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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## May 2004

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** Both the Evangelical and Catholic churches reject US sanctions and issue a call to a dialogue.

**Economy:** Cuban authorities take drastic steps to deal with the effects of new US government measures to tighten the embargo. A continued drought in eastern Cuba has prompted emergency measures.

**Exile Community:** The reaction to Bush's announcement of new measures against the island generates varied responses among the exile community. Cuban government officials and some 450 representatives of the more moderate factions of the Cuban exile community attend the 3rd Conference on Nation and Emigration.

**Foreign Affairs:** Mexico and Cuba experience a grave diplomatic crisis. Peru, Mexico and Nicaragua respond to Fidel Castro's critical speech on the occasion of May Day. Cuba remains isolated during debates at the 3th EU-LA Summit in Guadalajara.

**US-Cuba Relations:** The US Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba makes recommendations to hasten a democratic transition in the island. Cuba responds to the US with a warning to its citizen that harsher times are to come. Leading Cuban dissident organizations criticize US new measures.



### Domestic Affairs

**May 1:** Fidel Castro addressed more than one million people gathered at Havana's Plaza de Revolución for International Workers' Day. Looking out over the massive crowd, the leader of the Cuban Revolution -- just before beginning to read his prepared speech -- commented that it appeared this morning's gathering had "broken all records." [[Fidel Castro's May Day speech](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/5/04)

**May 3:** The Cuban Radio and Television Institute (ICRT) announced that the new TV channel, Educativo 2, will go on the air with special new musical, film and other educational programming. On the weekends, this second Cuban

educational channel will begin broadcasting at noon with a varied programming of concerts, documentaries and childrens' programs, informed Ovidio Cabrera, ICRT vice president. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** Two websites dedicated to the daughter of Rene Gonzalez, one of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States on political charges, launched by the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, are now available in Internet. The websites [www.daddy.cu](http://www.daddy.cu) and [www.quieroveramipapito.cu](http://www.quieroveramipapito.cu) were inspired by Rene Gonzalez' youngest daughter, Ivette, who turned six without hardly knowing her father, because he was sentenced shortly after her birth. The websites reflect aspects of Ivette's school and social life, including stories and a description of her environment, as well as other topics of interest for young people. They also reveal details of Rene's life as a father. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/04)

**May 4:** More than 200 social scientists, activists and political leaders from 40 countries met in Havana for the opening of a four-day meeting on contemporary Marxist thought around the world. The Second International Conference 'Karl Marx and the Challenges of the 21st Century', originally founded by the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment's (CITMA) Philosophy Institute, is being held in Havana's Convention Centre. After a presentation by Canadian professor Leo Panich, from the University of Toronto, about the contemporary concept of imperialism, a debate followed among participants. (*Granma, Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/5/04)

**May 5:** Three members of a small, illegal Cuban dissident party have been sentenced to prison for four to five years for taking part in a demonstration, according to relatives and a local human rights group. Rafael Corrales Alonso, Ricardo Ramos Pereira and Jose Enrique Santana Carreira took part in a Jan. 28, 2002, protest outside a Havana church, where they chanted for freedom for political prisoners, according to Ramos' mother, Carmen Pereira. They were arrested a month later. A Havana court sentenced Corrales to five years and Ramos and Santana to four years, according to a relative. (*AP*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** René Montes de Oca, leader of the Cuban Party for Human Rights, denounced the mental and physical condition of two inmates at Canaleta prison, Ciego de Ávila province, who require immediate medical care for their self-inflicted injuries. One of the inmates severed his remaining arm, while the other injected himself intravenously with petroleum, to protest the inhumane treatment he suffered. The latter was then put in solitary confinement, following which both his arms had to be amputated. (*Grupo Decoro*, 7/5/04)

**May 6:** Several posters saying "Oust Fidel" and "Long Live Liberty, appeared in different locations in Havana, sources of the independent press reported. The signs were painted in the portal of a medical post in Centro Habana, and in the indoor walls of the well known Finca de Los Molinos. Also, posters appeared in the washrooms of the Heladería Copelia. (*Grupo Decoro*, 6/5/04)

**May 9:** According to sources with the Conference of Cuban Catholic Bishops, the Cuban Catholic Church welcomes between 80- and 100 thousand mass-goers every Sunday and has implemented several social programs throughout the island. The programs, coordinated through some 600 parishes, enabled four thousand church volunteers to visit nearly 19 thousand sick nation-wide, an effort carried out by the Catholic charity organization Caritas. (*AFP*, 9/5/04)

**May 9:** Félix Gerardo Vega Ruiz, a political prisoner serving a seven year sentence at a prison in Guanajay, Pinar del Río province, was stabbed by common prisoners. Vega Ruiz was stabbed while he was making a telephone call, because prison authorities had canceled his family visit. Xiomara Ruiz, mother of the political prisoner sent an urgent appeal to the international community in support of the physical integrity of her son and of all political prisoners. Vega Ruiz is a member of the Cuban Pro Human Rights Party, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation. (*Puente Informativo*, 9/5/04)

**May 9:** Thirty-three female relatives of imprisoned Cuban dissidents marched for half an hour, on Mother's Day, and then rallied in an upscale area of Havana to demand release of their loved ones. The mothers, wives and sisters, all dressed in white and holding pink gladiolas, filed out of a church in the district of Miramar after mass then marched 14 blocks down posh 5th avenue, before returning and rallying in a nearby park. The women read aloud the names of 336 people they said were political prisoners, including 75 jailed last year for terms averaging 19 years. They shouted "libertad," or freedom, after each name. (*Reuters*, 9/5/04)

**May 10:** The Cuban poet and political prisoner Manuel Vázquez Portal declared himself in a hunger strike after he learned about the limitations the Boniatuco penitentiary authorities put to the amount of food and other goods he could receive. Vázquez Portal has been in solitary confinement since February in a dark, filthy, rat-infested cell, according to his wife, Yolanda Huerga Cedeño. Vazquez Portal was one of the 75 Cuban dissidents incarcerated and condemned to a long term in prison for expressing ideas different to the Cuban government. (*NetforCuba*, 10/5/04)

**May 11:** A prominent Cuban human rights activist said that the island's prison system has grown dramatically since Fidel Castro's government came to power in 1959. Elizardo Sanchez of the independent Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation presented what he said was the first fairly detailed study of the evolution of the prison system under communism. Sanchez displayed side-by-side maps of the prison system in 1959 and today: the first a scattering of 14 dots on the map of Cuba, the second a constellation of what he said were 200 prisons and detention camps that he said constitute "a tropical gulag." Sanchez said Cuba had about 4,000 prisoners in 1956 and about 100,000 today -- a figure similar to that used by some international human rights groups. He acknowledged that the figures were not precise, but said the government "has exact information about the total number of people now imprisoned in our country" and he urged officials to make it public. (*AP*, 11/5/04)

**May 13:** The 1st Bioinformatics Conference -dedicated to debate the latest advances in this field- has opened in Havana with a lecture by Agustin Lage, director of the Molecular Immunology Center. Lage's presentation focussed on the biological aspect of the discipline that harmoniously brings together the sciences of life and computing. The organizing committee of the 2004 Informatics Convention and Fair -taking place in Havana- said experts will talk about the design of bioinformatics instruments and biological problems, mainly those referred to as genomics and proteomics problems that can be solved through computer science. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/5/04)

**May 13:** Granma, the Cuban official newspaper, reported that 90 % of all 171 Cuban beaches are being affected by man-made erosion. The daily added that, with shorelines receding at an annual rate of 3'4", the erosion process is considered moderate. (*Cubanet*, 13/5/04)

**May 14:** The government of Fidel Castro put to the test its capacity to draw Cubans onto the streets to protest Washington's latest tightening of the four-decade embargo. And Havana residents answered the call en masse, just four days after the Cuban government announced unpopular economic adjustment measures, triggering fears of an across-the-board rise in prices. Castro and his brother Raúl, the head of Cuba's armed forces, headed the march of around one million people (according to official figures). (*IPS*, 14/5/04)

**May 15:** Through the streets of Managua, in Havana, hundreds escorted a likeness of St. Isidro Salvador, the town's patron saint. The procession was part of a locally developed, 9-day Catholic Church program to commemorate Managua's anniversary. (*Cubanet*, 18/5/04)

**May 15:** In Havana, Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega opened a Cuban contemporary art exhibit entitled "Deus Verus Verus Homo", dedicated to Jesus Christ and featuring works by renowned and budding local artists. The exhibit is sponsored by the Office of the City's Historian, as well as other institutions. (*NotiCuba Internacional* , 16/5/04)

**May 16:** "Theatre May", convened by the governmental Casa de las Américas cultural centre, has reaffirmed Cuba as an atypical forum, with the tradition and modernity of the Latin American stage, drawing a dozen theatre troupes from across the region. The organisers usually put together a programme that alternates between well-known Latin American and Caribbean figures and new talent, who find in Cuba a platform to potentially launch international careers. The fifth edition of this event was attended by groups from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico, alongside local theatre companies, receiving prizes awarded by a panel of critics -- and maintaining a dialogue about what is going on in the Latin American theatre world. (*IPS*, 22/5/04)

**May 16:** The Cuban government is stepping up efforts to further restrict Internet access for Cubans and to better control telephone services through a centralized structure. The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications has implemented an Information Technology Security Policy, under the supervision of Ministry of the Interior experts. Restrictions involve warning authorized cybernauts against "indiscriminate use" of e-mail through charge-free internet-based service providers like Yahoo! or Hotmail, as well as of international chat rooms. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 16/5/04)

**May 17:** Fidel Castro's doctor denied rumors that the Cuban president's health was ailing, saying Monday the 77-year-old leader is in excellent health and maintaining he can live to at least to 140. "I am not exaggerating," said Selman, who believes people are capable of living five times the number of years it takes for the human body to fully grow - which he said is around 25 years. (*AFP*, 17/5/04)

**May 17:** Vitral Magazine, run by the archdiocese of Pinar del Río, revealed on-line distribution restrictions imposed by new Information and Telecommunications Ministry regulations. According to the magazine, Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A. (Cuban Telecommunications Inc.), internet e-mail service provider for the Pinar del Río province will no longer allow multi-address e-mailing exceeding five recipient addresses at once, thus "preventing traditional use of address books." (*Vitral*, 17/5/04)

**May 18:** Three Cuban dissidents who participated in a meeting to discuss human rights were sentenced to three years each in prison, a local human rights group said. Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Raul Arencibia Fajardo and Virgilio Marante Guelmes were arrested December 6 of 2002 while meeting in a private home in Havana to study the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They were convicted in a one-day trial of contempt for authority, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, said Elizardo Sanchez, the head of the independent Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (*CNN*, 18/5/04)

**May 19:** Cuban political prisoners Diosdado González Marrero, José Daniel Ferrer García and Leonel Grave de Peralta have initiated a hunger strike in Kilo 5 prison, Pinar del Río province. The political prisoners began the strike in solidarity with imprisoned dissident Normando Hernández González, who was beaten and sent back to jail together with common prisoners. According to Directorio Democrático Cubano, an organization based in Miami, Hernández González, an independent journalist sentenced to 25 years in jail, went on hunger strike in protest for abuses perpetrated by the prison's authorities. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 19/5/04)

**May 21:** Two peaceful activists from the Democracy Movement in Santo Domingo, Villa Clara province, were arrested in the city of Santa Clara. Police authorities occupied the documents that Diólexis Orestes Rodríguez Hurtado and David Díaz-Oliver Delgado, were carrying after attending a meeting of their dissident organization. (*Cubamet*, 25/5/04)

