts would have to be replaced. "Making an investment to make that refinery function doesn't permit recovering the investment," said Lameda, who resigned in 2002 and quickly became one of the government's most outspoken critics. Lameda accused Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez of investing in the aging refinery as a means of giving economic support to his close ally, Fidel Castro. (AP, 17/4/06)

April 17: Cuba and India make a powerful force leading world biotechnology, asserted P.Chidambaram, finance minister of the Asian nation, during the opening of a modern institution for the production of humanized monoclonal antibodies h-R3. The official highlighted the importance of both nations' integration in the biotechnological field strengthened by the creation of the joint enterprise Biocon Biopharmaceutical, in charge of producing and commercializing the product. Doctors Agustin Lage, director of the Cuban Center of Molecular Immunology and Kiran Mazumder, Biocon president, chaired the opening ceremony. (Prensa Latina, 17/4/06)

April 18: The 10th Session of the Cuba-Zambia Joint Commission for the Economic, Technical and Scientific Collaboration will kick off in Havana, to review bilateral cooperation in health and other sectors. According to a note from the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, the meeting will be presided over by the island's Minister Marta Lomas and Zambian Finance and Planning Minister Peter Ngandu Magande. (Prensa Latina, 18/4/06)

April 18: Cuba, among the world's largest nickel and cobalt producers, has launched a program with Canadian mining firm Sherritt International Corp. (TSX:S) to increase output by about half to 49,000 tonnes annually, state media said. The government's Cubaniquel and Sherritt are now in the "construction phase" of their expanded production program at the Moa mining facility in the eastern province of Holguin, the Communist Party newspaper Granma reported. The daily quoted Cuban Basic Industries Minister Yadira Garcia as saying that the expanded production program was "the toughest goal the Canadians and the Cubans have faced" in the mining program. According to Cuban figures released when the plan was announced a year ago, the expansion will increase nickel and cobalt production at the plant by around 50 per cent, from about 35,000 tonnes in 2004. Nickel is needed to produce stainless steel and cobalt is used for creating alloys necessary for jet engines and in high technology components. The \$450-million-US expansion project had been announced in Havana, in March 2005, by Fidel Castro and Sherritt International President Ian Delaney. Among Cuban attendees to the ceremony were ministers Yadira Garcia (Basic Industry); Marta Lomas (Foreign Investment); Raul de la Nuez (Foreign Trade) and Fidel Figueroa (Construction) as well as local authorities and the nickel industry officials. The Canadian mission was led by Ian Delaney, chair of Sherritt International Board of Directors, Jowdat Waheed, its main manager, and other leaders of the company. (Prensa Latina, AP, Canadian Press, 18/4/06)

April 19: The state corporation Oils of Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA) expects to cut the shipments of crude oil to Cuba when the Cuban refinery of Cienfuegos starts operating, said the president of the company and minister of Energy, Rafael Ramírez. Ramírez supported PDVSA's decision to take part in the reopening of the Cienfuegos refinery pointing out that a study by an international company revealed that an investment of \$83 million dollars by the Venezuelan government in the Cuban plant would yield a return of 28 %. (AP, 20/4/06)

April 19: President-elect, René Prével, announced Haiti will join Petrocaribe and will accept Cuba's help to confront the energy crisis in his country. "During our meetings in Havana, we discussed this matter with the Venezuelan ambassador to Havana, Adán Chávez, who is Hugo Chavez' brother", Preval said. He also announced that, "Cuban technicians will be sent to Haiti to help us with the lack of electric power", he added. (El Universal, 19/4/06)

April 21: Cuba is becoming increasingly costly and less profitable for foreign tour operators, some of whom are canceling trips to the island nation and taking people to other Caribbean resorts, industry sources said. They said Cuba and tourism companies are increasingly at odds, with the government seeking a greater share of shrinking profits even as the arrival of new visitors stagnates. "Tour operators are canceling bookings and flights," a European hotel manager said. "They are making their money from places like the Dominican Republic and Mexico, but nothing from Cuba." The Canadian Association of Tour Operators recently complained to the Cuban Ministry of Tourism about the lack of adequate service for tourists, theft at airports and hotels, and jet fuel costing 33 percent more than elsewhere. "Rates have become completely uncompetitive with other tourist destinations in the Caribbean," the association said in the letter sent in January and obtained by the press. (*Reuters*, 21/4/06)

April 22: The Iran-Cuba Joint Economic Commission concluded its 11th session in Tehran. The Cuban delegation was headed by Minister of State Ricardo Cabrisas, while the Iranian delegation was headed by Minister of Agriculture Jihad Mohammad Reza Eskandari. Iran's deputy ministers of industries and roads and transportation as well as several of its economic and trade officials and the Cuban ambassador to Tehran also participated in the meeting. During the meeting, the heads of the two delegations announced that the two sides held identical views on the need to expand their political and economic cooperation at the international level. (*Asia Pulse*, 24/4/06)

April 23: Despite the severe drought that affected Cuba's eastern province of Las Tunas over the past year, local beekeepers have turned out 89,000 tons of honey so far this year. The adverse weather conditions forced the producers to move their apiaries to the province's northern coastal region, where nectar-rich flowers are abundant. According to Yurisander Rodriguez Acosta, chief of production at the Las Tunas Apiculture Company, the beekeepers are very optimistic with these results. Following the creation of the company in 1977, it recorded its best results in 1983 with an overall production of 363 tons of honey and wax. On the other hand, 2004 was the most critical year because of a lack of rainfall. (*Periódico 26*, 23/4/06)

April 24: Contracts totaling \$12 million were signed during a visit of Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky to Havana between April 20 and 23, Prensa Latina reported. The visit also resulted in agreements on cooperation in transport, air service, politics, legal matters, information exchange and municipal services, as well as on the supply of powdered milk and beans to Cuba. The two countries are expected to sign several agreements on cooperation in non-traditional trade areas, Prensa Latina said. Annual trade between Belarus and Cuba currently amounts to \$19 million, according to Cuba's official statisticians. To date, the countries have 17 agreements in the trade, economic, healthcare, product certification and consular spheres. During talks in Cuba, Mr. Sidorsky noted that Belarus could supply tractors, mining equipment and fertilizers to the island and buy refined sugar from it. As far as Cuban sugar is concerned, Cuba is experiencing sugar production difficulties at the moment. Due to the latter fact the sides agreed this year Belarus will buy 100,000 tons of raw sugar. It will be processed at Belarusian companies and sent back to Cuba. (*AP, Belta*, 24/4/06)

April 24: Cubans who made a better-than-average living selling crafts to foreign tourists at stalls along Havana's famed Malecon seaside boulevard are wondering about their future after being obliged by the government to pack up and move to a more out-of-the-way building. For years, tourists and other seekers of craft goods have visited the most popular markets in Havana, most of which are located in areas frequented by foreign visitors, such as Old Havana, the area around the cathedral and the Malecon in the El Vedado neighborhood. Cuban authorities, however, moved the vendors from the Malecon to an old department store in downtown Havana, putting them in one of the most populous neighborhoods of the Cuban capital. A cooperative of 193 self-employed workers, who pay for state licenses to sell their crafts, is trying to adapt to the new space provided by the Domestic Trade Ministry, but the drastic drop in sales has created uncertainty about their futures. "Our sales have been affected tremendously," Vicente Portilla, who sells figurines and wooden items, said, adding that what was needed was "a marketing campaign so that tourists know that we are here." "I haven't sold anything today. At the market, on a day like today, I would have already sold 15, 20 or more convertible pesos," Portilla said. One convertible peso is equal to \$1.08US. (*EFE*, 25/4/06)

April 25: After having already collected some 600 poles strung with tobacco leaves, the growers in eastern Las Tunas province continue to keep up a good pace towards achieving a record production this year. That figure represents two thirds of their target for the current harvest, which is due to conclude by the end of May. The healthy condition of the leaves indicates that it should be possible to achieve that goal. Speaking to the press, Norge Rodriguez, director of the Tobacco Company in Las Tunas, highlighted that this improvement is being made despite the severe drought that has been affecting this region for more than six years now. Las Tunas has the lowest average rainfall in all Cuba, with barely 100 millimeters per year. (*Periódico 26*, 25/4/06)

April 25: Jamaica will receive a shipment of cement from Cuba to help ease a shortage that is slowing down renovations to a stadium hosting matches for the 2007 cricket World Cup, an official said. The 20,000 metric tons (22,046 tons) of cement will arrive from Havana, said Colin Campbell, the information minister. It's not clear how much Jamaica is paying for it. Jamaica began negotiating with Cuba to supply cement after the main local producer, Caribbean Cement Company Limited, temporarily suspended production in March following claims of substandard product. (*AP*, 25/4/06)

April 25: Following the launch of the People's Trade Agreement (PTA) on April 29 in Havana, coca leaves grown in Chapare and the Yungas will be exported to Venezuela and Cuba, President Evo Morales announced in Cochabamba. At the closing ceremony of a departmental party conference, Morales said that the agreement, which replaces the free trade agreement (FTA), would allow these three countries, initially, to enter into a commercial arrangement. He said that following the PTA's entry into force, all Bolivian products will enter Venezuela and Cuba on a "zero tariff", which is considered positive given the impact it will have on the national economy. (*El Diario*, 26/4/06)

April 26: Iran will be exporting 500 freight and passenger wagons to Cuba valued at \$135m, Cuban deputy minister of transportation noted in Tehran. The news came during Roberto Ricardo Mauro's visit to Pars Wagon Company in Arak, 250 km southwest of Tehran, after signing the purchase contract for 500 wagons at Iran-Cuba Joint Meeting. "Rail business plays a central role in Cuba's transportation policy and delivery time of the rail cars is crucial to us," deputy minister announced. Furthermore, executive director of Pars emphasized on 'quality job' and 'design innovation' as two inseparable drives of the company, adding that the wagons will be delivered by 2007. (*MNA*, 26/4/06)

April 26: Iran and Cuba have signed an agreement wherein the Islamic republic will help Havana modernize its oil industry. The deal, signed by Iran's Agricultural Jihad Minister Mohammad Eskandari and Cuba State Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, in Tehran, came as part of an economic cooperation agreement at the end of Iran-Cuba joint 11th Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation Commission. Among other things, the two sides agreed to cooperate in building and modernizing refineries and in oil exploration activities. Cabrisas called the meeting a "success." (*UPI*, 26/4/06)

April 26: President Hugo Chavez said Venezuela will shortly begin shipping fuel to Nicaragua in his government's latest preferential oil pact as it uses its vast resources to expand its influence in the region. A group of 51 Nicaraguan mayors, many from the leftist Sandinista party including presidential candidate Daniel Ortega, met with Chavez at the presidential palace as the terms of the accord were announced to supply 10 million barrels a year of fuel to their communities. "A boat will arrive soon. There are alternatives," Chavez told the group, characterizing the deal as part of a budding effort to expand a Venezuela-Cuba pact for trade and social programs, known as ALBA. (*AP*, 26/4/06)

Exile Community

April 3: A Cuban exiles' delegation called on the French government in Paris not to allow "the worst violators" to join the UN Human Rights Council, in reference to Cuba and the new entity that will come into force next June. A high-ranking foreign affairs officer at the French foreign ministry, whose name was not disclosed, met with the activists. Members from MAR for Cuba, Plantados Hasta la Libertad and relatives of political prisoners participated in the meeting. (*CubaEncuentro*, 4/4/06)

April 3: A radical pro-Castro group prevented Raúl Rivero from giving a conference in Seville. The Cuban poet and journalist, who was going to talk about the absence of freedom of expression on the island, was received by a score of young people calling him "terrorist" and other insulting names. There was no physical aggression, but "the climate was of increasing violence every minute", said Rivero. In Rivero's opinion, the incidents were "perfectly organized". He also pointed out the presence of representatives from the Cuban Consulate, similar to what happened when he attended the International Festival of Poetry in Granada and a group of extremists awaited him where he was going to read his poems with banners calling him a "worm"--, a term used by pro-Castro groups to call those who flee the island. (*El Mundo*, 4/4/06)

April 4: The Embassy of Cuba in Spain denied that officials from that diplomatic mission or any consular office took part in the boycott of an event in which Cuban poet Raúl Rivero was going to speak. Rivero was released from prison last year thanks to the mediation of the current Spanish government. The University of Seville "strongly condemned" the group of protesters "alien to the University Community" who prevented Rivero from giving his conference. (*Europa Press*, 4/4/06)

April 6: The Cuban Border Guard opened fire on a boat carrying three men believed to be Cuban-American migrant smugglers -- killing one and wounding another -- in an incident the US State Department called a "deeply disturbing matter." The two captured survivors were identified as Rosendo Salgado Castro and Rafael Mesa Fariñas, who hold US passports. Salgado was shot in the leg, according to a knowledgeable official in Havana who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to speak about the case. "I read that garbage. I don't think it happened like that," Leydi Crespo, the daughter of Salgado's former companion, said from her Miami home. "They decided to shoot at them, just like they did to those Brothers to the Rescue planes. If he was trafficking people or not, you don't shoot them." Crespo and her mother, Ana Del Toro, said they have no idea what Salgado was doing near Cuba, and have no knowledge of him being involved in migrant smuggling. Salgado, 41, is an out-of-work truck driver who arrived in Miami in 1995 after a stint at the refugee camps at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base. Ninoska Perez Castellon, spokeswoman for the Miami-based Cuban Liberty Council, blamed the communist government, accusing it of tolerating illegal migrant smuggling. "The Cuban government has the authority to let them go in and out," she said. "For anybody to believe that all those people are coming in and out without the government getting a cut is ridiculous." The men face a precarious legal situation, because the Cuban government does not recognize dual citizenship. If the men were born in Cuba -- and Salgado certainly was -- the government there will treat them as Cuban citizens, experts said. "The bottom line is they are subject to the laws of Cuba. The Cubans will use this as an incentive to have others not engage in the same efforts," said attorney Mario Cano, who has represented accused smugglers in Miami. (*The Miami Herald*, AP, 7/4/06)

April 6: Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero, the highest-profile political prisoner of the Castro regime's Spring 2003 crackdown on dissent, said the verses collected in his new book were a means of figuratively freeing himself from jail. Released last year for health reasons and currently residing in Spain, he talked with the press about "Vidas y oficios. Los poemas de la cárcel" (Lives and Occupations: Poems from Prison). "It is a book of meditation, written to escape from jail, to get out of that hostile, tense environment I was in," he said. Dreams, escapes or "sweetened rejections" are some of the themes treated in "Lives and Occupations," which Rivero wrote between the spring of 2003 and the winter of 2004, and in which he recreates places "to live awhile and be able to come back later," the author said. Written in a cell where he could "only take six steps in one direction," this book of verse contains scarcely any direct references to his prison surroundings, reflecting the interior world of the poet rather than offering the testimony

of a man behind bars. This restorative "escape from reality" finds its counterpoint in the "critical, humorous and ironic" vision that the author gives of himself in the work. He says that it is his "best weapon" against falling into "vanities - the great defect," according to Rivero, of Fidel Castro, whom he considers "a conceited person in love with himself." "Castro's fake superiority and cheap boasting does the country much harm," Rivero said, adding that "in Cuba it's a national catastrophe if a boxer loses" because of the need for greatness and success throughout a society that "is unaware that the revolution failed." (*EFE*, 6/4/06)

April 10: A fishing boat filled with 43 Haitians, a Jamaican and a Cuban landed at Broward's Hillsboro Beach. The Haitians and Jamaican are likely to be sent home; the Cuban is likely to stay. The stark differences in US immigration policy came into the spotlight again as more than two dozen Haitian leaders and their allies revived protests about what they say is an unfair and even racist policy. "In the case of Haitians, it's very unfortunate that things suggest that they are being discriminated against because of the color of their skin," said Ramón Saúl Sánchez, a Cuban refugee activist. Others were more blunt about the TPS program, calling it "racist." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/4/06)

April 10: A federal civil suit alleging human rights violations by the Cuban government has been dismissed because the four Cuban plaintiffs lacked jurisdiction. US District Judge Alan S. Gold in Miami ruled the people who sued had not sufficiently established allegiance to the US, which would have allowed review by American courts. The nine-page decision said the plaintiffs did not qualify to sue under the Alien Tort Claims Act, which allows foreign nationals to bring civil suits against their governments in the US in the absence of sovereign immunity under other federal laws. The four plaintiffs — two imprisoned Cuban citizens and two of their relatives now living in the US — won a clerk's default judgment in US District Court in 2004 because the Cuban government did not respond to the suit, its standard approach to US lawsuits. The ruling is flawed, but the plaintiffs are unsure if they will appeal, their lawyer Paul Orfanedes, director of litigation for Washington-based Judicial Watch, said. The Cubans claimed the Cuban government, the Cuban military and several top government officials, including Fidel Castro and his brother Raul, committed crimes against humanity by imprisoning and torturing people who oppose Castro's rule. (*Miami Daily Business Review*, 11/4/06)

April 19: A Cuban exile arrested for stashing more than 1,000 guns in his suburban Upland, California home told federal authorities the weapons were for a quasi-military group bent on overthrowing Fidel Castro, but police officials said that may be a cover story for his black-market gun ring. Federal agents found hundreds of additional firearms as well as hand grenades during a follow-up search of the upscale San Bernardino County home of Robert Ferro, a retired Army Special Forces officer, adding to the 875 guns confiscated on April 14. Ferro told federal investigators that he was a member of the anti-Castro group Alpha 66, "a militant group who collectively desire to overthrow Fidel Castro and liberate the country of Cuba," according to an affidavit filed in federal court by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Special Agent Keith Krolczyk. (*Los Angeles Times*, 20/4/06)

April 20: A Cuban exile arrested in California with a huge cache of weapons is not a member of the militant group Alpha 66 as he claims, Alpha 66 leader Ernesto Diaz said. Robert Ferro, 61, was arrested after authorities raided his Upland home in Southern California and found more than 1,000 weapons, including assault rifles, machine guns and live grenades. Ferro told investigators that he was a member of Alpha 66 "a militant group who collectively desire to overthrow Fidel Castro and liberate the country of Cuba," according to an affidavit filed in federal court by the bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Diaz disputed Ferro's account. "He is not a member of Alpha 66, nor does Alpha 66 have any knowledge of who this person is," Diaz said. Diaz said he suspects that Ferro could be part of a Cuban government plot to discredit Alpha 66. "I don't discount the possibility that it's a campaign from the Cuban government to compromise Alpha 66," Diaz said. "At these moments, Alpha is being respectful of US laws, and our training camps are within the guidelines of US laws." "We don't have records of Robert Ferro; we know nothing of that person," said Mario Estevez, press secretary of Alpha 66 in Miami. "We have 50,000 members, maybe more, and most of our members are in Cuba. Robert Ferro is not a member of our organization," Estevez said. (*The Miami Herald*, *EFE*, 20/4/06)

April 26: Prominent Cuban-American scholars and artists, calling US policy toward Cuba a "political and moral failure," are pressing the Bush administration to open travel to the island. The group, named Emergency Network of Cuban American Scholars and Artists for Change in US-Cuba Policy, or ENCASA, is launching a publicity campaign against the US trade embargo and Cuba travel ban. Current US policy bars American tourists from traveling to Cuba but allows Cuban exiles to visit direct family -- but not aunts, uncles or cousins -- once every three years. ENCASA's bold attack on US Cuba policy comes just weeks before the administration's Cuba commission will recommend to President Bush ways to help speed up a democratic transition in Cuba. It also comes at a time when some scholars and activists have expressed concerns that an escalating atmosphere of intolerance in Miami is curtailing discourse over Cuba. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/4/06)

Foreign Affairs

April 1: Colombian president, Álvaro Uribe, and Fidel Castro exchanged official visit invitations for dates yet to be confirmed, said Colombian foreign minister Carolina Barco in Havana. "We are talking about a bilateral visit", said Barco adding that Castro has also invited Uribe to attend the XIV Summit of Non-Aligned Countries that would take place in Havana in September. (*IPS*, 2/4/06)

April 1: Paraguayan Public Health minister, Teresa León, confirmed that the Cuban Government will build and equip an ophthalmology centre in the department of San Pedro, in Paraguay. On the other hand, the agreement under which for five years Cuban medical brigades had been working in Paraguay will not be renewed to give job opportunities to Paraguayan doctors who are graduating on the island, said León. She also added that the returning young graduates from seven Cuban faculties will need jobs, thus it was decided not to renew the agreement on the Cuban medical brigades. (*La Nación*, 1/4/06)

April 3: Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi received and held talks with a special envoy of Fidel Castro at his office. Prime Minister Meles was invited by Castro to attend the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement member states due to be held in September in the Cuban capital. Briefing journalists after the talks with the prime minister, Castro's special envoy, Cuban deputy foreign minister, Ambassador Marcos Rodríguez Costa, said the prime minister has accepted the invitation extended to him by Castro. (*BBC*, 3/4/06)

April 4: The Venezuelan Acción Democrática party issued an alert on the announcement by Jesse Chacón, minister of the Interior and Justice, of the intention to hand over to the Cubans the identification, land registration and notary systems. This would put state security affairs in the hands of foreigners, no different than passing them over to the US, added the party. Henry Ramos Allup, secretary general of AD, noted that considering that the principle of private property does not exist on the island, registration expertise, in particular with regards to real estate, the Cuban "specialists" must be "in Prehistoric times". (*El Universal*, 4/4/06)

April 4: The building work on an ophthalmological clinic, fruit of Cuba's international collaboration, has started in the province of Djelfa, Algeria. The ground breaking ceremony of this project was attended by local authorities and the Cuban ambassador to that African country, Roberto Blanco Dominguez. (*CAN*, 4/4/06)

April 4: "I feel grateful when I come to Cuba and see the generosity of its people who every day demonstrate how globalization could have a radically different face from the one of deterioration of the humankind and the planet", said Canadian scientist David Suzuki in Havana. The world-renowned environmentalist gave a lecture on "Science, Human Foresight and the Survival of the Earth" at the Latin American School of Medicine. Present at the main auditorium of the Latin American School of Medicine for Dr. Suzuki's lecture was Her Excellency Alexandra Bugailiskis, Canadian Ambassador to Cuba; Jorge Francisco Soberon, deputy director for North America of the Cuban Foreign Affairs

Ministry; and Dr. Juan Carrizo Estevez M.D., the dean of the academic institution, as well as other distinguished guests. (*Granma*, 6/4/06)

April 5: Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Suyed Hamid Albar said Cuba-Malaysia relations are excellent and expressed his certainty that Cuba will be successful at the chairmanship of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). Malaysia, the current chair of the Movement has conducted a constructive and sound effort at the helm of NAM. In this regard, Hamid Albar noted that his country will help muster support for the Caribbean island, when it becomes NAM's new president in its upcoming summit in Havana this September. In a meeting with his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque, both officials delved into preparations for the event in September and the ministerial meeting, which will take place in Malaysia in May. (*Reuters, Granma*, 5,6/4/06)

April 5: The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs reprimanded Cuban ambassador to Spain, Alberto Velazco San José, for his criticism against the president of the Madrid regional Community, Esperanza Aguirre, after she met with Cuban opponents in Miami. The director-general for Ibero-American Affairs, Javier Sandomingo, phoned the Cuban ambassador in the afternoon to indicate to him that his words against a representative of the Spanish public service "is not the kind of job a head of mission should do". The Cuban ambassador had said he could picture Aguirre "next to those who for decades have had plans of assassinating Cuban leaders and organizing terrorist acts in our country". (*Europa Press*, 6/4/06)

April 5: Nearly 100,000 inhabitants of Michoacan state in Mexico have been taught to read and write with the Cuban method "Yo Si Puedo" (Yes, I Can). Michoacan governor Lazaro Cardenas declared free of illiteracy the indigenous community of Pichataro. He denied that the so-called Alfa-TV program, advised there by 41 Cuban experts, has any political slant. "The aim is to seek another type of globalization: that of knowledge, culture, health, equity and justice, and not only accept the one that subjugates us to hegemonic centers of the international economy," he upheld. (*Prensa Latina, El Universal*, 6/4/06)