**May 21:** Over 200 Christians from 31 different Evangelical churches met for several days at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Havana to debate the current situation in the island following the US government decision to increase sanctions against Cuba. The final Agreement by the Cuban Pastoral Forum calls all Cuban and US churches, and the Cuban population and authorities to a dialogue. [[Foro Pastoral Cubano](#)] (*Caminos*, 28/5/04)

**May 22:** A member of the "Damas de Blanco" (Ladies in White) illegal opposition group, which demands the release of dissidents jailed by the Fidel Castro government, was arrested in Havana. According to a Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) press release, María Alpizar Ariosa was taken to a police station in Havana, where she was informed that she would be immediately escorted back to her hometown, Placetas, 250 km east of the capital. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/5/04)

**May 25:** One of Cuba's best-known dissidents still at liberty, Oswaldo Paya, announced the start of a "National Dialogue" involving all his compatriots and aimed at drafting a peaceful "transition program" for the Communist-ruled island. Paya, leader of the outlawed Liberation Christian Movement, or MCL, released a statement in Havana explaining that the process is based on a working document he released several months ago. "All Cubans without exception may take part in this dialogue, whether or not they live on the island and whether or not they support or are members of the government, and regardless of political membership, religious affiliation, experience, age and social or economic status," the opposition leader said. (*EFE*, 25/5/04)

**May 26:** Cuba's Roman Catholic bishops rejected sanctions adopted by the Bush administration against the Cuban government and said the island's future should be decided without foreign interference. The Catholic Bishops Conference said new sanctions announced by the White House only served to aggravate the hardships and burdens already suffered by Cuban families under communist rule. The bishops also criticized price increases implemented by Fidel Castro's government because they hurt Cuba's poorest families. "It is unacceptable that the future of Cuba be determined on the basis of exclusions and much less with the intervention of a foreign government," the bishops said in a statement. The Catholic leaders repeated their call for a national dialogue to solve Cuba's problems peacefully. (*Reuters*, 26/5/04)

**May 26:** A ten-year study has given Havana the ability to predict tidal waves caused by tropical storms 18 hours in advance. The announcement was made at a meteorology seminar in Ciego de Avila, located in central Cuba. According to leading meteorologists at the seminar, mathematical studies take into consideration predicted climatic changes and are valid for the rest of this century. The ability to accurately predict tidal waves will obviously provide protection from these natural occurrences, which are responsible for nine out of every ten deaths during tropical hurricanes in the world. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

**May 26:** Cuba's first wax museum is scheduled to open soon in the western city of Bayamo, with the likenesses of music legends Compay Segundo and Polo Montañez among the many on display. The National Information Agency (AIN) said the exhibit will include 70 lifesize wax figures fashioned by brothers Rafael and Leander Barrios Milan and their father, Rafael Barrios Madrigal. (*EFE*, 26/5/04)

**May 27:** A Press Release in the official daily Granma informed that, at the suggestion of Fidel Castro, 72-year old José Ramón Balaguer Cabrera, with a lengthy leadership career, has been appointed Public Health minister, due to the "importance and intensity" of work in that sector. (*AFP*, 27/5/04)

**May 27:** An electrical failure provoked a fire in the Havana building housing three Cuban radio stations (Progreso, Radio Habana Cuba and COCO), causing an interruption in broadcasts but no loss of life. According to a report released to the press by officials of the Ministry of Interior, the fire started when a short circuit ignited spilt oil in the basement where several technicians were installing a central refrigeration device. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/5/04)

**May 28:** A train carrying boarding school students back from the countryside derailed for unknown reasons south of Havana. A local hospital reported treating some of the teenagers for injuries. An Associated Press Television crew and AP photographer later saw flattened passenger seats and twisted steel inside three yellow passenger cars toppled on their sides, along with the locomotive, in Jamaica, a town about 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Havana. There was

no immediate statement from authorities about the cause of the accident, or the number of casualties. Officials at one nearby hospital confirmed they had treated several people injured in the derailment. (*AP*, 28/5/04)

**May 28:** Cuba's national team has walked off the pitch in protest during a practice match against Brazilian club Fluminense after veteran striker Romario scored what they claimed to be an offside goal. Cuba's Peruvian coach Miguel Company said his side was already upset at having two goals disallowed earlier in the game when it abandoned the game while trailing 3-2 in the 75th minute. (*Reuters*, 28/5/04)

**May 28:** Renowned Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés filled in for his exiled father, Bebo, during the first Cuban concert to promote the hit album "Lágrimas Negras" ("Black Tears"), a collaboration between the latter and young flamenco *cantaor* (singer) Diego el Cigala. A packed Karl Marx theatre gave a resounding standing ovation for Bebo Valdés, an 85-year old self-exiled Swedish resident who has not returned to the island since his departure in 1960. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 28/5/04)

**May 28:** Three hundred community informatics clubs will be soon inaugurated, the National Informatics Program director Nestor Rodriguez said. He added that the increase of such community centers will further consolidate ongoing national education and cultural programs, such as the expansion of higher education courses at community level as well as socially-oriented initiatives aimed at providing the community with access to information technologies. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/5/04)

**May 30:** Yoanka Gonzalez Perez from Cuba won the Women's 10km Scratch Race final at the Track Cycling World Championships in Melbourne. Perez won the race ahead of Mandy Poitras from Canada and Olga Slyusareva from Russia, who came in third. More than 200 cyclists from 43 countries will participate in the championships, which will include 15 events. The Championships are also the last chance for nations to qualify places for the Athens Olympic Games and for the cyclists, their last opportunity to earn a place on their respective Olympic teams. (*Reuters*, 30/5/04)

## **Economy**

**May 4:** Argentine companies have reached agreements to export \$15 mln (12.6 mln euro) in goods to Cuba in 2004, mainly foods, following a recent trade mission to the island country, it was reported. A total 34 Argentine companies visited Cuba last April. Over 400 meetings between the Argentine companies, local companies and representatives of foreign companies, operating on the island, were carried out within the visit. Argentina will sell to Cuba 3,000 tonnes of black beans and 10,000 tonnes of wheat flour under the agreements, and 5,000 tonnes of cotton pellets, 100 tonnes of powder milk and 300 tonnes of poultry. (*Latin American News Digest*, 4/5/04)

**May 6:** Bolivian airline Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB) will start offering two weekly flights to Cuba as of August 2004, compared to one weekly flight offered currently. The flights are for the route LAB Santa Cruz de la Sierra-Panama-Havana. LAB has been maintaining contacts with the Cuban market for three years. The airline plans to open an office in Havana in the last quarter of 2004. (*Latin America News Digest*, 6/5/04)

**May 5:** Cuba is imposing tighter limits on private sector workers — from auto body repairmen and masseuses to children's clowns and used book sellers — as the government tries to reassert control over the unofficially sanctioned private economy. Under a Labour Ministry decree scheduled to take effect Oct. 1, no new licences will be allowed for 40 categories of self-employment. The list includes an array of professions, such as stonemasons, computer programmers and television antenna repairmen. The measure has not yet been made law by publication in the official gazette, but probably will be by the end of May. (*The Toronto Star*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** Sherritt International Corporation boosted its first-quarter profit by 52 per cent as revenue rose 16 1/2 per cent, the mining company reported. Sherritt, which also has significant oil, gas, power generation and tourism assets, mostly in Cuba, said it earned \$52.9 million or 35 cents per share in the first three months of 2004, compared with net earnings of \$34.8 million or 26 cents per share in the first quarter of 2003. Revenue climbed to \$224.9 million from \$192.9 million. (*The Toronto Star*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** According to Mexican Economic Affairs Secretary, Fernando Canales, his country asked Cuba to pay US \$450 million worth of outstanding debt obligations incurred with the government-owned National Bank for International Trade (Bancomext). "That sum will have to be paid since it is an investment of the Mexican people's savings," stressed the government official. On March 30 th, Bancomext announced it was closing its Cuban branch offices, acknowledging that it was leaving behind over US \$400 million in debts it had been unable to collect. (*AFP*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** Cuban raw sugar production topped 2.3 million tonnes with little chance an additional 100,000 tonnes can be churned out before the last mill closes later this month, local analysts said. "Production passed the 2.3 million tonne mark when the month began," a source close to the Sugar Ministry said. Reuters estimated output at 2.32 million tonnes May 1, based on official media and provincial source reports. The world's fourth-largest sugar exporting country sells abroad all but 700,000 tonnes of the crop. More than half of 80 mills have already closed, according to official media reports, including most of the industry's larger ones. (*Reuters*, 6/5/04)

**May 8:** Sherritt International Corp. plans to boost electricity production in Cuba by 71 per cent over the next three years, supplying about 20 per cent of the island's needs. Energas, a natural gas-fired generator one-third owned by Sherritt, will add about 150 megawatts of new capacity, chief operating officer Jowdatt Waheed said in a conference call yesterday, one day after Sherritt announced a 52-per-cent increase in quarterly profits. The expansion plans are still being worked out, but Sherritt executives hope the two-phase development will proceed. The Toronto-based company says it will finance its share of the project with its Cuban cash flows. (*The Globe and Mail*, 8/5/04)

**May 10:** Cuba is taking drastic steps to deal with the effects of new US government measures designed to tighten the embargo against the island and step up pressure on the government of Fidel Castro. Among the 15 measures announced Monday night on Cuban television in response to the new US policy was one restricting stores that accept US dollars on the island to selling only food and cleaning products. Prices in the dollar stores and the cost of fuel will also rise. The exchange rate for the Cuban peso, convertible peso and the US dollar, however, will stay the same. Many depend on dollar stores to supply goods that have not been offered in state shops since the Soviet Union crumbled in the early 1990s. The statement warned, "days of work and sacrifice lie ahead" and exhorted all Cubans to "elevate their revolutionary consciousness." [[Nota oficial](#)] (*EFE, Sun Sentinel*, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** A top-level Brazil-Cuba business meeting and trade exhibition began in Rio de Janeiro in what has been described as an important step in ratifying growing co-operation between the two countries. The event is taking place in the Rio de Janeiro Industrial Federation's (FIRJAN) headquarters with the participation of the President of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce Bertha Delgado, the Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Trade Antonio Carricarte, representatives of the Brazilian government and more than 40 business people from both countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** Cuba's dollar-only stores displayed "closed for inventory" signs after the communist government suddenly shut them down, blaming new US measures aimed at squeezing the island's economy. Long lines stretched from state stores with food and personal hygiene products -- nearly the only items still sold to Cubans in dollars -- as people scrambled to buy shampoo and soap from rapidly emptying shelves. The government did not say whether the stores would reopen. Three floors selling clothes, mattresses and electrical goods were cordoned off in Harris Brothers, where employees stood behind empty counters looking confused. Other workers catered to dozens of shoppers buying cooking oil, Spam and deodorant in the store's only open section. Dozens of stores along Old Havana's commercial

Obispo Street selling toys, shoes and fancy furniture never opened Tuesday. Gift shops in upscale hotels and other tourist stores, however, were still selling T-shirts, crafts and camera film in dollars. (CNN, 11/5/04)