April 6: Pledging to share its experiences in the human rights field with the international community, Cuba's communist government has announced its candidacy for the United Nations' new Human Rights Council (HRC). "The Cuban people can show to the world, with deep modesty but with full satisfaction and pride, its tremendous achievements," Fidel Castro's government said in a document sent to other UN member states' missions in New York, requesting support for its candidacy. The HRC, which will hold its inaugural meeting in Geneva on June 19, replaces the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), long criticized because rights-abusing states were accused of seeking admission to block criticism of themselves and their allies. Cuba, which held a seat on the now-defunct UNCHR from 1976 to 1984 and again from 1989 until its dissolution last month, was one of the countries most frequently cited by critics in this regard. Cuba is one of 34 countries whose candidacies for the 47-seat HRC have been made public by the UN. (*CNSNews.com*, 6/4/06)

April 6: Cuban songwriter Silvio Rodríguez was granted the Latin Award by the Spanish Academy for Music. The Academy highlighted that Rodríguez' compositions are "a symbol of social and political commitment, and examples of poetry". Rodríguez will receive the award at a ceremony in Madrid, in May. (*AFP*, 6/4/06)

April 6: In 2000, Cuban doctors working in the Honduran Integral Health Program began to work at the Proyecto Victoria rehabilitation center for addicts in Tegucigalpa. They have contributed with therapeutic techniques and research that has proven very beneficial for the institution. "You could say we were working in an empirical manner until the Cubans arrived," Rosa Aguilera, the project's director for the last seven years, said. The first Cuban at the center, Havana psychiatrist Octavio Garciga, wrote four important texts for the work of the program, which, put into a book, have also served as a guide for other Cubans who came later. The psychiatrist Victoria Gomez Sanchez, of the Joaquin Albarran Clinical-Surgical Hospital in Havana, speaks highly of the book, entitled "How to treat an addict and gang member." Victoria arrived in Honduras in 2005 and her commitment with the program was immediate. "The

Cubans are teaching us a lesson on humanism: they always say yes when help is needed, no matter how difficult it might be," Noemi Perdomo, a Honduran psychologist working with the program, noted. (*Granma*, 6/4/06)

April 6: Jose Ramon Balaguer, Cuban Healthcare minister and member of the Communist Party Political Bureau, is on a working visit to the People's Republic of China where he held talks with his Chinese counterpart Gao Qiang. According to a report from Prensa Latina news agency, the meeting took place in a friendly and brotherly atmosphere, and both sides expressed their opinions on the excellent relations between the two nations. The ministers exchanged ideas aimed at strengthening and further developing bilateral cooperation in the area of healthcare. Balaguer also toured several healthcare facilities in the Chinese capital including the Center for Control and Prevention of Infectious Diseases, before traveling on to Guangzhou, capital of the southeastern province of Guangdong. Later the Cuban official is scheduled to visit Sichuan and Qinghai. (*Granma*, 6/4/06)

April 6: In fifteen days, some 27 Cuban immigrants have arrived in Honduras, an official source said. The head of Honduras' International Migration, Carlos Sánchez, said a first group of 18 Cubans arrived at Swam Islands, in the Caribbean. Sánchez also said a group of nine made it to Puerto Cortes. (*EFE*, 6/4/06)

April 7: The Cuban government accused Mexican authorities of Quintana Roo of being involved in an aborted human smuggling operation, where one person died and another was injured after Cuban coast guards fired on the boat. According to Havana, this incident reaffirms the existence of a complex ring that uses Mexico as a bridge to the United States. "Boatmen of Cuban origin, Mexican fishermen, Mexican state authorities and elements of the anti-Cuban mafia who live in the area and who have connections with Miami" are involved in this operation, said an official note published in the daily *Granma*. Pedro Ramírez Violante, head federal prosecutor in Quintana Roo, said there is no indication of a human-trafficking ring. The spokeswoman of the National Migration Institute's office in Cancún, Claudia Teyer, refused to comment. For his part, Miguel Kim, legal affairs director for the Cancún Preventive Police, said that all cases are immediately passed to immigration authorities. [[El tráfico humano y la muerte viajan en lancha rápida](#)] (*AFP*, 7/4/06)

April 8: Cuba declared its concerns in a diplomatic letter over the deteriorating Middle East situation, after having been prevented from addressing the Security Council on the theme on March 30. Cuban ambassador to the UN, Rodrigo Malmierca, in a letter pointed out that events in that region have a multiplicity of important implications for international peace and security and so are of interest to all UN member states, and regretted the Security Council's "arbitrary" limiting of the rights of non-Council members to speak at the public meeting. The Cuban diplomat said it was necessary to publicly state that the March 14 Israeli military attack on the Jericho jail constitutes a grave violation of international legal obligations and humanitarian law, and adds to its decades-long list of violations and aggressions against the Palestinian people. (*Ahora*, 8/4/06)

April 9: The Czech ambassador to the USA, Petr Kolar, sent Easter greetings to Cuban dissidents imprisoned in Cuba for their political stands. "We want to support our Cuban friends who could [otherwise] lose hope and start believing that the world has forgotten them," Kolar said to the press. He said the greetings he had sent to 188 Cuban political prisoners means an expression of direct support and a call on them not to give up hope. "We know about them and we think about them. Easter has come nearer and it is natural for us to send greetings to the people we like and we think about," Kolar said. He said the greetings do not contain any political declarations. "We've only expressed support to them and our belief that their hope will hold on," Kolar said. (*CTK*, 9/4/06)

April 9: Bolivian President Evo Morales expressed gratitude for Cuba's solidarity in the field of health, when announcing the opening of a new center for "Operation Miracle" in this country. During a tour of the central region of Cochabamba, Morales pointed out that this ophthalmologic center, equipped with state-of-the-art technology, was to open at the Villa Tunari Hospital, east of La Paz, "thanks to support from the Cuban government and people". (*Prensa Latina*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Wives of Cuban imprisoned dissidents known as the “Ladies in White” invited the leader of Izquierda Unida Spain (United Left), Gaspar Llamazares, to travel to Cuba to get to know the reality in the country, after the coalition vetoed a proposal in favour of the release of the prisoners. “We understand that honest people are confused”, they say in a letter in which they urge Llamazares to walk the streets, visit the homes and “to show up at any prison (...) in any province, at random”. (*EFE*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Two officials from the Mexican embassy in Cuba will attend as observers the trial of three Mexicans accused of human trafficking, more than 10 months after being arrested in the southern city of Cienfuegos. The Mexican embassy officials are the head of the Consular Section Ana Mercedes Hernández, and the Civil Attaché for Protection Affairs, Carlos Zamora Treviño, said the diplomatic mission in a press release. (*Notimex*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), met with Jose Ramon Balaguer, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party in Beijing. The two sides spoke positively about the relation between the two countries and the two parties, vowing to push forward the party relations at various levels. (*Xinhua*, 10/4/06)

April 10: Cuba and China began a medical collaboration program this weekend, which will contribute to improve ophthalmologic attention to the population in regions of western China. With this objective, an association agreement for the creation of an ophthalmologic center was signed in Xining, Qinghai, by Dr. Tania Gonzalez Perez, representative of Cuban Medical Services Cubanos in China, and Dr. Chai Duo, director of Peoples Hospital 1 in Xining. Cuba will supply its experience in this branch of medicine, Cuban diplomatic sources said Monday, and will be staffed by Cuban and Chinese specialists, so that residents of Qinghai Province and other regions will be able to receive medical treatment. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/4/06)

April 11: Approximately 300,000 Latin Americans of scant means of support have received vision treatment free of charge in Cuba in the last 16 months, as part of a health program promoted by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, said a diplomat. Patients from 24 countries of the region were operated in Cuba thanks to the so-called Operation Miracle, an initiative launched in 2004 that seeks to benefit 6 million poor patients with vision problems in the next decade, said Adan Chávez, Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba. (*Reuters*, 11/4/06)

April 11: The Government of Cuba donated an ophthalmology clinic to Bolivia. The clinic is located in the coca-producing region in the centre of the country, said Bolivian president Evo Morales in the Town of Tunari, Cochabamba, in the presence of the Cuban foreign minister, Felipe Pérez Roque. “These eye-surgery equipments do not even exist in other Bolivian clinics. Everything has been imported from Europe”, emphasized Morales. He also announced that Cuba is setting up a similar clinic in another Bolivian city, to tend to those who need eye-surgery free of charge. (*EFE*, 11/4/06)

April 11: Uruguay’s Public Health minister, Maria Julia Muñoz, arrived in Havana accompanied by 123 Uruguayans that will receive vision treatment in Cuba, in the framework of Operation Miracle. Thanks to Cuba through Operation Miracle, hundreds of Uruguayans are receiving invaluable assistance that will allow them to return to our country with recovered vision, said Muñoz on her arrival. (*AFP*, 11/4/06)

April 11: Cuba refused to repatriate four Mexicans charged in Havana with human trafficking after they requested to carry out their sentences in their country, in accordance with a bilateral agreement. The Mexican ambassador, José Ignacio Piña, said he has made a new request to local authorities. The Cuban government had refused the requests of the Mexican prisoners, invoking the “social impact of the crime” for which they were sentenced, indicated the diplomat. (*La Jornada*, 11/4/06)

April 11: The head of the Canada Desk of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the World's Peoples was in Manitoba on a recruiting mission looking for local residents interested in donating three weeks' worth of labour to the Caribbean country's economy. Fernando Duque said his goal is to find 80 to 100 Canadians to join the Che Guevara Brigade -- a program named after the iconic Cuban guerilla leader -- that encourages foreigners to work and study in Cuba each August. Last year, he said there were about 30 Canadians who made the trek and lent their backs to the effort. "The benefit to us is we'll get visitors who realize Cuba is not really how it's depicted in much of the media. Cuba is usually depicted as a country with a tyranny, no democracy and where you can't go out in the streets after six o'clock. That's not true," he said in an interview. He said the work is primarily in farmers' fields and construction sites. Duque's cross-Canada tour is also taking him to Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria and a number of stops in Ontario. (*Winnipeg Free Press*, 12/4/06)

April 12: Three top Cuban scientists will be in Kuala Lumpur to showcase their pioneering biotechnology products and share their experience with their Malaysian and Singaporean counterparts. They will zoom in on the treatment of cancer and the advancements in immuno-therapy (experimental cancer vaccines) emerging from Cuba which have proved successful against the disease. A local biotech company which has worked with Cuban scientists for years, Bioven Sdn Bhd, is bringing Dr Augstin Lage, Dr Rolando Perez and Dr Gerardo Guillen down for a Cancer Immuno-therapy workshop at the NCI Cancer Hospital. (*New Straits Times*, 12/4/06)

April 12: Haitian President-elect Rene Preval left for Cuba in an unannounced trip aimed at rekindling relations between the Caribbean neighbors. Preval, a former president who is due to take power next month, is to meet with Fidel Castro during the three-day trip and is expected to discuss Cuban aid for his impoverished country, Preval spokesman Volce Assad said. Relations between Haiti and Cuba were warm during Preval's 1996-2001 presidency, but ties have suffered since a US-backed interim government was appointed to replace former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was ousted in a February 2004 revolt. "President Preval had a good relationship with Cuba so he's going there to restart the relationship," Assad said. "Cuba has done a lot to help Haiti and the president wants to see how we can make the relationship better." (*AP*, 12/4/06)

April 12: A group of 17 Cuban immigrants, from Camaguey province, arrived to the Caribbean coast of Honduras. According to local authorities, 15 women and two men arrived in a small boat at Bajamar beach, 200 kilometres northwest of Tegucigalpa, after sailing for seven days. (*AP*, 12/4/06)

April 12: Cuban prosecutors asked for 25-year jail sentences for three Mexican fishermen charged with smuggling people out of Cuba by boat to Mexico, diplomatic sources said. The harsh sentences were sought by the island's Communist authorities as they move to crack down on the increasing number of smugglers ferrying Cuban migrants to Mexico, where they try to cross into the United States. The Mexicans, who were arrested on a boat stranded off Cuba in May 2005, went on trial in the city of Cienfuegos. The trio are among 12 Mexicans jailed in Cuba for people smuggling. They were accused of attempting to smuggle out 17 people, including four children, when the boat's engine failed. "They did not deny anything," a diplomat, who asked not to be identified, told the press. (*Reuters*, 12/4/06)

April 13: Cuban prosecutors lowered from 25 to 10 years jail terms they are seeking for three Mexican fishermen charged with smuggling people out of Cuba, Mexico's ambassador in Havana said. Relatives of one of the men said they hoped the trio would be absolved after attending their one-day trial on April 12 in the southern coast city of Cienfuegos. A decision could take up to a month. Mexican Ambassador Jose Ignacio Pina said defense lawyers refuted evidence that the fishermen were planning to pick up 17 people on Cuba's south coast. The three Mexican fishermen, who were arrested a year ago, insisted in court they were on a fishing trip when their boat broke down and they entered Cuban waters to fix the engine. (*Reuters*, 13/4/06)

April 13: Nearly 600 Cuban doctors have arrived in Bolivia since the new government took power, along with waves of Cuban and Venezuelan teachers and social workers, on a mission that critics fear is more political than humanitarian.

The leftist government of President Evo Morales says the foreign workers are providing badly needed relief to poor areas hit by recent floods and support for a new literacy program. But the political opposition and some civic leaders charge that the visitors have been sent by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez to help their Bolivian ally consolidate political control -- echoing US criticism of a similar Cuban program in Venezuela. "The Cubans are setting up the framework for a Castroite system in Bolivia. It's very worrying," said popular radio commentator Arturo Mendivil. He and other critics accuse the Cubans of organizing neighborhood vigilante groups modeled on Cuba's notorious "committees for the defense of the revolution." (*The Washington Times*, 13/4/06)

April 13: Haitian President-elect Rene Preval met Fidel Castro to discuss new ways for improving bilateral cooperation. "If Haiti does not integrate into the region it will have great difficulties in development. So we are going to do everything possible to join with the region politically, economically and culturally," Preval said after meeting Castro. "The future of Haiti is to strongly advance its integration with Latin America and the Caribbean," he said. Preval, visiting Cuba with a delegation that includes future members of his government, earlier praised Cuban-trained doctors for the healthcare they have given needy Haitians. "There's a saying in Haiti: 'After God, there are Cuban doctors'," Preval was quoted as saying, adding: "They have done more than eight million consultations and over 100,000 operations." (*AFP*, 13/4/06)

April 13: The Cuban government denied a request to renew the visa of Czech Embassy political counselor Stanislav Kazecky and gave him until April 15 to leave the country, the diplomat told the press. "The authorities refused to prolong my visa and gave me a period of 72 hours to leave the country," Kazecky said, adding that the Cuban government has not given any official explanation for its decision. "In practice it's the same as an expulsion," said Kazecky, who began his mission to Cuba in April 2004. "We've requested to meet with the Cuban Foreign Ministry to ask for an explanation but they haven't granted us the meeting and thus far there's no explanation. Kazecky said that while he has been a forceful spokesman for his government's stand on human rights in Cuba, his relationships with opposition figures were no different than those maintained by "many other diplomats from several other countries." Cuban authorities have not yet released a public statement on the matter. (*EFE*, 13/4/06)

April 13: Czech diplomats perceive the denial of a visa to the first secretary of the Czech embassy in Havana as an act of expulsion. The Czechs are protesting against it and have immediately summoned Cuban charge d'affaires in Prague Aymee Hernandez for an explanation. "Cuba is undoubtedly reacting to the Czech foreign policy which constantly criticizes human rights abuses in Cuba and supports the Cuban opposition," the Foreign Ministry said. "The Czech Republic understands this as an act of expulsion," the ministry said in a statement. The Czech Republic is one of the toughest critics of Fidel Castro in the EU. The ministry views this unusual conduct as an "evident effort at escalating the tension in relations between the Czech Republic and Cuba." The Czech diplomacy has made it clear that it will not extend the visa to one of the Cuban diplomats working in Prague by which it would expel him. "The Czech Republic will take a reciprocal measure," the ministry said. The case of the Czech diplomat is another in a series of rifts in relations between Prague and Havana. (*CTK, Reuters*, 13/4/06)

April 14: The European Commission "regretted" the decision taken by the Cuban government of denying the renewal of a visa of Czech Embassy political counselor Stanislav Kazecky. "We are in contact with our delegation in Havana to follow up this situation", a spokesman for the Commission, Ferrán Tarradellas, said, but he avoided any other comment on this issue. (*EFE*, 14/4/06)

April 14: The minister of State and minister of Foreign Affairs and Francophony of the Republic of Congo, H.E. Rodolphe Adada, arrived in Havana, following an invitation by Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Felipe Perez Roque. This is the third visit to Cuba of the Congolese foreign minister. (*Granma*, 14/4/06)

April 14: No fewer than 50 leaders of developing nations are expected to attend September's Nonaligned Movement summit in Cuba, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. In remarks reported by Cuba's National Information

Agency, Perez Roque said invitations so far had been personally delivered by Cuban envoys to 95 of the 114 countries belonging to the Nonaligned Movement, the largest grouping of the world's nations after the United Nations. Perez Roque made his comments during a visit to Cuba by Congo Foreign Minister Rodolphe Adada. The summit will be held in Havana on September 11-16, when Malaysia will turn over chairmanship of the Nonaligned Movement to Cuba. The summits are held every three years, with the last one held February 2003 in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur. (*AP*, 14/4/06)

April 14: Cuban Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon conferred in Teheran with Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on the expansion of relations between the two countries. The two sides met on the sidelines of the Third International Conference on Qods and Support for the Rights of Palestinian People, kicked off in Tehran with a key note speech by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei. At the meeting, Mottaki described expansion of relations between Iran and Cuba at mutual and international levels as very 'valuable'. Referring to the stands taken by Cuba during NAM troika session, the South African conference as well as the country's stance in the IAEA Board of Governors on Iran's peaceful nuclear dossier, Mottaki described them as very significant. Referring to the upcoming conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana, and presence of Iran's president in the session, he underlined that the Islamic Republic of Iran calls for expansion of political and economic relations with Cuba. The Cuban parliament speaker, for his part, voiced support for Iran's peaceful nuclear activities and congratulated the recent access of Iranian scientist in attaining nuclear technology and joining the nuclear club countries. (*IRNA*, 16/4/06)

April 15: After four fruitful days of debates opposing the free trade agreements and its consequences, the 5th Hemispheric Meeting against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) came to an end. The forum closed with the presentation of the action plans of the Continental Alliance for Latin America and the Caribbean and of other bodies such the Network of Networks in Defense of Humanity. Attendees made important proposals such the creation of a world legal network to direct anti-FTAA fighting. Concrete actions were presented to handle Washington's maneuvers on their own level and a boycott was called of US products on May 1 to illustrate the importance of the immigrants in that nation's economy and support recent protests by those people. Likewise, delegates urged to closely follow the plans of the Alliance for Security and Prosperity of North America, a new mechanism to extend the FTA among the US, Canada and Mexico throughout America. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/4/06)

April 15: The mother of a Mexican fisherman tried in Cuba for people trafficking called on Fidel Castro to allow her son to return to Mexico. Lucia Rivero said that her son, Juan Ramon Barco, was innocent and should be released by Cuban authorities. Rivero returned from Cienfuegos, Cuba, where she attended the trial of her son and two other Mexican fishermen, Luis Nicolas Chan Campos and Johnny Enrique Fuentes, accused of smuggling Cubans out of the island. "I am going to ask Fidel Castro to listen to his heart and allow my son to return to Mexico because he is innocent, and his only problem is that he was a victim of nature when his boat experienced a problem," Rivero told reporters. Rivero said she also planned to ask Mexican President Vicente Fox to work to win her son's freedom. The Cuban government denounced the existence of organized people trafficking networks on the Yucatan Peninsula and accused US and Mexican authorities of tolerating such activities. (*EFE*, 16/4/06)

April 16: Four Cuban rafters -- two of them identified as political advocates-- were detained by the Mexican Navy at Contoy Island, Yucatan, Mexican authorities reported. "They are Oskel Lezcano Chávez, 30, who said he is a member of the Movement for Human Rights in Cuba, and Lorenzo del Toro Ramos, 40, who said he is president of the "Sanluisena" Democratic Alliance". The other two rafters are Valentín García Fuentes, a 53 year-old fisherman, and 29 year-old Maikel Jiménez Chávez, (*AFP*, 16/4/06)

April 16: A group of 20 Cuban immigrants arrived at the Caribbean coast of Honduras, local authorities said. The 14 men, five women and a 5 year-old girl arrived at Puerto Cortés, 200 kilometers north of Tegucigalpa, after sailing for ten days in two boats from Santa Cruz, in the southern coast of Camaguey province. The boats were named "Liberty

Bus One”, and Liberty Bus Two (Guagua Uno de la Libertad y Guagua Dos de la Libertad), authorities said. (*AP*, 16/4/06)

April 17: Mexican foreign minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez, rejected Cuban allegations that state authorities in Quintana Roo are encouraging illegal immigration of Cubans to Mexico. “I refuse to believe that”, said Derbez. As to the influx of Cubans to Mexico by boat, Derbez said that they are “specific” cases where the individuals involved, in his opinion, do it for economic reasons. (*EFE*, 18/4/06)

April 17: The Czech Republic is preparing steps and proposals for the European Union talks regarding relations with Cuba, Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda told reporters at an extraordinary press conference after the return of expelled Czech diplomat Stanislav Kazecky from the island. Svoboda did not specify what proposals the Czech Republic would submit to the EU. He only said that the Czech Republic wants the EU to take a joint stance on Cuba. "This does not mean that we will embrace Fidel Castro," Svoboda noted. (*CeskeNoviny*, 17/4/06)

April 17: A cultural program to honor Fidel Castro on his 80th birthday was announced by the Guayasamin Foundation during the 5th Hemispheric Encounter against the US-promoted Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which wound up in Havana.

Foundation president Pablo Guayasamin said that Castro’s birthday represents 80 years of dignity and victorious struggle against US imperialism, 80 years that set an example to follow for the peoples of the Americas and the Third World. He said the occasion will be marked by celebrations from August 10-13 in Havana. Pablo is the eldest son of outstanding Ecuadorian painter Oswaldo Guayasamin, a long-time friend of the Cuban Revolution and its leader Fidel Castro. He referred to the support given to the celebration by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Nobel Peace Laureates Rigoberta Menchu and Adolfo Perez Esquivel and other members of honor of the Guayasamin Foundation. (*CAN*, 17/4/06)

April 18: Belarus Prime Minister Serguei Sergueievich Sidorski will start an official visit to Cuba on April 20, responding to an invitation by Fidel Castro. According to a note published by Granma newspaper, the aim of his visit is to foster the excellent political, friendship and cooperation ties existing between the two nations. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/4/06)

April 18: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque underscored in Caracas the importance of the unity of Venezuelan university students to buttress the Bolivarian Revolution. During the opening ceremony of the first National Meeting of Venezuela’s Bolivarian University Students, Perez Roque recognized the effort of the youth to hold this encounter while remembering his experience as a young leader. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/4/06)

April 18: Belarus' Prime Minister, Serguei Sidorski, said that Cuba is an important and reliable partner in political and economic matters in the Western Hemisphere, as the two nations have kept relations for a long time. "I don't think I am mistaken if I say that Belarus is a strategic ally for the island," said Sidorski in an exclusive interview with *Prensa Latina* in Minsk before engaging in a trip to Cuba. The state of bilateral relations was clearly demonstrated in a letter of congratulations from Fidel Castro on the recent election of Alexander Lukashenko to a third term, noted the Belarus Prime Minister. (*ACN*, 19/4/06)