**May 12:** Spain's Sol Melia, one of the world's largest holiday resort chains, is building two new hotels in Cuba. Sol Melia has reported a jump in first-quarter net profit, driven by Latin America and the Caribbean where tourism picked up with US economic recovery. Latin American and Caribbean markets represented about half of the company's core earnings in the first quarter. "Our resorts in Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba are mainly benefiting from the economic recovery in the US, the increasing flow of American travelers and the positive trends in travel by European clientele with increased purchasing power thanks to the euro appreciation," it said in a statement. (CNN, *Gaceta de los Negocios*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** Cuba's dollar-only stores are closed temporarily to assess the impact of "brutal measures" announced last week by US President George W. Bush and will reopen, possibly with higher prices, Cuba's UN envoy said. Ambassador Orlando Requeijo Gual didn't know whether the stores would be back in business in days or weeks but said, "Don't worry about the situation because we should normalize the situation as soon as possible." Asked if Bush's new measures would lead to higher prices when the dollar stores reopen, Requeijo said the assessment the government is undertaking would also take into account higher prices for oil, gas and milk -- so an increase in prices in the dollar shops might not be "directly related" to Bush's actions but to rising international prices. (AP, 12/5/04)

**May 13:** Cuba is bracing for a new financial crunch as soaring oil prices, shipping rates and harsher US sanctions threaten the import-dependent country's scarce hard currency resources, local analysts said. "Thanks to increased tourism and higher nickel prices we were doing a bit better this year, but forecasts that oil will remain above \$40 per barrel and Bush's increasing hostility are forcing us to rethink plans," a Cuban economist said. "Here we go again, it looks like payments will be late or stop now," one diplomat said. With oil prices up 25 percent this year, freight costs twice what they were a year ago, and fuel costs pushing up tourist travel bills, the government had to act, said the Cuban economist. "The Bush measures were the icing on the cake. They closed the stores to let everyone know just how serious the situation was," he said. Cuba imports 50 percent of its fuel needs, or 80,000 barrels per day, and a similar percentage of its food requirements. Food imports amounted to \$1 billion in 2003. Tourism, family remittances and spending by Cuban-Americans visiting Cuba account for more than 50 percent of hard currency revenues, estimated at just over \$5 billion. (Reuters, 13/5/04)

**May 18:** Italian clothing maker Nemo, owned by Giordano Ferrarini, has recently opened its eighth single-brand store in Cuba, it was reported. Nemo runs a total 32 single-brand stores in Italy's southern region of Apulia. (ANSA, 18/5/04)

**May 20:** Cuba's sugar harvest is all but over, but not much more than the previous crop which yielded the least sugar in 70 years. The current crop was put at 2.4 million tonnes of raw sugar, local analysts said, with only a dozen of 80 mills still grinding, according to local media and source reports. The 2002/2003 sugar crop amounted to 2.2 million tonnes, making it the lowest in 70 years. "They are at 2.38 to 2.4 million tonnes and only a few small mills are still open, processing cane that had to be demolished anyhow and with yields at less than 8 percent," a source close to the Sugar Ministry said. It is estimated an output at 2.4 million tonnes, based on official media and provincial source reports. According to a Cuban economist with access to Sugar Ministry information, "2.4 million tonnes, give or take 10,000 to 20,000 tonnes, is right for the season." (Reuters, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** Cuba's Foreign Trade Vice Minister Antonio Carricarte continued a series of talks with important Argentine executives, aimed to explore ways to increase bilateral relations. Carricarte is heading a large delegation of organizations and enterprises exhibiting Cuban export products and services in Argentina. He has held talks with Antonio Eduardo Seward, undersecretary of Foreign Trade, Eduardo Sigal, undersecretary of the chancellery for American Economic Integration and MERCOSUR, the presidents of the import and export chambers, and other trade officials, seeking ways towards bilateral negotiations. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** A continued drought in eastern Cuba has prompted emergency measures -- including the construction of a 50-kilometer long conduit from the River Cauto to Holguín, where the situation is most serious. Water from the river will supply area reservoirs that are almost completely dry from the lack of rainfall. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/5/04)

**May 21:** New decoder cards introduced in the US late last month put an end to satellite TV piracy in Cuba, as well as the lucrative black-market dish racket, which until now had enabled many to have access to foreign channels. A dish and receiver, complete with a decoder card activated for six months, would sell in the Cuban black market for US \$800-900. Local residents are not allowed legal access to cable TV. The crackdown affected illegal video rental clubs, as well. (*Cubanet*, 21/5/04)

**May 22:** According to Mexican authorities, an Italian court ordered the seizure of Cuban Telecommunications Inc. (Etecsa)'s bank accounts in Italy, worth a combined US \$40 million, as part of legal litigation initiated by Mexico to receive payment of Havana's outstanding debt to that country. The director of the National Bank for International Trade (Bancomext) said that the amount seized covers about 10% of the total figure owed. A Bancomext official indicated that the ruling is part of one of two legal suits launched by Mexico two years ago to ensure payment of the debt. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 22/5/04)

**May 24:** Cuban shoppers expressed dismay at hiked-up prices on goods sold in US dollars as stores selling everything from deodorant to electronic goods reopened two weeks after the communist government abruptly shut them down to reprice items. The Cuban government abruptly shut them down to raise prices, blaming US measures aimed at squeezing the island's economy. The reopening of more than 5,000 dollar stores across the island was announced in a full, front page article in the Communist Party daily Granma. An increase in gasoline prices also went into effect. At one local station, the cost for regular gasoline had been raised to 80 US cents from 75C per liter. The newspaper article, entitled "Information for the People," said prices at the dollar stores were increasing an average of 15.4%. (*AP*, 24/5/04)

**May 25:** Cuba officially published the list of Argentine slaughterhouses authorized to export fresh beef and pork to the island, the Argentine health service said. The list was drawn up by the Cuban Veterinary Medicine Institute (IMV), following a visit to Argentina and plant inspections, officials said. The IMV authorized imports of fresh, refrigerated and frozen beef from countries free of foot-and-mouth disease and that vaccinate their herds, as is the case in Argentina. During the first four months of this year, Argentina exported 67,879 tons of fish and milk to Cuba, valued at \$13.1 million. (*EFEAgro*, 24/5/04)

**May 25:** Cuban authorities informed that the country's eastern provinces' water reserves, affected by a severe drought, will barely last another 3 months. Thousands of dollars were approved to increase land irrigation and special steps were taken to ensure adequate water supply for the population. According to official daily Granma, Rafael Vivar, a Ministry of Agriculture official, said that 19 of the 467 land irrigation reservoirs are depleted while the rest remain only at 25% capacity. Tanker trucks are delivering water for 18,000 cattle, and a similar number have been herded to other locations. Central government authorities had to authorize the expenditure of an additional US \$800,000 for land irrigation. Fuel allocation for that purpose was also increased. (*AP*, 25/5/04)

**May 26:** The Cuban-Canadian joint venture PROSA looks forward to a significant production growth and expansion on the local and foreign markets this year. Located in central Matanzas province, PROSA expects to soon increase sales up to eight million dollars, which would translate into eight percent growth with respect to 2003. The company's products include toilet paper, tissues, handkerchiefs and other items, which are sold on the Caribbean market and in Cuba's dollar shops. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

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## **Economy**

**May 4:** Argentine companies have reached agreements to export \$15 mln (12.6 mln euro) in goods to Cuba in 2004, mainly foods, following a recent trade mission to the island country, it was reported. A total 34 Argentine companies visited Cuba last April. Over 400 meetings between the Argentine companies, local companies and representatives of foreign companies, operating on the island, were carried out within the visit. Argentina will sell to Cuba 3,000 tonnes of black beans and 10,000 tonnes of wheat flour under the agreements, and 5,000 tonnes of cotton pellets, 100 tonnes of powder milk and 300 tonnes of poultry. (*Latin American News Digest*, 4/5/04)

**May 6:** Bolivian airline Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB) will start offering two weekly flights to Cuba as of August 2004, compared to one weekly flight offered currently. The flights are for the route LAB Santa Cruz de la Sierra-Panama-Havana. LAB has been maintaining contacts with the Cuban market for three years. The airline plans to open an office in Havana in the last quarter of 2004. (*Latin America News Digest*, 6/5/04)

**May 5:** Cuba is imposing tighter limits on private sector workers — from auto body repairmen and masseuses to children's clowns and used book sellers — as the government tries to reassert control over the unofficially sanctioned private economy. Under a Labour Ministry decree scheduled to take effect Oct. 1, no new licences will be allowed for 40 categories of self-employment. The list includes an array of professions, such as stonemasons, computer programmers and television antenna repairmen. The measure has not yet been made law by publication in the official gazette, but probably will be by the end of May. (*The Toronto Star*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** Sherritt International Corporation boosted its first-quarter profit by 52 per cent as revenue rose 16 1/2 per cent, the mining company reported. Sherritt, which also has significant oil, gas, power generation and tourism assets, mostly in Cuba, said it earned \$52.9 million or 35 cents per share in the first three months of 2004, compared with net earnings of \$34.8 million or 26 cents per share in the first quarter of 2003. Revenue climbed to \$224.9 million from \$192.9 million. (*The Toronto Star*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** According to Mexican Economic Affairs Secretary, Fernando Canales, his country asked Cuba to pay US \$450 million worth of outstanding debt obligations incurred with the government-owned National Bank for International Trade (Bancomext). "That sum will have to be paid since it is an investment of the Mexican people's savings," stressed the government official. On March 30 th, Bancomext announced it was closing its Cuban branch offices, acknowledging that it was leaving behind over US \$400 million in debts it had been unable to collect. (*AFP*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** Cuban raw sugar production topped 2.3 million tonnes with little chance an additional 100,000 tonnes can be churned out before the last mill closes later this month, local analysts said. "Production passed the 2.3 million tonne mark when the month began," a source close to the Sugar Ministry said. Reuters estimated output at 2.32 million tonnes May 1, based on official media and provincial source reports. The world's fourth-largest sugar exporting country sells abroad all but 700,000 tonnes of the crop. More than half of 80 mills have already closed, according to official media reports, including most of the industry's larger ones. (*Reuters*, 6/5/04)

**May 8:** Sherritt International Corp. plans to boost electricity production in Cuba by 71 per cent over the next three years, supplying about 20 per cent of the island's needs. Energas, a natural gas-fired generator one-third owned by Sherritt, will add about 150 megawatts of new capacity, chief operating officer Jowdatt Waheed said in a conference call yesterday, one day after Sherritt announced a 52-per-cent increase in quarterly profits. The expansion plans are still being worked out, but Sherritt executives hope the two-phase development will proceed. The Toronto-based company says it will finance its share of the project with its Cuban cash flows. (*The Globe and Mail*, 8/5/04)

**May 10:** Cuba is taking drastic steps to deal with the effects of new US government measures designed to tighten the embargo against the island and step up pressure on the government of Fidel Castro. Among the 15 measures announced Monday night on Cuban television in response to the new US policy was one restricting stores that accept US dollars on the island to selling only food and cleaning products. Prices in the dollar stores and the cost of fuel will also rise.

The exchange rate for the Cuban peso, convertible peso and the US dollar, however, will stay the same. Many depend on dollar stores to supply goods that have not been offered in state shops since the Soviet Union crumbled in the early 1990s. The statement warned, "days of work and sacrifice lie ahead" and exhorted all Cubans to "elevate their revolutionary consciousness." [[Nota oficial](#)] (*EFE, Sun Sentinel*, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** A top-level Brazil-Cuba business meeting and trade exhibition began in Rio de Janeiro in what has been described as an important step in ratifying growing co-operation between the two countries. The event is taking place in the Rio de Janeiro Industrial Federation's (FIRJAN) headquarters with the participation of the President of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce Bertha Delgado, the Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Trade Antonio Carricarte, representatives of the Brazilian government and more than 40 business people from both countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** Cuba's dollar-only stores displayed "closed for inventory" signs after the communist government suddenly shut them down, blaming new US measures aimed at squeezing the island's economy. Long lines stretched from state stores with food and personal hygiene products -- nearly the only items still sold to Cubans in dollars -- as people scrambled to buy shampoo and soap from rapidly emptying shelves. The government did not say whether the stores would reopen. Three floors selling clothes, mattresses and electrical goods were cordoned off in Harris Brothers, where employees stood behind empty counters looking confused. Other workers catered to dozens of shoppers buying cooking oil, Spam and deodorant in the store's only open section. Dozens of stores along Old Havana's commercial Obispo Street selling toys, shoes and fancy furniture never opened Tuesday. Gift shops in upscale hotels and other tourist stores, however, were still selling T-shirts, crafts and camera film in dollars. (*CNN*, 11/5/04)

**May 12:** Spain's Sol Melia, one of the world's largest holiday resort chains, is building two new hotels in Cuba. Sol Melia has reported a jump in first-quarter net profit, driven by Latin America and the Caribbean where tourism picked up with US economic recovery. Latin American and Caribbean markets represented about half of the company's core earnings in the first quarter. "Our resorts in Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba are mainly benefiting from the economic recovery in the US, the increasing flow of American travelers and the positive trends in travel by European clientele with increased purchasing power thanks to the euro appreciation," it said in a statement. (*CNN, Gaceta de los Negocios*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** Cuba's dollar-only stores are closed temporarily to assess the impact of "brutal measures" announced last week by US President George W. Bush and will reopen, possibly with higher prices, Cuba's UN envoy said. Ambassador Orlando Requeijo Gual didn't know whether the stores would be back in business in days or weeks but said, "Don't worry about the situation because we should normalize the situation as soon as possible." Asked if Bush's new measures would lead to higher prices when the dollar stores reopen, Requeijo said the assessment the government is undertaking would also take into account higher prices for oil, gas and milk -- so an increase in prices in the dollar shops might not be "directly related" to Bush's actions but to rising international prices. (*AP*, 12/5/04)

**May 13:** Cuba is bracing for a new financial crunch as soaring oil prices, shipping rates and harsher US sanctions threaten the import-dependent country's scarce hard currency resources, local analysts said. "Thanks to increased tourism and higher nickel prices we were doing a bit better this year, but forecasts that oil will remain above \$40 per barrel and Bush's increasing hostility are forcing us to rethink plans," a Cuban economist said. "Here we go again, it looks like payments will be late or stop now," one diplomat said. With oil prices up 25 percent this year, freight costs twice what they were a year ago, and fuel costs pushing up tourist travel bills, the government had to act, said the Cuban economist. "The Bush measures were the icing on the cake. They closed the stores to let everyone know just how serious the situation was," he said. Cuba imports 50 percent of its fuel needs, or 80,000 barrels per day, and a similar percentage of its food requirements. Food imports amounted to \$1 billion in 2003. Tourism, family remittances and spending by Cuban-Americans visiting Cuba account for more than 50 percent of hard currency revenues, estimated at just over \$5 billion. (*Reuters*, 13/5/04)

**May 18:** Italian clothing maker Nemo, owned by Giordano Ferrarini, has recently opened its eighth single-brand store in Cuba, it was reported. Nemo runs a total 32 single-brand stores in Italy's southern region of Apulia. (ANSA, 18/5/04)

**May 20:** Cuba's sugar harvest is all but over, but not much more than the previous crop which yielded the least sugar in 70 years. The current crop was put at 2.4 million tonnes of raw sugar, local analysts said, with only a dozen of 80 mills still grinding, according to local media and source reports. The 2002/2003 sugar crop amounted to 2.2 million tonnes, making it the lowest in 70 years. "They are at 2.38 to 2.4 million tonnes and only a few small mills are still open, processing cane that had to be demolished anyhow and with yields at less than 8 percent," a source close to the Sugar Ministry said. It is estimated an output at 2.4 million tonnes, based on official media and provincial source reports. According to a Cuban economist with access to Sugar Ministry information, "2.4 million tonnes, give or take 10,000 to 20,000 tonnes, is right for the season." (Reuters, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** Cuba's Foreign Trade Vice Minister Antonio Carricarte continued a series of talks with important Argentine executives, aimed to explore ways to increase bilateral relations. Carricarte is heading a large delegation of organizations and enterprises exhibiting Cuban export products and services in Argentina. He has held talks with Antonio Eduardo Seward, undersecretary of Foreign Trade, Eduardo Sigal, undersecretary of the chancellery for American Economic Integration and MERCOSUR, the presidents of the import and export chambers, and other trade officials, seeking ways towards bilateral negotiations. (Prensa Latina, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** A continued drought in eastern Cuba has prompted emergency measures -- including the construction of a 50-kilometer long conduit from the River Cauto to Holguín, where the situation is most serious. Water from the river will supply area reservoirs that are almost completely dry from the lack of rainfall. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/5/04)

**May 21:** New decoder cards introduced in the US late last month put an end to satellite TV piracy in Cuba, as well as the lucrative black-market dish racket, which until now had enabled many to have access to foreign channels. A dish and receiver, complete with a decoder card activated for six months, would sell in the Cuban black market for US \$800-900. Local residents are not allowed legal access to cable TV. The crackdown affected illegal video rental clubs, as well. (Cubanet, 21/5/04)

**May 22:** According to Mexican authorities, an Italian court ordered the seizure of Cuban Telecommunications Inc. (Etecsa)'s bank accounts in Italy, worth a combined US \$40 million, as part of legal litigation initiated by Mexico to receive payment of Havana's outstanding debt to that country. The director of the National Bank for International Trade (Bancomext) said that the amount seized covers about 10% of the total figure owed. A Bancomext official indicated that the ruling is part of one of two legal suits launched by Mexico two years ago to ensure payment of the debt. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/5/04)

**May 24:** Cuban shoppers expressed dismay at hiked-up prices on goods sold in US dollars as stores selling everything from deodorant to electronic goods reopened two weeks after the communist government abruptly shut them down to reprice items. The Cuban government abruptly shut them down to raise prices, blaming US measures aimed at squeezing the island's economy. The reopening of more than 5,000 dollar stores across the island was announced in a full, front page article in the Communist Party daily Granma. An increase in gasoline prices also went into effect. At one local station, the cost for regular gasoline had been raised to 80 US cents from 75C per liter. The newspaper article, entitled "Information for the People," said prices at the dollar stores were increasing an average of 15.4%. (AP, 24/5/04)

**May 25:** Cuba officially published the list of Argentine slaughterhouses authorized to export fresh beef and pork to the island, the Argentine health service said. The list was drawn up by the Cuban Veterinary Medicine Institute (IMV), following a visit to Argentina and plant inspections, officials said. The IMV authorized imports of fresh, refrigerated and frozen beef from countries free of foot-and-mouth disease and that vaccinate their herds, as is the case in

Argentina. During the first four months of this year, Argentina exported 67,879 tons of fish and milk to Cuba, valued at \$13.1 million. (*EFEAgro*, 24/5/04)

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## Foreign Affairs

**May 1:** At a massive May Day rally in Havana's Revolution Square, Fidel Castro called the European Union a "Mafia allied and subordinated to Washington" and spared no words for Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Baltic states, former Communist allies he feels have let down the cause of socialism. "A plague of renegades, anxious for loans and consumer society goods has joined the Mafia of the European Union," he said. Departing occasionally from his prepared speech, the Cuban leader reiterated that "Cuba will not bow down before the dictates of the old colonial powers of Europe". [[Fidel Castro's May Day speech](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/5/04)

**May 2:** Peru withdrew its envoy to Havana after harsh criticism from Fidel Castro at a May Day speech. Castro lashed out at Lima, saying Peru was an example of the "wretchedness and dependency" left by neo-liberal economic policies. He slammed unpopular President Alejandro Toledo as a man who "does not and cannot direct anything." A Foreign Ministry statement in Lima said Peru rejected Castro's "offensive" comments and was downgrading its diplomatic representation to a business attache. "The Peruvian government energetically rejects offensive remarks made by the Cuban head of state with regard to Peru," the ministry said in a statement. It added that Castro's comment "will inevitably have consequences for bilateral relations." It is the second time Toledo's government has pulled out its envoy. (*Reuters, Europa Press, The Australian*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** Mexico has pulled its ambassador from Havana and accused Cuba of interfering in its internal affairs as bitterness over Mexico's close relations with the United States comes to a head. In his May Day speech, Fidel Castro severely criticized Mexico's stance at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva towards Cuba, saying that the prestige Mexico once gained in Latin America and throughout the world for its foreign policies had "turned to ashes" as it began toeing the line for the United States. Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez indicated that Castro's remarks were unacceptable. "Mexico does not and will not tolerate under any circumstance any foreign government trying to affect our decisions on foreign or domestic policy," Derbez told a news conference. Mexico asked Cuba to pull its envoy out of Mexico City within 48 hours, he said. Mexico's Interior Minister Santiago Creel also said two members of the Cuban Communist Party's central committee, José Antonio Arbesú and Pedro Lobaina, had been "carrying out activities incompatible with their status" in Mexico. Creel added that the pair had dabbled in "affairs which should be dealt with by diplomatic channels in the relevant institutions," suggesting they had become involved in Mexican politics. The pair spent several days in Mexico in April and entered the country on diplomatic passports, he said. He said Mexico had declared Orlando Silva, a diplomat at the Cuban Embassy, "persona non grata," meaning he had to leave the country immediately. A spokesman for the Cuban government said Havana had no immediate comment on the Mexican decision. [[Mexican Official note](#)] (*Reuters, La Jornada, AP*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** Cuba has the dubious distinction of being the world's biggest jailer of journalists. Of 130 journalists in jail around the world, according to Reporters Without Borders, the largest number -- 27 -- were imprisoned last year as part

of a crackdown on dissent by the regime of Fidel Castro. To draw attention to what it claims are Castro's human rights violations, Reporters Without Borders has started a poster campaign to get tourists to think about what lies behind promotional images of the country's sun and sand. The poster shows a young woman on a beach wearing a T-shirt that says " Cuba Si, Castro No." (Vancouver Sun, 3/4/04)

**May 3:** The jailed Cuban journalist, Raúl Rivero Castaneda, was yesterday awarded the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize. The prominent journalist and poet, who was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment last year, was awarded the prize for his "long-standing commitment to independent reporting - the hallmark of professional journalism". Imprisoned along with 25 other journalists in March 2003, Mr Rivero was tried under Article 91 of the penal code, for "undermining the independence or territorial integrity of the State". He was said to have written biased articles and to have collaborated with the United States. Chairman of the international jury, which recommended he receive the \$25,000 award Jamaica's Mr Oliver Clarke of Gleaner Co Ltd, said he hoped the international attention would encourage the Cuban authorities "to respect individuals' basic human rights to express their views freely". [[World Press Freedom Day in Belgrade](#)] (*Irish Times*, 5/4/04)

**May 3:** US and European diplomats visited the home of jailed Cuban reporter Raul Rivero, offering support to relatives of the dissident and others put in prison after a government crackdown on the opposition last year, Rivero's wife said. James Cason, chief of the US Interests Section in Havana, and officials from half a dozen European countries arrived together on the same day Rivero was awarded a press freedom prize in Belgrade, Serbia-Montenegro. The diplomats said they lamented the imprisonment of all the activists and called for their immediate release, according to Blanca Reyes, Rivero's wife. (*CNN*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** A wealthy developer at the center of a Mexico City corruption scandal said that controversial statements he made while in custody in Cuba were the product of psychological duress, the local media reported. They cited a letter from Argentine-born Mexican citizen Carlos Ahumada to Mexico's attorney general, Rafael Macedo, claiming the statements he made to Cuban authorities had been obtained "arbitrarily and illicitly," since he had been "forced to give them." (*EFE*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** The Cuban Government published a note in the digital version of Granma newspaper, informing on the decision taken by Mexico of declaring persona non grata a Cuban diplomat based in the DF, and the withdrawal of its ambassador to Havana. [[Official Information](#)] *Granma*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** Thousands took to the streets in Mexico City to protest against President Vicente Fox' decision to reduce diplomatic relations with Cuba on what many political observers have called insubstantial grounds. The demonstrators blocked part of the Reforma Avenue in the Mexican capital as they marched to the United States embassy with placards claiming that the US, not Cuba, was guilty of external interference in Mexico. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/4/04)