April 18: Dominican Republic and Cuba would be members of a group of more than 100 nations which launched a news service via Internet, pooling their resources to offer an alternative to the Western news media. Malaysia’s Bernama news agency will sponsor the ‘NAM News Network,’ of the 114 members of the Non-aligned Countries Movement, Cuba’s ambassador in Malaysia, Pedro Monzon Barata said. (*Dominican Today*, 19/4/06)

April 19: The first secretary of Cuba’s diplomatic mission in the Czech Republic, Manuel Ángel Baltar Charnicharo, left the country after local authorities did not renew his visa. Baltar “left Prague”, said chargé d’affaires Aymee

Hernández. Hernández and second secretary, Alex González García, are the only two Cuban diplomats who remain on post in the Slavic nation. (*EER*, 19/4/06)

April 19: Cuban foreign minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, arrived in the Paraguayan capital accompanying Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, who would take part in the so-called "Gas Summit" along with his counterparts from Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay. The Cuban foreign minister, who had been on a visit in Caracas, arrived in Chávez's plane. "President Chávez invited the minister, en route to Brazil. He has no official activities in Paraguay, except a courtesy visit with the foreign minister", said Paraguayan vice-minister of foreign affairs, Emilio Giménez. (*Reuters*, 19/4/06)

April 19: Fidel Castro defended Iran's nuclear program and warned that a military aggression by the United States against that country could trigger "a world war, which no one could prevent", affirmed Castro during an event marking the victory of his troops in Playa Girón 45 years ago. "How can they (the United States) threaten Iran because it wants to produce nuclear energy? There is no doubt that they would be making a mistake with Iran", said Castro before some 3,000 veterans, armed forces officers, students and diplomats who attended the event at the Karl Marx theatre in Havana. (*AFP*, 20/4/06)

April 19: Approximately 2,000 students gave Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, a big ovation during a ceremony at the national university in the Paraguayan capital where Cuban foreign minister Felipe Pérez was also applauded. Nobody explained, officially, when Pérez arrived in Asunción, but unconfirmed reports indicate that he would have been part of the Venezuelan delegation in the trip from Caracas. (*AP*, 20/4/06)

April 20: Canada refused to allow Belarussian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky's plane to land for refueling en route to Cuba, a Belarussian diplomat and Canadian officials said. Ottawa, which last month froze most ties with Belarus to protest against the controversial March 19 presidential vote, said it had strong concerns about the country's commitment to democratization and human rights. "In light of these concerns, we were not prepared to facilitate the entry of senior-level representatives of the Belarussian regime onto Canadian soil," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Pamela Greenwell. In Havana, Belarussian embassy councilor Victor Kozintsey said the reason Canada gave was that Sidorsky's delegation included officials banned from entering the European Union for their role in the presidential election. The plane refueled in Boston instead, delaying Sidorsky's arrival in Havana, Kozintsey said. (*Reuters*, *UNIAN*, 20/4/06)

April 20: Seeking to expand relations substantially with Cuba, the Prime Minister of Belarus, Sergei Sidorsky, arrived in Havana for an official visit at the invitation of Fidel Castro. The Belarus Prime Minister called Cuba a "strategic ally" and a political and economic partner. "This visit is an expression of the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries and will serve as a framework for a broad exchange of political and other matters," he said in a statement published in the official daily *Granma*. Sidorsky, 51, told Cuba's *Prensa Latina* news agency, "Cuba is an important, reliable partner in political and economic matters in the Western Hemisphere." The countries have long ties, going back to when Belarus was part of the Soviet Union, which was Cuba's main trading partner. Cuba and Belarus established diplomatic ties in April 1992. Sidorsky arrived just 12 days after Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko was sworn in for a third term, amid US and EU criticism. (*Granma*, *AFP*, 21/4/06)

April 20: Cuban government opponents asked the United Nations to demand the release of political prisoners on the island as a condition for the Caribbean country to join the new Human Rights Council. "The announcement of the immediate release of peaceful Cuban political prisoners is the essential step that would give sense to the Cuban vote and the country's aspiration to be a member of the Council", said the Christian Liberation Movement. "Not to call on the release of political prisoners would be an outright denial (...) of the Universal Declaration of Human rights", said the group who is lead by Oswaldo Payá in a message to the UN. [[Mensaje a la ONU](#)] (*Reuters*, 20/4/06)

April 20: Cuba offered free ophthalmologic assistance to the Montserrat population, in the British Caribbean. Cuban professionals working in Antigua will visit Montserrat monthly to assist local patients. Those in need of surgeries or other advanced treatments will be sent to Cuba, Montserrat's minister of Health, Idabelle Meade, said. (*AP*, 20/4/06)

April 20: Minister of Health Sports, Youth Affairs and Carnival, John Maginley is heading a delegation to Cuba to discuss a number of programmes including medical assistance between Antigua & Barbuda and Cuba. Maginley will attend a welcome dinner where he will meet with the Cuban Minister of Health Dr. Jose Ramon Balaguer Cabrera. They will review the eye care programme and look at the continued health care services for the Cuban doctors and nurses who are working in Antigua & Barbuda. (*Antigua Sun*, 20/4/06)

April 21: Fidel Castro received Serguei Sergueievich Sidorski, prime minister of the Republic of Belarus, in the Palace of the Revolution, in an atmosphere in which the excellent relations between both countries were reflected. The leader of the Cuban Revolution greeted the members of the visiting delegation and had an animated conversation with each one of them on their field, especially about the wide range of possibilities that are offered in spheres like transport. The Belarus leader also talked with the Cuban party and expressed his pleasure at being on the island at the moment. After the official photograph, Fidel and Sidorski reviewed the present situation of bilateral links, discussed aspects of mutual interest and explored future prospects in commercial terms and for collaboration, demonstrating the respect and understanding that exists between both nations. (*Granma*, 21/4/06)

April 21: Venezuelans will spill blood to defend Cuba against a possible US invasion, President Hugo Chavez said. "If the US empire were to invade Cuba, Venezuelan blood would run in the defense of Cuba and its people," Chavez said during a speech to government supporters in Venezuela's capital. The Venezuelan leader repeated that the US "is preparing an aggression," though it was not clear which country he believed was the target. "Patria o muerte! (Countryland or Death), that is our device; Socialism or Death!, united for whatever may come", Chavez said about his vision of unity between Cuba and Venezuela. (*El Nuevo Herald, Jerusalem Post*, 21/4/06)

April 21: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez decorated 28 Cuban healthcare workers with the Francisco de Miranda Order for their work in "Mision Barrio Adentro", a community-based medical services program serving in his nation. Since the program's inception, on April 16, 2003, 175 million medical consultations have been performed with Venezuelan people in poor communities and remote areas – 16 million of those calls were in dentistry and more than four million in ophthalmology. In all, about 17 million individuals have benefited. Chavez awarded the medal, accompanied by the Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Venezuelan Minister of Health Francisco Armada during a ceremony that took place in the Municipal Theater in Caracas. (*Granma*, 22/4/06)

April 21: Czech diplomats in Cuba do not carry out spying activities for the USA and neither do they act according to instructions from the USA, said Czech diplomat Stanislav Kazecky in response to allegations from Havana that he was spying on behalf of the USA. "We did not receive any instructions that could be interpreted that we were working according to their instructions. We are accredited in Cuba as representatives of an independent country and that is also the way in which we behaved," added Kazecky, whose visa was not renewed by the Cuban authorities last week because of alleged subversive activities for the benefit of the USA. According to Kazecky, the motive of his expulsion is clear - it is a reaction to the Czech policy criticizing the state of human rights in Cuba. (*Pravo*, 23/4/06)

April 21: The Dominican Republic asked Havana to review a migratory agreement between the two countries. The Dominican Assistant Secretary for Foreign and Migratory Affairs, Rosario Graciano de los Santos, said her country asked the Cuban government to review an agreement signed in 1997. "We are begging them to allow us to return undocumented Cubans to the island, but they don't allow us to do that because the agreement needs to be changed", Graciano de los Santos said. Since October 1 st, 449 Cubans have arrived in Puerto Rico, most of them from the Dominican Republic. (*EER*, 21/4/06)

April 22: Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki in a meeting with the Cuban Minister for Government and Head of the Iran-Cuba Commission Ricardo Cabrisas said that given the close relations between the governments and nations of both countries, there are hopes that continuous exchange of views will strengthen mutual ties. A report released by the Foreign Ministry Media Department, quoting Mottaki, said that given the common interests of the two states, cooperation in uncovering the political nature of global hegemony in various regions will be achieved through promoting common goals and strategies. Mottaki added that the flourishing of the allied forces in Latin America has strengthened the positions of pioneering nations and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member states. Expounding on the capacities of Iran and Cuba to cooperate in Latin America, Africa and the international scene, he pointed out that the two countries have much potential in the economic fields and common political strategies in the global arenas. (IRNA, 22/4/06)

April 23: Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno and his visiting Uruguayan counterpart Maria Belela Herrera signed four cooperation agreements in Havana. The deals cover the facilitation of entry visas for those who carry diplomatic and official passports; the exchange of information on the archives between the two foreign ministries; the cooperation between the two foreign ministries' Institutes for International Relations; and a joint statement on supplementary economic cooperation. This is the third visit to Cuba of a top official from the Uruguayan government of Tabare Vazquez. (VNA, 23/4/06)

April 24: Kashmir's Prime Minister Sandar Shahar took note of Cuba's example of solidarity and expressed gratitude for the work of the Cuban medical brigade that cared for those affected by the October earthquake in Pakistan. "I think Cuba, its people and government, have earned the respect of the entire world, especially in Kashmir and those territories fighting for freedom and development," he said in an interview broadcast on Cuban TV. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/4/06)

April 25: The leftist and "anti-imperialist" governments of Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba are to sign an agreement in Havana on April 29 to launch the Peoples Trade Treaty (TCP), an accord seen as counterweight and alternative to US-pushed free-trade pacts, local media reported. The signing date was announced by Bolivian President Evo Morales, the reports said. Morales will travel to Havana to meet with his Cuban and Venezuelan counterparts, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, respectively. According to the Bolivian president, Cuba and Venezuela accepted his proposal for the TCP as a means of implementing the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a Venezuelan-backed trade initiative. (EFE, 26/4/05)

April 25: Four ambassadors were presented to Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf at the Executive Mansion. They are ambassadors of Russia, The Vatican, India and Cuba. The ambassadors promised their respective government's assistance for the reconstruction of post-war Liberia. Ambassador Lucens Domingo Polledo of Cuba called on President Sirleaf to identify the government's priorities for immediate assistance. The Cuban ambassador also extended an invitation to President Sirleaf to attend the 14th summit of non-allied countries in Cuba. (*India Daily*, 25/4/06)

April 25: Police officers had to escort a Cuban novelist critical of Fidel Castro past protesters as she left a book fair in the Dominican Republic's capital that attracted both supporters and critics of the communist leader. During a talk given by writer Zoe Valdes, who was born in Cuba and fled to France as an adult in 1995, a physical struggle broke out among attendees of the Ninth International Book Fair of Santo Domingo as she made critical comments about Castro. The author's speech, titled 'Cuba: Fiction and Reality,' was interrupted repeatedly by Cuban and Dominican hecklers. Between interruptions, Valdes made her argument against Castro's Cuba: "It is a regime of tremendous cruelty. He is a man that has simply used the Cuban people to build his estate." An article in the Dominican newspaper *El Caribe* warned readers that protesters would attend the book fair and claimed the Cuban government pressured organizers to exclude Valdes. Warner Lores, the cultural attache from the Cuban consulate in Santo Domingo, denied the accusations. (AP, *El País*, 26/4/06)

April 26: The state of human rights in Cuba is increasingly worsening, Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda (the Christian Democrats, KDU-CSL) told a meeting of European diplomats and NGOs on the situation in Cuba. The number of political prisoners and attacks on dissidents and their families is increasing on the island, ruled by a Communist regime headed by Fidel Castro for almost 50 years, Svoboda said. "We will advocate the release of all political prisoners," Svoboda said. "When the Czech Republic wants to celebrate its national holiday, it will invite even those who seek democratisation and freedom in Cuba," Svoboda said, alluding to an incident last year when Cuban authorities banned the celebrations of the Czech national holiday in Havana, arguing that it is a counter-revolutionary act. (*CTK*, 26/4/06)