**May 3:** Ten Cubans on a raft rowed their way to Honduras from their native communist-ruled country, landing on a beach northeast of Tegucigalpa after a seven-day journey. Two had to be treated for dehydration. The seven men and three women were transferred to the Migration Department, a spokesman for the Honduran Security Ministry said. (*AFP*, 3/5/04)

**May 4:** Cuba's ambassador to Mexico, Jorge Bolaños, left Mexico City for Havana after the Mexican government ordered him to leave and recalled its envoy from the island nation in a move reducing bilateral diplomatic ties to a minimum. "The Mexican and Cuban people will be the judges" of the decision made by the government of Mexican President Vicente Fox, Bolaños said before boarding a Cubana de Aviacion flight for his homeland. Mexican officials on Sunday gave Bolaños 48 hours to leave the country. He was seen off by a dozen members of the "Solidarity with Cuba" civic group and accompanied by security guards and members of the diplomatic mission. [[Statement by Ambassador Jorge Bolaños](#)] (*EFE*, 4/5/04)

**May 4:** Cuba welcomed home its diplomatic team expelled from Mexico and denied violating any laws or the sovereignty of that nation, saying that such "fallacies will be crushed." "At the right time, we will respond to the lies. At the right time, we will crush the fallacy with the force of truth and our arguments," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. "The truth is the Cuban people's most powerful weapon and it will be employed," Perez Roque said at an event to welcome home expelled Cuban Ambassador to Mexico Jorge Bolaños. The entire Foreign Ministry leadership and high-ranking members of the Cuban Communist Party met Bolaños at the airport. (*EFE*, 4/5/04)

**May 4:** Cuba has agreed to release three students from Dominica sentenced to long prison terms on drug trafficking charges last year, officials said. Fidel Castro agreed to pardon the students after meeting with Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit in Havana last month, according to a statement from the Dominica Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs. The statement did not say when the students were scheduled to be released. They were given sentences ranging from 10-20 years. Castro "agreed on conditions to be followed by all parties involved to issue a presidential pardon," the statement said, but did not specify what the conditions were. (*AP*, 4/5/04)

**May 4:** Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez sent a letter to Cuba suggesting officials from both countries work together to improve their strained relationship. Derbez sent the diplomatic "with the clear aim of getting relations between Mexico and Cuba back on track, at least in diplomatic terms," he wrote to his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. "I declare my absolute belief that by re-establishing trust and dialogue between the two of us we can arrive at a relationship equal to our mutual needs."[\[Mexican Diplomatic Note\]](#) (*AP*, 4/5/04)

**May 4:** Nicaragua sent Cuba a note of protest over Fidel Castro's May Day speech in Havana. Nicaragua protested because Castro said a small unit of "Sandinista troops" had been sent to Iraq to serve under the US-led occupation. The reference to the left-wing Sandinista government, which was voted out of office in 1990, has rankled Nicaraguan officials. They say the troops have no party affiliation. Castro's statements have "nothing to do with the truth (and) constitute a complete falsification of reality," the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry said. Castro should know that Nicaragua's military is nonpartisan, Foreign Minister Norman Caldera said, though many senior army officers are veterans of the 1979 Sandinista revolution. (*Reuters*, 4/5/04)

**May 5:** More than 1,000 Venezuelan doctors are slated to join "Barrio Adentro Mission" next month, replacing some of the Cuban physicians who currently provide health care in Venezuela's most impoverished areas, officials said. Under the program - unprecedented in Venezuela - the nation's poorest citizens receive outpatient-type treatment in their own homes. President Hugo Chavez has reported that the program, currently staffed by more than 10,000 Cuban doctors and aides, is benefiting 14 million people. (*EFE*, 5/5/04)

**May 5:** Cuba's foreign minister accused Mexico of fabricating a crisis with Havana as a smoke screen to divert attention from a corruption scandal brewing among Mexico City officials. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque called Mexico's unexpected decision to expel Cuba's ambassador and recall its own envoy from Havana "unjustifiable, rash and arrogant." "Cuba considers that all this has had the purpose of deviating attention from a matter which is exclusively an internal issue for Mexico," Perez Roque said, referring to Mexican businessman Carlos Ahumada, who fled to Cuba after the release of videotapes showing him passing wads of cash to officials in Mexico City. The Foreign Minister held a three-hour news conference in which he accused Mexican officials of lies, insults, erratic behavior and diplomatic incompetence. Perez Roque also rejected Mexican charges that two high-ranking members of the Cuban Communist Party engaged in "unauthorized activities" during a trip to Mexico last month and meddled in the country's internal affairs. He said the men met with members from various political parties, as well as journalists. Perez Roque defended Fidel Castro's May Day speech, which accused Mexico of trying to curry favor with Washington by criticizing Cuba's human rights record. [\[Press Conference\]](#) (*Sun Sentinel*, *AP*, 5/5/04)

**May 6:** The Mexican government offered to resume with "respect" relations with Cuba, though it used harsh terms to deny Havana's accusations that Mexico is solely responsible for freezing the century-old ties. "We're keeping our hand

extended. We would like to resume dialogue with Cuba under respectful conditions," said Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez. Mexican Interior Minister Santiago Creel said he hopes bilateral relations "will return to the level where they've always been." The ministers said there will be no "break in relations," but they stressed that the dialogue must come through diplomatic channels, alluding to Cuba's tendency to vent its problems through the press. Despite the hand extended to Cuba, both officials "categorically" and in harsh terms ruled out Havana's claim that the Mexican government masterminded a conspiracy centered on the corruption case involving jailed businessman Carlos Ahumada to hurt its political opponents. (*EFE*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** Referring to the new Cuban strategy announced by US President George W. Bush, Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez asserted that Mexico would not allow, accept or support interference of one nation in another's affairs. Instead, it would denounce it because it is wrong. He said that, just as Mexico told the US "Thank you, but no, thank you" when asked to express support for the military intervention in Iraq, his country would reply in similar fashion if invited to endorse the new actions against the island. (*La Jornada*, 7/5/04)

**May 6:** Salvadoran president-elect, Antonio Saca, expressed in Mexico his hopes that Cubans will eventually live in a democratic society in which governments are freely elected, a goal towards which his government is willing to contribute. "Democratic governments are the most fitting (to society's needs), so I would expect that Cuba should experience total democracy, as we all do in the rest of the countries (of the region)," said Saca. (*Europa Press*, 6/5/04)

**May 7:** Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas thanked the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) members in Gaborone for their position in favor of Cuba in Geneva. Cabrisas addressed the 79th meeting of the ACP Group Council of Ministers held in Gaborone about the support of ACP member countries and their rejection of the maneuvers to condemn Cuba at the 60th period of sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/04)

**May 7:** Sources close to former soccer superstar Diego Armando Maradona informed that Fidel Castro put a charter plane at the disposal of the former athlete's family so he can travel to Havana and continue his drug rehabilitation treatment. (*Europa Press*, 7/5/04)

**May 7:** 20 Cuban illegal migrants, who reached the Cayman Islands, told local authorities that their boats had been destroyed when they hit nearby reefs. (*AP*, 8/5/04)

**May 7:** Mexican President Vicente Fox said Friday that his government will not take part in a new US program designed to help Cubans speed an end to the communist regime. Speaking in the Mexican city of Culiacán, Fox said his country's policy was based on noninterference in the internal affairs of other nations. "We reject all interference in this case," Fox said, referring to the report of the White House's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba suggesting measures that would enable the United States to hasten a transition to democracy on the island. "Thus, Mexico will in no way take part in this proposal that has been made against Cuban sovereignty, and neither will we accept interference in that country's affairs by any other nation," Fox said. (*EFE*, 11/5/04)

**May 9:** Venezuela's president has condemned the United States as a "terrorist state" for toughening sanctions against Cuba. Hugo Chavez vowed that his government would increase its trade and cooperation with the Communist island. "That's called state terrorism, inciting people to kill President Castro, to overthrow him, inciting violence," Chavez said. (*AlJazeera*, 9/5/04)

**May 9:** Heightening US concerns, President Hugo Chavez has posted dozens of Havana "advisers" to his intelligence services and key ministries, foreign diplomats and former Venezuelan government officials say. The deployments mark a significant expansion of Cuba's influence over security and government affairs in Venezuela, which already includes an estimated 10,000 Cuban doctors working in poor neighborhoods and scores of sports coaches. Former officials of

the Chavez government said most of the dozens of Cuban advisers have been spotted at the following government agencies: Venezuela's main civilian intelligence agency, the Directorate of Intelligence and Preventive Investigations, known by its Spanish acronym, DISIP; the Department of Military Intelligence, or DIM; the Central Bank; the Interior Ministry, in overall charge of domestic affairs; and the immigration department known as DIEX. (*Monterrey County Herald*, 9/5/04)

**May 9:** Two South African medical students have died following a car accident in Cuba over the weekend, Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang said. Daniel Tinyiko Nkuna, 28, from Moretele in the North West died at the scene, while Thulile Maureen Mbatha, 25, from Kwazulu-Natal, died later in hospital after the accident in Santa Clara, about 400km from Havana. Three other South African medical students were injured. (*SAPA*, 11/5/04)

**May 10:** Cuba's Ambassador to Tehran José Ramón Rodríguez called for Iran's support for his country to face the renewed and further broadened US sanctions. Rodríguez, who was speaking to the press, added: "The US Government intends to extend its 45-year sanctions against Cuba once again, while broadening the range of those sanctions to an unprecedented level." (*IRNA*, 10/5/04)

**May 10:** The European community has been urged to inspect the conditions of Cuban prisons, where 75 Cuban dissidents are being held after they were arbitrarily arrested in March 2003 and sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 28 years. In a statement, 124 members of the European Parliament said they are calling for the "urgent dispatch" of a mission to Cuba, adding that the Communist-ruled island is a member of the United Nations and is therefore required to respect the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding the legal rights of those accused of crimes. The European Parliament, the legislative branch of the European Union, also adopted a resolution calling on the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro to release the political prisoners arrested in March 2003. (*Washington File*, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez asserted in Madrid that the Cuban crisis is best resolved, not through wars of words on the press, but through diplomatic channels, with the mediation of a Group of Friends of Cuba. He said that Vicente Fox's government does "not intend to judge the regime" of Fidel Castro, and reminded that his country has always condemned the US economic embargo on the island. "In the case of Cuba, all the elements are there. All that is required now is to establish a dialogue and respect diplomatic channels," he said. (*Europa Press*, 11/5/04)

**May 11:** According to Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, the Spanish government will continue to push for the normalization of relations with Cuba in the context of EU policy. Likewise, it will keep promoting democratization and the advancement of human rights. Moratinos warned that, considering first the Cuban citizens' situation, his government's policy towards Havana would avoid "straining" bilateral relations, remaining "calm" but "vigilant." (*Europa Press*, 11/5/04)