April 26: The president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, received Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz, who is in Teheran heading the delegation that participated in the 11 th Session of the Iran-Cuba Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. During their talk, the Iranian president highlighted the sincere spirit of relations between both countries, and appreciated the "brave support of Cuba for Iran." Minister Cabrisas underlined that in the last few months they had not only created the basis to deepen the bilateral relations, but also to diversify those relations, as it was proved by the results of the work of the Joint Commission. Cabrisas also mentioned the upcoming 14 th Summit of the Non Aligned Movement in Cuba, which is an excellent opportunity to continue strengthening negotiations between the two nations. (*Granma*, 27/4/06)

April 26: The Mexican Navy rescued eight Cuban rafters in a wooden boat close to Isla Mujeres, in the Mexican Caribbean. The immigrants, who had sailed from Cuba eight days before, were trying to reach US soil. (*EFE*, 26/4/06)

April 27: The Russian Orthodox church thinks the US economic sanctions against Cuba are unfair. "Certainly, we disagree with the economic blockade of Cuba. We consider the presence of an American military base on Cuba as wrong", deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations bishop Mark of Yegoryevsk said when answering the questions of journalists in Moscow. He said a jaundiced view was often taken of Cuban problems, as "the position of its mighty Western neighbour is taken into consideration". "We are convinced, however, that Cuba should be treated without prejudice", bishop Mark said. (*Interfax*, 27/4/06)

April 26: Reporters Without Borders, or RSF for its initials in French, said that Cuban authorities are carrying out a campaign to silence journalist Roberto Santana Rodriguez, who works for the on-line publication Cubanet. In a communique, RSF said that over a number of months the Cuban police several times have "ordered" Santana to stop writing for Cubanet and have threatened to throw him in jail. The press organization criticized the "blackmail of resorting to Law 88, regarding national independence and the Cuban economy, which provides the regime with an argument for sentencing dissidents to (lengthy) prison terms. (*EFE*, 27/4/06)

April 29: Three Latin American presidents - Cuba's Fidel Castro, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales of Bolivia - signed a trade agreement designed to strengthen the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA, the regional integration initiative. The three leaders signed two accords in Havana, the first admitting Bolivia into ALBA, originally an agreement between Cuba and Venezuela, and the second making the three countries members of the Peoples' Trade Treaty (TCP) proposed by Morales. At a ceremony in the Cuban capital's Palace of Conventions, the presidents signed the agreements formalizing the Republic of Bolivia's membership in ALBA as well as the adherence of all three to the Peoples' Trade Treaty. Under this second agreement Cuba and Venezuela will eliminate all tariffs on Bolivian products. Venezuela agreed to provide "all the energy resources Bolivia needs" as the second poorest country in the hemisphere nationalizes its natural gas reserves, and to help it develop a petrochemical industry. Chavez and Morales contrasted the agreements with faltering US plans for a "Free Trade Area of the Americas," each charging the United States with trying to impose "imperialist domination" on the region. "All Venezuela's and Cuba's experience over these years building integration, all the potential of our economies and people are at the Bolivian people's disposal," Chavez said during the signing ceremony. (*EFE, The New York Times*, 29,30/4/06)

Terrorism

April 19: The US government released the first list of detainees held at the Guantanamo Bay prison -- the most extensive accounting yet of the hundreds of people held there, nearly all of them labeled enemy combatants. In all, 558 people were named in the list provided by the Pentagon in response to a Freedom of Information lawsuit by The Associated Press. They were among the first swept up in the US global war on terrorism for suspected links to al Qaeda or the Taliban. Those named are from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and 39 other countries. Many have been held at the US prison at Guantanamo Bay for more than four years. Only a handful have faced formal charges. (*CNN*, 20/4/06)

April 25: Representatives of the Colombian government and the South American nation's second-largest rebel group met in Havana in a renewed attempt to hammer out an agenda for peace talks. Neither side spoke to the news media after the meeting, which took place behind closed doors at the Palco hotel in western Havana. Headed by government peace envoy Luis Carlos Restrepo and rebel leaders Francisco Galan and Antonio Garcia, the two sides hope to fashion a schedule for talks to end at least part of the ongoing violence in Colombia. It is the third time in six months that representatives of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, have met with Restrepo in Havana for exploratory talks (*La Jornada, AP*, 25/4/06)

Security

April 10: The Cuban government perceived the US military maneuvers in the Caribbean as a demonstration of force. The United States is conducting a series of military maneuvers in the Caribbean in conjunction with NATO forces and all countries of the hemisphere, except Cuba and Venezuela, indicated Prensa Latina. The stated objective of the maneuvers is "to strengthen military relations between the US Navy and the countries of the region," and "to fine tune efforts against drug trafficking and terrorism." Regional analysts believe, however, that for the United States the reconnaissance flights and the depth measurement and terrain analysis program could mean an evaluation of its possibilities of success in an attack against a country in the area. The exercise —dubbed in Curacao as "Emplacement for Cooperative Security"— will have the Hato Rey base as its main headquarters. The international military exercise is considered as one of the largest carried out in recent years because of the participation of an aircraft carrier and an amazing naval fleet. (*Granma*, 10/4/06)

April 17: Guo Boxiong, vice-chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC), met with a visiting Cuban military delegation in Beijing. The delegation, invited by the General Logistics Department of the Chinese Liberation Army (PLA), was led by Claro Orlando Almaguel Vidal, director of the General Logistics Department of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces. Guo said the military relations of the two countries had witnessed great progress in recent years, with frequent high-ranking visits and smooth cooperation in technical and personnel training. (*Xinhua*, 17/4/06)

April 17: "Arms oligarch" Mikhail Kalashnikov will be visiting Cuba shortly. As far back as the Soviet era, the AK rifles made in Cuba were of good quality. According to Kalashnikov, he's interested in whether the Cubans are using modern production facilities to manufacture his creation these days. But there seems to be some greater purpose to Kalashnikov's forthcoming trip - judging by the fact that Rosoboroneksport spokesman Nikolai Shvets gently but firmly silenced the veteran designer when Kalashnikov started elaborating on his "creative plans." Russia's chief arms

exporter, Rosoboronekspport, has denied allegations in the American media that Russia is delivering poor-quality AK automatic rifles to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. (*Vremya Novostei*, 17/4/06)

April 18: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who accuses Washington of planning to invade Venezuela, said recent deployment of US warships in the Caribbean Sea threatened his country and its ally Cuba. Four US warships, including an aircraft carrier, and 6,500 sailors, are in a two-month deployment in the Caribbean Sea dubbed "Partnership of the Americas" by the US Navy. "They are doing maneuvers right here," Chavez told a student meeting in the country's western territory. "This is a threat, not just against us, against Venezuela, against Cuba." (*Reuters*, 18/4/06)

April 18: Venezuela's foreign minister denied a local media report alleging that Iran was planning to send nuclear missiles to Venezuela and Cuba. The Caracas-based newspaper 2001, citing unnamed US intelligence sources, reported that Iran and Venezuela had reached a secret arms deal to ship missiles to Venezuela and Cuba aboard oil tankers to avoid detection from US satellites and spy planes. "It tops a chain of absurdities that have been unloaded on Venezuela in recent years," Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez was quoted as saying in an interview with the state TV broadcaster. (*AP*, 18/4/06)

April 19: Forty-five years after it defeated a CIA-trained invasion force at the Bay of Pigs, Cuba continues to defy the world's biggest power, Fidel Castro said. Castro said his Communist-run country was not afraid of a US naval force led by the aircraft carrier USS George Washington currently carrying out exercises in the Caribbean. "This nation faced up to the strongest superpower on Earth and it is still on its feet," Castro said in a speech marking the failed U.S.-planned attempt to overthrow his fledgling revolutionary government in 1961. Castro said the US government had too much on its plate elsewhere to be a threat to Cuba today. "There are some little boats going about. Who is afraid of them? Nobody," Castro, dressed in his trademark green uniform, told militia veterans at Havana's Karl Marx theater. "They never frightened anyone. They should not waste their time here. They have enough problems in the world," said the Cuban leader, who will be 80 in August. (*Reuters*, 19/4/06)

April 23: Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez, Member of the Political Bureau and Communist Party First Secretary in Holguin province, addressed the political and military ceremony to celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the founding of the Cuba's Eastern Regional Army, presided over by its founder, the Second Secretary of the Communist Party and Armed Forces Minister, General Raul Castro Ruz. "Only a legitimate Revolution, made up of common people in uniform, can achieve the miracle of a close alliance between the Army and the population", Diaz-Canel said. A crowd of more than a hundred thousand attended the ceremony, interspersed around the military equipment deployed in the local Calixto Garcia square. After the military parade, and a salute to the participants by the young Brigadier General Onelio Aguilera Bermudez, Chief of Staff of the Eastern Army, retired Lt. Colonel Rubinson Silva Perez spoke on behalf of the Army's founders. (*Granma*, 24/4/06)

April 28: Russia's state-controlled arms exporter will push to stop the illegal production and supplies of Kalashnikov assault rifles, a company spokesman said. "Rosoboronexport is resolved to use all available legal means to press for an end to the illegal production and supplies of Kalashnikov automatic rifles," Valery Kartavtsev said, adding that Russian enterprises intended to file lawsuits against illegal producers. Rosoboronexport says that almost 20 countries, including Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, China, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, and Germany, produce the cult rifle illegally. "In some instances, the terms of such agreements have expired, while in others different-caliber weapons are being made, since all licenses for the production of Kalashnikov rifles were issued decades ago," he said. (*Novosti*, 28/4/06)

US-Cuba Relations

April 2: Cuba's parliamentary speaker criticized a branch of Canada's Bank of Nova Scotia, saying it had denied services to Cuba's diplomatic mission in Kingston, Jamaica. In comments carried by Cuba's National Information Agency, National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon said the Jamaican branch of the Bank of Nova Scotia recently informed Cuban Ambassador Gisela Garcia it could no longer offer services to the embassy there "in accordance with the United States Patriot Act." Passed after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Patriot Act gave US law enforcement a vast array of new investigative and prosecutorial powers, including increased reporting and monitoring requirements by American banks, as well as foreign banks doing business with the United States, to prevent transfer of US funds that could be used for terrorism.

Cuba remains on the US State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. "Now we discover that this instrument also has an aggressive end toward Cuba," said Alarcon. He said refusing bank services to Cuba by a non-US bank violates Jamaican and Canadian law. Scotiabank is one of many major banks with similar policies regarding US dollar wire transfers involving Cuba. (*AP, Prensa Latina, Granma, 2,4/4/06*)

April 3: The Florida chapter of the US-Cuba Trade Association will meet to discuss how businesses can benefit from current and potential trade policies with Cuba. If the United States doesn't take advantage of the opportunity, other countries will, according to member Stanley Riggs, a Sarasota resident and Palmetto businessman who is privately developing a \$20 million warehouse complex near Port Manatee's US 41 entrance. We're talking about filling a void that some other country is going to fill, and we might regret how that plays out," Riggs said. The US-Cuba Trade Association is a collection of business interests that want to promote normal commerce between the United States and Cuba while leaving the political issues at the door. (*The Miami Herald, 4/4/06*)

April 5: Dresser-Rand Group Inc. said it may face US government sanctions over business dealings its Brazilian unit conducted with a Cuban mining company. The Olean, New York-based maker of compressors and turbines for the energy industry said it had discovered that the subsidiary is engaged in transactions with Moa Nickel SA -- jointly owned by the Cuban government and Canadian company Sherritt International Corp. -- and has informed the US Treasury Department of those dealings. The transactions date back to 1999 and total \$4 million, \$2.5 million of which came from the sale of a spare part ordered in October 2003, the company said. Dresser-Rand said it told the subsidiary to stop doing business with the Cuban company in July 2005, shortly before Dresser-Rand's initial public offering in August. The company said the dealings apparently violated the US Treasury Department regulations on Cuba, which is identified by the US State Department as a terrorist-sponsoring state. Dresser-Rand said it is in preliminary discussions with the US Treasury Department about the Cuban deals and may face sanctions and may face additional government scrutiny to see if it has done business with other countries subject to US sanctions. (*Reuters, 5/4/06*)

April 6: The second meeting of the Global Internet Freedom Task Force (GIFT) "discussed practical and constructive strategies to advance Internet freedom," said Under Secretary for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs Josette Shiner, who chaired the April 3 meeting. "The Internet, a powerful force for advancing knowledge and spreading information, is increasingly a target for censors," Shiner said. The multidisciplinary US State Department group reviewed issues, including increased monitoring of Internet censorship, discussions with US businesses, NGOs and academics on the challenges overseas and technologies that help break down barriers to Internet access. "In particular, we focused on challenges to Internet freedom in Iran, Cuba and China," Shiner added. (*M2 Presswire, 6/4/06*)

April 6: Administrative snags are delaying government aid to US-based groups that support pro-democracy organizations and dissidents in Cuba, several US officials and recipients said. The delays, though said to be a routine result of US government operations, come at a time that the Bush administration is under pressure to cut spending, fueling nervousness among grant recipients. The University of Miami's Cuba Transition Report, for example, is awaiting a payment of \$400,000 from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) that was due January 1. Javier de Céspedes, who heads the Cuban Democratic Directorate, a group that seeks to provide support for pro-democracy organizations in Cuba, said he is temporarily using other funding sources to cover what USAID is late in

delivering. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Miami Republican, raised the issue with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice shortly before a House hearing on April 5, her office said. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/4/06)

April 6: The Cuban Coast Guard shot two suspected migrant smugglers from the United States, killing one, when they and a third man refused orders to halt their speed boat as it neared the island, official media said. The Communist Party daily Granma said the confrontation occurred on April 5 near Cuba's southern coast in the western province of Pinar del Rio. The Coast Guard official in charge ordered officers to open fire after the three-man crew aboard the 12-meter (40-foot) boat failed to stop as ordered and launched "violent sudden attacks" on a Coast Guard vessel, damaging the craft and almost causing it to overturn, the report said. The newspaper identified the owner of the speedboat as John Roberto, known as Blue Shark, of Florida and said the smugglers had planned to ferry the Cubans to Mexico. Two Cuban-Americans named Rafael Mesa Farinas and Rosendo Salgado Castro were wounded. A third man who was not immediately identified died later in hospital, the ruling Communist Party newspaper said. Police arrested 39 people, including 12 women and seven children, in connection with the attempt to leave Cuba illegally, Granma said. The women and children were later taken to their homes, it said. The Cuban government blamed the incident on US immigration policies it says encourage illegal migration, and accused Mexican government authorities in Quintana Roo and "anti-Cuban mafia with connections in Miami" of participating in smuggling rings. [[El tráfico humano y la muerte viajan en lancha rápida](#)] (*AP, Reuters*, 6/4/06)

April 6: Cuba's coast guard shot and killed one of three suspected people smugglers aboard a US-registered speedboat as it approached the island to pick up a group of Cubans, US officials said. The officials confirmed a report in Cuba's state-run Granma newspaper that the two surviving migrant smugglers, one of whom was wounded, are American citizens, but did not comment on the dead man's nationality. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the shooting was "deeply disturbing" and Washington would be very worried if the dead man was a US citizen. "If you have an American citizen who's been shot and killed, I think that that is a deeply disturbing matter. And we would be very concerned about that," he said in Washington. The US Interests Section in Havana said it was notified of the incident some 22 hours later, in a 2 a.m. call to the Coast Guard officer assigned to the diplomatic mission. Drew Blakeney, spokesman for the US Interests Section in Havana, said American authorities had confirmed the names of the two surviving men and that they were US citizens. He said they were seeking consular access to them in custody. But Blakeney said they had not confirmed the identity nor the citizenship of the dead man. [[El tráfico humano y la muerte viajan en lancha rápida](#)] (*Reuters, The Miami Herald*, 6/4/06)

April 6: A children's book may be removed from dozens of elementary school libraries throughout the district because it contains themes from Cuba's communist regime. The book, "Vamos a Cuba" ("A Visit to Cuba"), is available at 33 schools, district officials say. A portrait of kids outfitted as Pioneers -- Cuba's communist youth group -- is emblazoned across the book's cover. Inside pages show scenes of a joyous carnival held on July 26, the anniversary of the Cuban revolution. After seeing the book, the parent of a Marjory Stoneman Douglas Elementary student promptly contacted officials at the West Miami-Dade school. First, a committee at the school will review the book's material, followed by district officials. If it's determined that censoring the book will not infringe on a student's right to a well-rounded education, a ruling will then be made on removing it. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/4/06)

April 7: Cuba wants to cooperate with the United States to fight drug trafficking and would even sign an agreement to make it official, a top official in Cuba's Interior Ministry said. Lt. Col. Miguel Landera, the No. 2 man in the ministry's international relations department, told reporters during a two-day government tour that "we are willing to contribute, we are willing to help with all the modest resources we have." Landera spoke to international media during a stop in Punta de Maisi, Cuba's easternmost point, while touring several provinces to show how the government keeps an eye out for traffickers with planes and helicopters, land patrols along unpopulated beaches and sea patrols in the Florida Straits. Cuba has agreements for anti-drug trafficking cooperation with more than 30 countries and regularly shares information with all other countries in the region about suspicious boats and aircraft. But despite being only 145

kilometers (90 miles) from southern Florida, Cuba has no formal anti-drug agreement with the United States. (AP, 7/4/06)

April 7: The man killed by Cuban border guards during an alleged immigrant-smuggling attempt had left Cuba just three weeks earlier, Cuban media reported. Geovel González Morera paid smugglers to get him and his girlfriend out of Cuba on March 14, but he was back on Cuban shores just before dawn on a Florida-registered 40-foot speedboat heading to pick up 43 people, Cuban TV reported. The Cuban Border Guard shot at the vessel as it approached the shore of Pinar del Río in southwestern Cuba with three men aboard when it refused orders to stop and rammed a Naval patrol boat, the Cuban newspaper Granma said. González died, and a Cuban-American man from Miami named Rosendo Salgado Castro was wounded. The other survivor now in custody in Cuba, Julio Rafael Mesa Fariñas -- a Cuban American who has lived for 26 years in Miami -- told authorities that he got involved in human smuggling to pay off a \$20,000 debt. He owes the money to smugglers who helped get his wife and child out of Cuba to Mexico last year, and the smugglers are holding the woman and baby at a safehouse along the Gulf of Mexico until the debt is paid, the Cuban TV show Mesa Redonda reported. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana said it has not been able to independently verify the Cuban government's version of events. A spokesman said Cuban authorities have not responded to requests for American diplomats to have consular access to the accused smugglers, both of whom are US citizens. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/4/06)

April 11: Twelve Cuban immigrants arrived at Mona Island, Puerto Rico, after leaving Dominican Republic, local authorities said. This number adds to 439 Cuban immigrants that have arrived in this US territory since October 2005, Victor Griffin, US Coast Guard press spokesman said. (AP, 12/4/06)

April 12: Four decades ago, thousands of Cubans took to the Escambray mountains in a CIA-backed guerrilla war against Fidel Castro. Today, US law brands them as terrorists. In a twist of fate, 320 Cubans on the island with links to that armed revolt are now having problems winning US political asylum because the Patriot Act bars asylum for terrorists and people who help them. The Department of Homeland Security says the holdups affect 160 asylum applications involving 320 individuals who joined or helped the anti-Castro guerrillas, as well as some of the close relatives of the asylum seekers. Bill Strassberger, a spokesman for US Citizenship and Immigration Services, said lawyers from Homeland Security and the departments of State and Justice are trying to resolve the legal tangle of who's a terrorist and whether civilians who provide willing or unwilling support to terrorists should be denied asylum. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/4/06)

April 13: Business leaders and Cuban government officials expressed frustration with Bush administration policies that have tightened restrictions on travel and commerce between America and the Communist island nation. About 30 executives gathered for the first meeting of the Florida chapter of the US-Cuba Trade Association -- the same group whose Mexico City gathering between Cuban officials and US energy representatives in February was canceled after the American government pressured a hotel to expel the Cubans. The conference Thursday was intended to help Floridians better understand how to do business with Cuba. It was neither protested nor interrupted, but rife with concern over present hostility. "They are afraid of the free exchange of ideas," Dagoberto Rodriguez, head of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, D.C. said by teleconference. "They are afraid of free contact between our two countries." He and several others said they doubted any restrictions would loosen before Bush's term ends. Irving Wheeler, a Polk County citrus grower, said he was interested in shipping oranges to Cuba, but not right now. "Not for the next two years, at least," he said, hoping for a different political climate. Molly Millerwise, spokeswoman for US Treasury Department, which enforces trade sanctions, said strong Cuba sanctions encourage democracy and hamstringing a dangerous leader. (AP, 13/4/06)

April 13: Cuba spent \$172 million on US food imports so far this year, representing a spike in sales over last year, the island's top agriculture import official said. Cuba bought mostly wheat, corn, rice and chicken, despite a rule enacted last year by the Bush administration that requires Havana to pay cash for American products before the goods leave US

ports, instead of when they arrive in Cuban ports, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Alimport, the island's food import company. He spoke by teleconference from Havana at the "Doing Business in Cuba" conference in Orlando. Cuba spent 20 percent more in the first two months of 2006 over the same period last year, experts said. "That is huge," said Kirby Jones, president of the US-Cuba Trade Association, which organized the conference for Florida companies interested in doing business with the communist country. "That's way up from last year. It doesn't mean it will continue that high, but it is substantial." (*The Miami Herald*, 13/4/06)

April 14: The controversial nation of Cuba, quickly emerging as a world trade partner, is showing serious interest in buying Oklahoma wheat, and possibly timber, pork and cattle. But agricultural officials worry that opposition by some members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation to easing trade restrictions will seriously hamper budding trade relations with the Caribbean island. US Representative Dan Boren, Democrat-Oklahoma, voted for three of four proposed amendments to the US trade embargo against Cuba last year that would have eased trade and travel restrictions for agricultural agents. US Senator Tom Coburn, Republican-Oklahoma, has yet to cast a vote on the issue. But US Senator Jim Inhofe and US Representatives John Sullivan, Frank Lucas, Tom Cole and Ernest Istook Jr. -- all Republicans -- voted against all of the amendments, which were attached to appropriations bills. (*Tulsa World*, 14/4/06)

April 16: After an initial flurry of activity, Vermont's fledgling export trade with Cuba appears to be in a holding pattern. From the perspective of Vermont's secretary of agriculture, Steve Kerr, US exports to Cuba are being squeezed by the Bush administration's imposition of tighter economic sanctions against the communist island. At the same time, Kerr and others say the Cubans remain committed to doing business with Vermont, especially to the purchase of high quality cows from the state's farmers.