**May 12:** Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, Orlando Requeijo, said that Cuba would second the creation of a Group of Friends... for the United States. In response to the Mexican proposal for the creation of a Group of Friends of Cuba, a regional initiative previously implemented to deal with political crisis in other Latin American countries, Requeijo said that the nation that actually needs it is the United States. (*Notimex*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** During a press conference, Cuban Ambassador to the UN, Orlando Requeijo, said that the Cuban delegation to the UN delivered a letter to Secretary General, Kofi Annan, about the US decision of toughening measures against the island. The Cuban ambassador said that he hopes the letter is distributed among all delegations to the UN as an official document, and that a resolution be adopted in its support by the General Assembly. (*Notimex*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** In Port au-Prince, Cuban Ambassador to Haiti Rolando Gómez told the press that, following President Jean Bertrand Aristide's exit from power, cooperation between Cuba and Haiti has continued in "most of the areas" it covered. Collaboration is taking place in the areas of health care, veterinary medicine and agriculture. He said that the number of Cuban doctors and health technicians in Haiti remains at 550. (*AFP*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** Hundreds of protesters marched through downtown Mexico City to show support for the Cuban government, one week after President Vicente Fox told the Cuban ambassador to leave and withdrew Mexico's top representative in Havana. The demonstrators condemned Fox's decision to downgrade diplomatic relations, and also protested US measures to tighten the embargo on cash transfers to the island. Chanting "Cuba yes, Yankee no," the demonstrators, mainly from leftist and student groups, marched past the US Embassy but did not attack it. (*AP*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** During an interview in Buenos Aires, Argentinean President Néstor Kischner told US magazine Newsweek that he would meet with the Cuban opposition, should he ever visit the island. (*Noticias ProCuba Libre*, 12/5/04)

**May 13:** The Irish Presidency of the European Union issued a Declaration on the continuity of violations of human rights in Cuba. The European Union is "deeply concerned at the recent trials and sentencing of a further group of 13 Cuban human rights activists and journalists, all of whom were arrested while peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association and assembly", the official statement says. Among those dissidents was blind Cuban attorney Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, sentenced to four years under house arrest. [[Declaration by the EU Presidency](#)] (*EU Press Release, EFE*, 13/5/04)

**May 13:** Václav Havel, Former President of the Czech Republic, sent a message to the Cuban People on the birth date of the Cuban martyr Pedro Luis Boitel, and Day of International Support to the Cuban Opposition. The message was read at the Church of Our Lady of Charity, in Miami, Florida, by Carlos González, an activist of the Czech NGO People in Need. (*PuenteInformativo*, 13/5/04)

**May 15:** The Spanish joint parliamentary group requested the Socialist government of Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero to come out openly against the new plan of aggression of the United States against Cuba. They called on the government to criticise this aggression in the European Union and to promote favorable relations with Cuba based on dialogue, improvement of all forms of relations and to contribute to the will of the Cuban people to decide their future freely and in peace. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/5/04)

**May 16:** Ecuadorian foreign minister Patricio Zuquilanda has admitted that the diplomatic conflict pitting Mexico and Peru against Cuba could be addressed during the next General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS). However, Zuquilanda added that, for the matter to be added to the OAS General Assembly's agenda, a motion to that effect "must be approved by all the nations and Ministries of Foreign Affairs" of the continent. (*Cubanet*, 16/5/04)

**May 16:** Cuba's Ambassador to Syria, Claudio Ramos, described the American administration's measures adopted against his country as unjust and as a flagrant violation of the international legitimacy charters and laws. In a press conference, he said "the American administration works in an irresponsible way", adding that the US escalation policy is being adopted against Syria and Cuba and many other countries aimed at turning eyes away from the American plight in Iraq and the American forces scandal against the Iraqi detainees. (*SANA*, 16/5/04)

**May 17:** Cuban oppositionist Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo has called for the next EU-Latin America Summit not to endorse any hostile US policies against the island and to renew efforts for dialogue with Cuba. The ex-political prisoner and leader of Cambio Cubano revealed his organization's "Five-Point Document," that includes recommendations to the participants in the 3 rd EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit. (*Notimex*, 17/5/04)

**May 17:** Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno traveled to Kuala Lumpur to lend a helping hand to the Palestinian cause, despite his country's mounting problems with the United States. The former career diplomat left for home satisfied with the outcome of the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) special ministerial session on the Middle East conflict, but still thinking of a way out for his homeland. "The meeting was convened at a vital hour by the Malaysian Government, and NAM members have reaffirmed their solidarity by standing united on the Palestinian issue. I am happy to have played a role," he added in an interview. (*The Star.Com*, 17/5/04)

**May 17:** Cuban Ambassador to the European Union (EU) Rodrigo Malmierca said that, if the EU wants its relations with the island to resume, the steps taken last year against the Cuban authorities must be rectified. In a Brussels press conference, Malmierca said that Cuba is willing to have once again a relationship with the EU that is conducive to dialogue on an equal footing, but, as a first step towards that goal, the EU measures against the island must be lifted. (*AFP*, 17/5/04)

**May 17:** Upon arrival to the Cathedral of Havana, newly appointed papal nuncio Luigi Bonazzi received a welcoming ovation from Cuban clerics and churchgoers, prior to officiating mass. Bonazzi, former Vatican Envoy to Haiti, entered the building, prayed to Jesus Christ, and presided over the Eucharist. 300 people were in attendance at the ceremony, during which the nuncio communicated John Paul II's blessings for the country. (*AP*, 18/5/04)

**May 17:** Peruvian chancellor Manuel Rodríguez explained his country's stance on human rights in Cuba to be a matter of principle, while he also questioned the US economic embargo against the island. "With regards to our ties to Cuba, which we value, this is a responsible vote. Besides, the content of the resolution is not condemnatory and should be interpreted in a context of cooperation," he said. (*Notimex*, 17/5/04)

**May 18:** Havana and Rio de Janeiro were eliminated as candidates to the Olympic Games 2012. Only Madrid, New York, London and Paris maintain their candidacies. (*AP*, 18/5/04)

**May 18:** The World Trade Organization General Council heard Cuba's denouncement of Washington's reinforcement of its highly aggressive economic policy aimed to destroy the Cuban Revolution. Celia Labora, counselor minister of the Cuban UN mission, read a declaration in which Cuba states that the WTO was founded to support and safeguard a multilateral system of free, no discriminatory trade to develop its members' standard of living. The text refers to the Doha Declaration, establishing the important role of international trade in promoting economic development as well as relieving poverty. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/5/04)

**May 19:** A Chinese Communist Party delegation expressed solidarity with Cuban leader Fidel Castro as he confronts a mounting US embargo, the official press reported. The delegation led by Wang Jiarui, head of the international department of the Chinese party's central committee, met Castro, said Granma, the Cuban Communist Party daily. Wang said "China is working to consolidate fraternal links" between the two countries, the official Prensa Latina news agency said, without giving more details of the meeting. The Chinese official also met Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Vice President Carlos Lage. (*AFP*, 19/5/04)

**May 20:** A group of 124 legislators presented a petition to the European Union's highest bodies to send a delegation to visit Cuban jails "to guarantee that prisoners' rights are respected," officials said. The group's leader, Italian Eurodeputy Maurizio Turco, said the petition was delivered to both the European Commission and Council of Ministers out of concern for the many people convicted last year who are "without international human rights guarantees." Among the document's signers were Spaniards Fernando Fernandez, Concepcio Ferrer, Manuel Perez Alvarez, Javier Pomes and Rosa Diez. The text notes that, "since October 1945, Cuba is a member of United Nations and is therefore subject to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights." (*AFP*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** A group of 69 Venezuelans suffering from various illnesses on Wednesday traveled to Cuba to receive free medical care provided by the communist regime. The group brings to 6,499 the number of Venezuelans who have gone to Cuba since 2001 for medical care. Authorities say that 20,752 more are waiting to go to be treated and will visit Cuba soon. Jhonny Romero, coordinator of the healthcare program, spoke with journalists about the plan, which was set up three years ago and is part of the Cooperation Agreement signed in 2000 by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro. (*EFE*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** Russia criticized US moves to tighten the US embargo against Cuba, calling the measures a counterproductive step reminiscent of the Cold War. "Russia sees the American policy of sanctions against Cuba as an anachronism, an echo of the Cold War period that does not answer to today's realities," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said. "In today's rapidly globalizing world, any attempts to isolate any individual country are, in our view, counterproductive," Yakovenko said in a statement. He called for an end to the 44-year-old US embargo against communist Cuba, Moscow's Soviet-era ally, and for a "constructive dialogue" between Washington and Havana. (*AP*, 20/5/04)

**May 23:** The "political climate is not appropriate" for Fidel Castro to attend the European Union, Latin American and Caribbean Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Perez Roque said the political situation stems from the "confrontation" that has resulted from "the Mexican government's unilateral decisions". Mexico and Cuba have strong historical ties, but a diplomatic crisis led Mexico to recall its ambassador in Havana and expel Cuba's representative from the country in early May. (*EFE*, 23/5/04)

**May 24:** The new US sanctions against Cuba "will be foremost" during the political consultations between the Russian Foreign Ministry and Cuban representatives, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov, head of the Russian delegation, said in Havana. "The US sanctions run counter to the opinion of a huge number of countries which have unequivocally expressed their attitude to them in the course of the UN General Assembly's 58th session," Trubnikov stated. He said the number of states which understand "the senselessness and danger of moves such as the economic blockade" of this Caribbean republic was growing every year. (*ITAR-TASS*, 24/5/04)

**May 25:** Amnesty International (AI) expressed concern in its annual report over the health of many prisoners of conscience in Cuba, where the organization found the human rights situation deteriorated significantly in 2003. In its 2004 report, issued simultaneously in London and Madrid, AI noted that in mid-March of 2003, Cuban authorities unleashed an "unprecedented wave of repression" against dissidents with the arrests of 75 people. According to AI, the 75 activists "were arrested," tried without due process and sentenced to up to 28 years in prison, leading to an upsurge in "criticism (of the Fidel Castro regime) by the international community." [[2004 Annual Report. Americas](#)] (*EFE*, 25/4/04)

**May 25:** Mexican president Vicente Fox declared that his country would attempt to resolve the current bilateral crisis with Cuba. "We are going to sit with (Cuban government representatives) and start a dialogue and work toward resuming full bilateral relations in the future," Fox told the foreign press. "This will not occur in a short time," he added. (*Reuters*, 25/5/04)

**May 25:** Official media in Cuba confirmed that, at the 3rd EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit, the country's efforts would focus on obtaining an "explicit" condemnation of the US economic embargo against the island. State-run television showcased statements by Cuban chancellor Felipe Pérez Roque, anticipating the Summit participants' condemnation of US president George W. Bush's new measures against Cuba. (*Notimex*, 25/5/04)

**May 26:** Cuba and Russia have expressed satisfaction with the current level of friendship and bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Speaking with journalists at the end of what he described as a productive visit to Havana, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viacheslav Trubnikov said that Moscow continues to work for increased ties with

Cuba. Following a meeting with his Cuban counterpart, Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, the high-ranking Russian official told reporters that Moscow will support Cuba at international forums on the issues of the US blockade and human rights. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

**May 26:** Fidel Castro said European complicity with the United States and the betrayal of some of his "submissive" Latin neighbors will keep him from attending the summit of European Union and Latin American leaders in Mexico. The meeting promises to be a hollow ceremony devoid of any agenda for dealing with the social problems facing Latin Americans, the 77-year-old Cuban leader said in a fiery statement explaining his absence from the summit in the Mexican city of Guadalajara. He said the expulsion of Cuba's ambassador from Mexico on May 1 and "dishonest" Mexican accusations of Cuban meddling in Mexican politics were also factors in his decision to stay home. In an open letter to the Mexican people, Castro blasted European and Latin American leaders for bowing down before to the policies of his arch-enemy, the United States. [[Mensaje al Pueblo Mexicano](#)] (*Reuters*, 26/5/04)

**May 26:** Prominent Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer has ratified his unconditional support for the Cuban Revolution and its leader Fidel Castro, while condemning the actions of US President George W. Bush against Cuba and the world. In an interview with Prensa Latina News Agency at his workshop overlooking Rio's Copacabana Beach, the creator of Brasilia said Bush hates the Cuban Revolution and the example that it represents for the world. The 96-year-old architect and political activist said Fidel Castro is one of the greatest leaders of humanity and that he has always expressed his support and admiration for the leader of the Cuban Revolution. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

**May 26:** Negotiations for the Final Declaration of the upcoming European Union, Latin America and Caribbean Summit (EU-LAC) in Guadalajara are underway and, so far, the results are few. According to the head of the Cuban delegation to the meeting, Bruno Rodríguez, there has been little progress because "Europe does not seem to understand our countries' problems." Noting that Cuba is actively participating in the EU-Latin American Summit, Rodríguez told reporters that among Europeans, "there is a selfish position, a great misunderstanding of their historical responsibility and a great lack of political will to establish true cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 26/5/04)

**May 26:** Clara Chepe, whose son Oscar Espinosa Chepe was jailed last year as part of Cuba's biggest opposition crackdown in years, asked leaders taking part in the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit in Mexico to lobby Havana authorities to release him. Chepe sent an open letter to the heads of state and government saying her son is gravely ill and denouncing his living conditions in a Havana hospital. "I beg you to intercede with Cuban authorities so that Oscar Espinosa Chepe is adequately treated and, basically, released," she said in the letter. (*EFE*, 26/5/04)

**May 27:** Reporters Without Borders is urging the heads of state of the 58 countries attending the EU-Latin America and Caribbean summit in Guadalajara, Mexico to press the Cuban delegation for the release of journalists jailed in Cuba [[Spotlight on Cuba](#)] (*RWB Press Release*, 27/5/04)

**May 27:** Cuba's foreign minister met with his Mexican counterpart, an effort to smooth over a diplomatic row that resulted in both countries withdrawing their respective ambassadors. Cuba's Felipe Perez Roque arrived at the hotel of Mexico's Luis Ernesto Derbez, but said nothing to reporters as he headed to the meeting. The day before, he said he wasn't expecting a breakthrough. "I don't know if the actual diplomatic crisis (...) can have a solution," he said. (*AP*, 27/5/04)

**May 27:** Cuba's foreign minister said his nation and Mexico agreed to return their respective ambassadors, an attempt to mend relations strained by accusations that the communist-run island was meddling in Mexico's affairs. At a news conference on the sidelines of an international summit here, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said his meeting earlier with Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez had gone well and that they had decided to restore the ambassadors to their post. "The objective is to normalize our relations as they were before", Mr Ernesto Derbez

said. "I believe there will be a solution but I don't know when. I think it will take some time." "The atmosphere and discussion [at the meeting] point to a solution to the diplomatic crisis we have lived through," said Mr Perez Roque. Mr Perez Roque did not give a date for the ambassadors' return. (*Sun Sentinel, BBC, 27/5/04*)

**May 27:** Commenting on Fidel Castro's assertion in a letter "the people of Mexico" that the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit answers to US interests, Jalisco governor Francisco Ramírez said that caution should be exercised and all negative and accusatory pronouncements avoided. (*Mural.Com, 27/5/04*)

**May 28:** Cuba issued a call to defend Venezuela, following US Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega's "insolent and threatening declarations" against president Hugo Chávez's government. During a gathering in "solidarity" with Cuba at Guadalajara State University, Cuban chancellor Felipe Pérez Roque said that it was time to defend Bolívar's Venezuela. (*AFP, 28/5/04*)

**May 28:** Cuba denounced the European heads of states attending a summit meeting in Guadalajara, Mexico, as cowards for failing to condemn Washington's aggressive policy toward the Caribbean island and for making what it called weak criticisms of the US-led war in Iraq. A declaration signed by the leaders of 58 Latin American, Caribbean and European nations expressed horror at the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and urged nations to gain the support of international organizations before going to war. But it failed to mention the United States by name, as Cuba and Venezuela had demanded. Cuba refused to sign, citing the failure to mention the US by name, and to include specific language condemning the Helms-Burton law, which penalises US companies that trade with the US. Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, described the EU as "cowardly" and "hypocritical," while Felipe Perez Roque, the Cuban foreign minister, criticised "flagrant omissions" and "ambiguous language". [[Cuban Foreign Affairs speech at the Guadalajara Summit; Cuba's statement of reserve to the final Declaration](#)] (*Houston Chronicle, Financial Times, 29/5/04*)

**May 28:** Bill Rammell, the UK foreign office minister, said that Cuba's position in the European Union-Latin America summit is "pure political theatre". "We are not supporting the American blockade, and we were prepared to make that abundantly clear in the communiqué, but they wanted to drive a wedge." European Commission President Romano Prodi called Cuba's attitude "regretful." Britain's undersecretary of state, Bill Rammell, told British journalists that the Cubans deliberately made unrealistic demands at the meeting and tried to inject wording in the declaration that they knew would be unacceptable. (*Houston Chronicle, 29/5/04*)

**May 29:** In a press conference, Spanish president , José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said that Cuba's position at the Guadalajara summit was in clear minority. Rodríguez Zapatero said that the disqualification that the Cuban delegation made of the final declaration of the III Summit was "the opinion of a minority, that should make that country reflect on what happened there". (*Europa Press, 29/5/04*)

**May 29:** The Cuban and South African governments strengthened their bilateral relations with the signing in Havana of a Framework Programme for Scientific and Technological Cooperation for the period 2004-2008. The document establishes the foundations for increased cooperation in the fields of biotechnology, information and communication technology, plant and animal development and organic science. Cuba and South Africa also agreed to improve mechanisms for cooperation between universities and research institutes in both countries by promoting specialist exchanges and scientific fora. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 29/5/04*)

**May 31:** The Spanish government has asked for Cuba's approval for the appointment of Carlos Alonso Zaldivar as Spanish ambassador in Havana, replacing Jesus Gracia, the press has learnt from diplomatic sources. Alonso Zaldivar, posted in Rome as cultural adviser, is an experienced diplomat with great analytical abilities who has always taken leftist positions and he has occupied various posts, including that of ambassador to Korea. (*ABC, 31/5/04*)

## **Terrorism**

**May 5:** The Cuban magazine Bohemia denounced the existence of more than a hundred anti-Cuban terrorist groups in the United States. The 23-page report includes the highly incriminating evidence of the presence of Orlando Bosch, a terrorist of Cuban origin who organized the in-flight explosion of a Cubana Airlines flight in 1976, at an act presided over by President George W. Bush on October 10, 2002. The publication also denounces that one of the recurrent ideas of these groups is the assassination of Fidel Castro, like the plot planned in Panama during the Ibero American Summit in November 2000. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/5/04)

**May 11:** Speaker of the Cuban National Peoples Power Assembly (Congress), Ricardo Alarcon, affirmed that the administration of George W. Bush is responsible for some of the worst acts of terrorism committed on this continent and in the world. Alarcon made the accusation at the midnight closure of a public audience gathered to learn details of the case of the five Cubans condemned in the United States to tough sentences ranging from 15 years to double life imprisonment. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/5/04)

**May 18:** Secretary of State Colin Powell has determined and certified to the US Congress that five countries -- Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea and Syria -- have not been cooperating fully with United States antiterrorism efforts, the Department of State said. [[Five Countries Certified as not Cooperating with US](#)] (*USInfo*, 18/5/04)

## **US-Cuba Relations**

**May 1:** Cuba's socialist system would overcome any new US initiatives aimed at hastening political change on the island, Fidel Castro told a sea of flag-waving Cubans in a two-hour May Day speech. Referring to a report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, expected to be presented to the US President, Castro said his enemies across the Florida Straits are "once again making themselves hoarse, shouting threats of upcoming measures to affect our economy and destabilize our country." "To those who persist in their efforts to destroy the revolution I simply say, in the name of the crowd gathered here (...) long live socialism!" he said. [[Fidel Castro's May Day speech](#)] (*Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 1/5/04)

**May 1:** Cuba's Fidel Castro urged US President George W. Bush not to use force as strategy against terrorism. In an almost two-hour speech marking May 1 celebrations, Castro counseled US authorities to "be calm, act with equanimity, not be carried away by anger and hatred, or hunt people with indiscriminate bombing". "None of the world's problems, including terrorism, can be solved with force," said Castro, clad in his customary olive drab military fatigues. "Only reason, intelligent policy with the strength of consensus and international public opinion, can remove the problem at its roots," Castro told the Revolution Square crowd officially estimated at more than one million. (*AFP*, 1/5/04)

**May 2:** A government commission is recommending to President Bush a series of measures to cut US dollar flows to Cuba as part of a broader policy to hasten the end of the country's communist system, an administration official said. A commission report, in preparation for six months and overseen by Secretary of State Colin Powell, also calls for steps to overcome Cuban jamming of US-government sponsored radio and television broadcasts to Cuba, the official said. The official, asking not to be identified in advance of the report's public release, said it urges increased support for Cuban dissidents and families of political prisoners and also calls for measures to encourage foreign governments to distance themselves from the Cuban regime. (*AP, Canadian Press*, 2/5/04)

**May 3:** Even if the United States tightens its economic stranglehold on Cuba, the blockade is doomed to failure because the Island advances and even is able to help other nations, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque asserted. Alluding to President George W. Bush's "program for democratic transition in Cuba" in his talk with the more

than 600 delegates from 50 countries at a solidarity with Cuba meeting, Perez Roque stressed the determination of the Cuban people to resist any new aggression, including military. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** Secretary of State Colin L. Powell praised Mexico and Peru for recalling their ambassadors from Cuba to protest derogatory comments made by Cuba's communist dictator Fidel Castro. The US official made the comment in a speech to the Council of the Americas, a forum for discussion between the United States and Latin America held at the State Department. (*The Washington Post*, 4/5/04)

**May 3:** Secretary of State Colin Powell presented recommendations to President Bush to end communist rule in Cuba. His recommendations to Bush on Cuba were in a 500-page report that included a chapter on how to end the Castro government. The remaining four chapters covered ways the United States can help a post-Castro government committed to democracy. Bush "will decide which recommendations will be implemented and when," Boucher said. He refused to provide details of the study. [[Report by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba](#)] (*AP*, 3/5/04)

**May 3:** A growing number of international tourists could help revitalize and upgrade Cuba's processed tropical fruit products industry, the US Agriculture Department said. In a special report on Cuba's tropical fruit industry, the USDA said the island's climate and land are ideal for growing plantains, papayas, avocados, mangoes and pineapples. If trade relations between Washington and Havana were normalized, the United States would be a likely market for Cuban tropical fruit, the USDA said. The growing number of tourists could help generate the hard currency needed to modernize and expand the island's existing fruit processing plants, the report said. "The tourist sector, in fact, may generate the hard currency needed to fund the purchase of inputs necessary to allow increased utilization of existing plants, to allow the capital upgrades needed to modernize and improve efficiency of existing facilities and to allow expansion of sector capacities," the USDA said. [[Cuba's Tropical Fruit Industry](#)] (*Reuters*, 3/5/04)