Since Vermont Lt. Gov. Brian Dubie's inaugural trade mission to Cuba two years ago, Cuba has purchased 76 cows from Vermont farmers and 4,000 metric tons of powdered milk. The government of Fidel Castro also agreed to buy 4,000 bushels of Macintosh apples and a deal was in the works last fall to buy additional cows. But the Cubans haven't followed through on the apple deal or the purchase of additional cows, Kerr said. He said one likely reason is the Bush administration's attempts to make trade with Cuba more difficult. (*Rutland Herald*, 16/4/06)

April 16: Puerto Rican agents of the Natural Resources Department's Vigilantes Corp detained seven Cubans and 27 Dominicans who arrived at Mona Island after leaving Dominican Republic. The group arrived at Playa Mujeres, in Mona Island, in three boats that left from Dominican Republic. (*EFE*, 17/4/06)

April 17: A Pennsylvania congressman who wants to drill for natural gas just 20 miles out from the nation's shoreline has found a most unusual model: Fidel Castro. Representative John Peterson, a Republican who is trying mightily to lift the presidential and congressional bans that protect much of the US coastline from offshore drilling, is citing Cuba's fledgling energy-exploration program - and its proximity to Florida's coastline - as a reason the United States should explore its own coast for natural gas. "It's astounding we're going to sit here and say 'We're not going to produce,' and, meanwhile, our good friend Fidel Castro is going to suck it up under our noses," Peterson said in a phone interview, citing reports that show Cuba is moving aggressively to explore waters northeast and northwest of Havana, some parcels about 50 miles from Key West. (*Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 17/4/06)

April 17: Nineteen Cubans came ashore in Hollywood and were being interviewed by immigration authorities. The group -- four adult women, 12 adult men, two girls and one boy -- appeared to be in good health, said Hollywood police Captain Tony Rode. The Cubans were discovered in the 3500 block of North Ocean Drive, at Hollywood North Beach Park, Rode said. Police were investigating the possibility that the migrants were brought in by a smuggling operation. The Cubans were taken to the US Border Patrol office in Pembroke Pines, where they were interviewed and asked whether they were part of a migrant-smuggling operation. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/4/06)

April 18: The Miami-Dade School Board rejected a move to immediately remove a controversial children's book on Cuba from all school libraries, clearing the way for an appeals process to continue. The bill failed in a 6-3 vote, with sponsor Frank Bolaños and board members Perla Tabares Hantman and Marta Pérez supporting an immediate ban of *Vamos A Cuba* (subtitled *A Visit to Cuba*). District lawyers said the bill would likely have violated a landmark Supreme Court decision and possibly state law, and the American Civil Liberties Union indicated its readiness to file suit had the bill passed. The 5-year-old book drew attention this month after a parent at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Elementary complained about its depiction of Cuba under Fidel Castro. (AP, 19/4/06)

April 19: The Bush administration is battling to stop Venezuela and Cuba from gaining seats in important UN posts in a confrontation that has many Latin American nations caught in the middle, diplomats and analysts say. Most observers believe Washington faces an uphill battle to keep Venezuela out of the Security Council and Cuba out of a newly created UN Human Rights Council. The first showdown will take place May 9, when the 191-member UN General Assembly votes for 47 members of a new Human Rights Council. Eleven Latin American nations, including Venezuela and Cuba, are vying for eight spots reserved for the region. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/4/06)

April 19: Cuba agreed to buy another \$30 million in food from Nebraska, strengthening trade relations with a US farm state already selling corn, wheat, soybeans and other products to the communist island. Nebraska Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy and Agriculture Director Greg Ibach led the trade delegation, which included meat and other agriculture producers on the four-day trip. In August, Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman visited Cuba and signed a separate deal to export \$30 million in agricultural products in an 18-month period. Most of those deals have since been completed, said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. "We've had a great commerce experience with Nebraska and this shows the desire of many (U.S.) states to work for free trade with the United States," Alvarez told the press at Havana's historic Hotel Nacional during a breakfast hosted by Farmland Foods Inc. featuring Nebraska pork and other meat products. Sheehy said the new deal will include the export of pork, cattle, poultry, wheat, corn, soybeans, dry beans and dairy in the next 18 months. (AP, 19/4/06)

April 21: A federal informant playing a critical role in a South Florida weapons case against the wealthy Miami benefactor for Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles also was sharing details about the exiles with a Cuban government official known as "Daniel" as far back as 2001, prosecutors have revealed. Prosecutors also disclosed for the first time that the FBI informant, Gilberto Abascal, traveled by boat with Posada's benefactor and other friends last year to pick up the CIA-trained Posada in Mexico and bring him back to the United States illegally. Details of Abascal's past contacts with a Cuban official and Posada's entry into the United States surfaced as attorneys for the weapons-case defendants, Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat, sought to obtain more information from prosecutors that could help their clients' defense. For months, prosecutors claimed to have no evidence that Abascal communicated with Cuban government officials. The explosive admission was made public just two weeks before the May 8 trial in Fort Lauderdale, a location opposed by the defendants because they maintain they cannot get a fair trial outside of Miami-Dade. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/4/06)

April 24: US President Bush defended his administration's travel ban to Cuba telling a Cuban American who suggested that visits to the island would topple Fidel Castro that "trade with the country enables a tyrant to stay in power." The remarks came as Bush campaigned in California, urging Congress to revive a stalled immigration plan that would provide a means to citizenship for some illegal immigrants. Bush defended the ban, saying it was keeping money out of Castro's hands. "Fidel Castro has got the capacity to arbitrage your dollars to the advantage of his administration," Bush said. "You pay in dollars, he pays in Cuban money and collects the difference. So you go to a hotel in Havana, the money goes to the hotel, which has kind of got a deal with the government in order to be there in the first place, and the workers get paid in a currency that's worthless compared to the US dollar. And he makes the balance". "And so, in all due respect, I have taken the position that trade with the country enables a tyrant to stay in power, as opposed to the opposite," Bush said. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/4/06)

April 25: Fifteen Cuban immigrants arrived to the dessert island of Mona, west of Puerto Rico. Local police said that the immigrants arrived in two groups, of seven and eight persons, from Dominican Republic. (*AP*, 25/4/06)

April 25: The US government denied permission to a boxing team to travel to Cuba. The athletes were supposed to participate in the 3rd Cuban Olympic Games, Sarbelio Fuentes, chief of the Cuban national team said. "We received notice that the US team, nine boxers, did not receive authorization to travel to Cuba for the games", Fuentes said to the press. (*AFP*, 25/4/06)

April 25: The United States will introduce sweeping changes in the way Cubans apply for visitors' visas to end long delays and corruption in the process, the top US consular official on the Caribbean island said. "Currently, our visitor visa applicants have to go through a torturous process of trying to call in to set up an appointment. It is very difficult to get a line, and so our clients have been paying anywhere from \$20 to \$100 on the street to make appointments," Consul General Carl Cockburn said. As of May 25, family members or other potential US hosts will call a toll-free number to make the appointments for the Cuban applicants, who can then simply show up at the US Interests Section on the given date for an interview. The United States and Cuba do not have diplomatic relations, but maintain lower level missions in each other's capitals to handle visa and other matters. Around 30,000 Cubans applied to visit the United States in fiscal 2005, of whom 12,500 were granted visas, Cockburn said. Another 20,125 Cubans were allowed permanent US entry under an immigration agreement signed in 1994. (*Reuters, Sun Sentinel*, 26/4/06)

April 25: A Cuban militant accused of masterminding the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner has applied to become a US citizen, his lawyer said. Luis Posada Carriles, who has been jailed in El Paso on immigration charges since May, is scheduled to be interviewed on April 26 as part of his application. Felipe D.J. Millan, an immigration lawyer hired by Posada's Miami lawyers, said he will accompany Posada during the interview but declined to provide details of the application. (*AP*, 25/4/06)

April 26: Cuba's ambassador at the United Nations Rodrigo Malmierca accused the United States at the UN General Assembly Information Commission for increasingly financing illegal anti-Cuba radio and TV broadcasts to the island. The Cuban diplomat said Washington tries to fabricate a false crisis that would serve as a pretext for a military intervention against the island. The Bush administration allocated 37 million dollars in fiscal 2006 to boost anti-Cuba subversive propaganda broadcasts to the island through the so-called Radio and TV Martí, said Malmierca. Such anti-Cuba and illegal action uses 2,107 radio and TV broadcast hours to the island every week, which constitutes a violation of regulations established by the International Telecommunications Union. The Cuban diplomat warned that Cuba will continue to take all possible measures to counter such aggressive US actions. (*CAN*, 26/4/06)

April 26: The Florida House and Senate gave tentative approval to bills by South Florida legislators to restrict students and professors at state-run colleges and universities from using taxpayer funds to travel to Cuba and five other nations on the federal government's terrorist watch list. House and Senate bills that are expected to pass both chambers would bar Florida universities and colleges from sponsoring or promoting trips to Cuba, even for academic research missions. Critics have warned that the legislation could impede academic freedom. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/4/06)

April 26: A delegation of Alabama officials, politicians and businessmen visiting Cuba said they hoped a resolution by their state legislature to lift the US embargo would lead others to take similar action. "We are going to continue to do everything we can to get restrictions lifted," Alabama Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks told a news conference, where framed copies of the resolutions were presented to Cuban official Pedro Alvarez, Chairman of Alimport, the state food importing monopoly. The resolution, passed by the Alabama House in January and Senate in April, calls for an end to "all trade, financial and travel restrictions on Cuba." (*Reuters*, 26/4/06)

April 26: Because of current US policy, US companies are prohibited from developing oil fields that lie in Cuban waters and come within 50 miles of Florida. However, Cuba is exploring and potentially developing these oil fields,

estimated by the US Geological Survey to possess more oil than the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, and Cuba is partnering with China and other countries, such as Spain, France, and Canada. Senator Larry Craig, Republican-Idaho, took the opportunity to raise this issue during a speech on the floor of the United States Senate. Craig stated, "I must point out that it is certainly ironic that the same people blocking the American public from obtaining resources in our own country, and in the region, are the same people not offering solutions to our growing demand. "Red China should not be left to drill for oil within spitting distance of our shores without competition from US industries. Not only is this a supply and energy security issue for us, it is an environmental issue. China has a dismal environmental record fraught with cover-up and blatant disregard for its own people". (*US Fed News*, 26/4/06)

April 27: The Upland man accused of selling guns illegally from his home said in a jailhouse interview that some of the weapons were covertly supplied to him by the US government, intended for an attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro. Police say felon Robert Ferro had 1,571 firearms and some hand grenades stashed inside secret compartments and hidden rooms he built inside the sprawling foothill estate. He was arrested after a search of his home in connection with another case uncovered the weapons. But in an interview, Ferro, 61, contended that some of the high-powered weapons -- including assault rifles, silencer-equipped handguns and Uzis -- were supplied to him by the US government. He said the weapons were supposed to be used in an attempt to oust Castro that would have coincided with U.S. Navy operations being conducted in the Caribbean Sea. (*Los Angeles Times*, 28/4/06)

April 28: Columbia University granted Oswaldo Payá, leader of the dissident Christian Liberation Movement in Cuba, the Honoris Causa. Andrew Jones, assistant secretary at CU confirmed the news to "Encuentro en la Red", an online journal based in Madrid. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 28/4/06)

April 28: US Senator Bill Nelson announced legislation to keep Cuba from oil drilling in the waters between the Caribbean island nation and the Florida Keys. The Democratic senator's bill would block the renewal of a 1977 international agreement allowing Cuba to conduct commercial activity near the Keys -- unless Cuba would agree not to put oil rigs in the Florida Straits close to the low-lying island chain off Florida's southern tip. "At risk are the Florida Keys and the state's tourism economy, not to mention the \$8 billion that Congress is investing to restore the Everglades," Nelson in a statement. The 1977 Maritime Boundary Agreement dividing control of the 90 miles of sea between Cuba and the Keys must be renewed every two years, and was last renewed in 2004. Nelson's legislation would also deny visas to executives of foreign oil companies who continue drilling off Cuba's northern coast. (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/4/06)

April 29: Cuban leader Fidel Castro rejected the US State Department's annual report on terrorism and insisted that Washington provide an explanation as to why it has not turned accused anti-Castro terrorist Luis Posada Carriles over to Venezuela or Cuba to face justice. In its annual report on terrorism, the State Department accused Cuba of opposing the US-led anti-terrorism coalition and placed the Communist island among the countries that foster, condone and support terrorism, a list which includes Iran, North Korea, Syria, Sudan and Libya. In addition, the State Department mentioned the possible existence of a biological weapons program in Cuba, although it provided no evidence for that. Castro rejected the contents of the document and accused the US government of protecting Posada, whom Havana has accused of committing multiple terrorist acts, including blowing up a Cubana de Aviacion airliner in 1976, killing 73 people. "For us, it's an honor to be friends with North Korea (...) and Iran," said Castro in a speech before a large crowd during a Havana ceremony closing the Trilateral Summit, which was attended by Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales. Castro also warned about preparations by Washington to launch a war against Iran that would include the use of weapons of mass destruction. "The people of Iran are a truly heroic people, and if (the Americans) were not ignorant idiots they would recognize that they cannot mess around with that people," Castro added. [[State Sponsors of Terrorism](#)] (*CAN, EFE*, 30/4/06)