**May 5:** John Kerry reiterated his support for easing travel restrictions to Cuba, a stance that puts him sharply at odds with President Bush. Kerry's remarks, made in his first national Hispanic TV interview, came as he faces criticism for what some Democrats say is a dearth of Hispanics and other minorities in his campaign's inner circle and a lackluster effort to woo Hispanics, a key voting bloc in several battleground states, including Florida. But softening the travel ban to Cuba could fare poorly with Cuban Americans, who have called for even greater barriers against Fidel Castro. In the interview, taped in California where Kerry marked the Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo, Univisión network anchor Jorge Ramos said Kerry supports the economic embargo against Castro, but backs increased travel as a means of hastening democracy. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/5/04)

**May 5:** The new measures against Cuba prepared by the United States are doomed, assured Cuba. It said it has the solidarity of Latin America on her side. Asked at a press conference on the announced project to promote a political transition in Cuba prepared by the George W. Bush administration, Cuban foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque said the US plan violates international law. He warned that the report of the Commission appointed by Bush is an escalation in the aggressive policy against the island and expressed hope that Latin American governments do not support the plans contained in that document, with a goal of strengthening the economic blockade against Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/5/04)

**May 6:** President Bush, declaring "we are working for the day of freedom in Cuba," took steps to end jamming of US broadcasts to the island as part of a tough new strategy to hasten the demise of communist rule. Bush decided to order deployment of military aircraft to transmit signals of the Miami-based Radio Marti and TV, an effort to end Cuba's jamming of US government broadcasts. The measure was one of a number of recommendations in a report prepared by a government commission on Cuba headed by Secretary of State Colin Powell "We are working for the day of freedom in Cuba," said Bush, speaking during a meeting with commission members in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. (*AP*, 6/5/04)

**May 7:** Cuba has denounced that the brutal economic and political measures US President George W. Bush announced against the island are inspired by cruelty and hate. In a joint communiqué of the Cuban Government and the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, published in Granma daily on Friday, local authorities said the Bush dispositions "reiterated the hate and aggression" against the Cuban people shown in his traditional and cynical interfering attacks. [[Brutales medidas políticas y económicas contra nuestro país](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/04)

**May 6:** Democrats quickly denounced the new measures by the Bush administration tightening the 40-year-old U.S. financial squeeze on Cuba. Democrats and some Republicans were quick to dismiss the effort, either because they believe the policy of financial pressure has failed after four decades or because the announcement was made during a close presidential campaign. Representative Bob Menendez (Democrat-New Jersey), accused Bush of "playing election-year politics with the lives of the Cuban people." Representative Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona), is a leading proponent of congressional efforts to lift ever-tighter restrictions on travel to Cuba, a proposal that won majorities in the House and Senate last year. He said trying to use a C-130 aircraft to defeat Cuban jamming of US government broadcasts is laudable but insufficient. "If we're really serious about letting Cubans hear a voice other than Castro's, why not let Americans travel there?" Flake asked in a written statement. "After all, Castro can't scramble a firsthand conversation." (*The Washington Post*, 7/5/04)

**May 6:** A group of US senators have sent President George W. Bush a letter rejecting the latest measures recommended by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba, as they will further harm the Cuban people. The letter was signed by Senators Max Baucus (Democrat-Montana), Mike Enzi (Republican-Wyoming), Larry Craig (Republican-Indiana), Christopher Dodd (Democrat-Connecticut), and Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota). In comments after hearing Bush's endorsement of the measures on Thursday, Senator Baucus insisted that "at a time when the United States faces very real terrorist threats in the Middle East and elsewhere, the Administration's absurd and increasingly bizarre obsession with Cuba is more than just a shame, it's a dangerous diversion from reality". (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/04)

**May 7:** Former political prisoner Vladimiro Roca was unconvinced that further limiting the flow of dollars to Cuba would do much to change Castro's hold on power. Given that the Cuban regime is the only employer on the island and doesn't allow opponents to get jobs, "any gesture from any government in support of democracy in Cuba is welcome," he said. The problem is, I wonder whether the new US measures will have enough of an impact to offset the public relations harm they will cause. "I am a practical person. If in more than 40 years [the embargo] hasn't brought results, it won't bring them now," said Roca, whose father was one of the founders of the Cuban Communist Party. (*Sun Sentinel, The Miami Herald*, 7/5/04)

**May 7:** Cuban dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo commented that it is not up to the White House to plan political change in Cuba, because that task is up to Cubans, including the single-party administration of Fidel Castro and the domestic opposition. In the opinion of the former rebel commander and political prisoner, Castro, who has been in power for 45 years, "would be the appropriate person to make that peaceful transition (towards democracy)". A transition in which "we do not have to worry about a debacle happening here and about the matter being left up in the air without any planning", added the former political prisoner. He felt that, otherwise: "We could have uncontrollable chaos in which we may lose control over weapons in Cuba. A total anarchy. We lose control over mass exodus and, in that anarchy, we run the risk of losing the country completely." According to Gutierrez Menoyo, a scenario such as that "could bring difficulties to the United States. The loss of control over mass exodus would also destabilize the Caribbean, at the gates of the south" for the USA. "When we had realized what was happening, the sole alternative left would be a UN intervention," said the opposition leader, who spent 22 years in prison for taking up arms against the Castro government. (*Notimex*, 7/5/04)

**May 7:** The Cuban-American Alliance Education Fund, based in Washington, offered a press conference condemning US President George W. Bush's cruel measures against Cuba. During the press conference, the Cuban-American

solidarity group said that the Bush administration is attempting to get the financial and political support of the right wing sector in South Florida for the November presidential elections. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/5/04)

**May 8:** According to its president, Marcelino Miyares, the National Executive Secretariat of the Christian Democratic Party of Cuba (PDC) unanimously agreed that the new US initiatives allegedly aimed at speeding up democratic transition on the island are just "more of the same" policy that defines the Cuban issue as part of the US-Cuba differendum, instead of a problem that concerns Cubans alone. [[Comunicado de Prensa](#)] (*PDC Press Release*, 8/5/04)

**May 10:** The current situation of the five Cubans incarcerated in the United States was the main focus of a public hearing by the Cuban Parliament. The meeting was convened by the Parliamentary Commissions for Constitutional and Legal Affairs and International Relations at Havana's International Conference Centre to discuss the current situation of Gerardo Hernández, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino and Fernando González, and the increasing public awareness of the case around the world. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/5/04)

**May 10:** A group of Cuban dissidents has sharply criticised the US for measures aimed at speeding up the end of Fidel Castro's communist rule. Leading dissident Oswaldo Paya said it was up to Cubans, not the US, to bring about change in the country. "It is not appropriate or acceptable for any forces outside Cuba to try to design the Cuban transition process," said Mr Paya, winner of the European Parliament's Andrei Sakharov human rights prize, in a separate statement. Two other Cuban dissidents handed in a protest letter at the US diplomatic mission in Havana. One of the authors, Manuel Cuesta, said the US had "no right to set the pace of a transition in Cuba". The other, fellow dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, said: "This is a total interference that does not benefit the building of democracy in Cuba." He said his letter to US Secretary of State Colin Powell said the US plan was tantamount to incitement to armed conflict. Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said in an interview from Havana that "it's hard [for the United States] to deal with a totalitarian government: If you normalize relations, it takes advantage of it, and if you impose sanctions, it takes advantage as well. Sometimes, the best thing is to do nothing." (*BBC News, The Miami Herald*, 11/5/04)

**May 10:** Cuban workers from various unions have publicly rejected the recent US aggressive measures against the country and ratified their support to the island's unions and social system, *Granma* daily reported. The newspaper covered a number of public events held by unions, responding to a weekend call by the Cuban Workers Central (CTC). (*Prensa Latina*, 10/5/04)

**May 11:** The United States accused Fidel Castro of playing the victim by introducing "bizarre" sales suspensions in Cuba to counter new US sanctions. "Castro always likes to play the victim and to lay blame for his failures on others," US Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega said in a telephone interview. "What's being exposed is that they have such a stranglehold on the economy." Castro's countermeasures could backfire by further fueling a black market for goods stolen from the government, he said. "Frankly, the measures are sort of bizarre (...). It's clear that Castro would flunk economics 101, if he thinks that people are going to continue to go in and to pay these prices," said the top US diplomat for the Western Hemisphere. (*Reuters*, 11/5/04)

**May 12:** Hundreds of thousands of Cubans are expected to take to the streets in a huge march in front of the US Interest Section in Havana to protest the recently announced sanctions against Cuba by the Bush administration. The demonstration will take place along the Havana seawall drive and will end in front of the US Interest Section, according to an official call in Cuban media. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** The African Awareness Association is organizing a 60's-style "freedom ride" that will use buses and planes to protest the US economic blockade of Cuba. Organizers with the group, based in Richmond, Virginia, say the protest is designed to create awareness on the way Washington's economic blockade hurts the Cuban people. The group announced it will travel to Cuba in July without requesting a license from the US government -- adding that it is

working with a number of other organizations, including Pastors for Peace, the Venceremos Brigade, the National Committee to Free the Five and the Latin American Group of the National Lawyers Guild. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/5/04)

**May 12:** In its 2004 Report, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom states that, "as a result of the recent government crackdown on democracy activists, religious freedom conditions in Cuba may decline further as part of a generally deteriorating situation". "The Commission will continue to monitor conditions of freedom of religion or belief in Cuba to determine if they rise to a level warranting designation as a "country of particular concern," it adds. [[2004 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)] (*US Commission on IRF Press Release*, 12/5/04)

**May 13:** US writer and sociologist James Petras has proposed the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States for combating terrorism originating in Florida, as candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize. In his proposal, Professor Petras (SUNY, Binghamton) pointed out that compiling information about terrorist groups that conspire to commit acts of violence is an accepted national security policy in every part of the world. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/5/04)

**May 14:** Fidel Castro launched an immense anti-American protest with denunciations and ridicule of President Bush, saying the US leader was fraudulently elected and trying to impose "world tyranny." The Cuban leader led a sea of Cubans past the US diplomatic mission in Havana on the oceanfront Malecón Boulevard in a demonstration organized by the communist government against new US measures aimed at squeezing the island's economy and pushing out Castro. The crowd chanted "Free Cuba! Fascist Bush!" Castro said the march was "an act of indignant protest and a denunciation of the brutal, merciless and cruel measures" announced by Bush to tighten the 44-year US embargo on the island. Speaking directly about Bush, he said "everything that is said in your world about human rights is a lie." He said: "These words do not seek to offend or insult you" but given that President Bush "is committed to threaten and attack" Cuba and "destroy its independence and economy," he said it was his duty to remind President Bush of some basic facts, mainly: "you lack the moral authority". [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*CNN, EFE*, 14/5/04)

**May 15:** A Cuban accused of spying for Fidel Castro's government will be deported from Miami because he failed to register as a foreign agent and overstayed his visa after coming to the United States in 2000, immigration officials said. Lázaro Amaya La Puente, 40, who is in custody at Krome detention center in West Miami-Dade County, acted as an "operative of the Cuban state security service," according to federal agents. The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in Miami said he gathered intelligence on human rights activists in Cuba and spied on a US diplomatic office in Havana. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/5/04)

**May 17:** Cuban dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo sent a letter to US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, asking the George Bush administration to meditate on the consequences of the Report by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba to the Caribbean Basin security. Gutierrez Menoyo foresees that current confrontation between the US and Cuba may generate public disorders and even an insurrection in the island. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/5/04)

**May 17:** United States denounced that Cuba's human rights record worsened during 2003. In its new Report 2003-2004, Supporting Human Rights and Democracy, the US Department of State affirms that the Cuban government "continued to commit numerous serious abuses." [[Supporting Human Rights and Democracy](#)] (*Notimex*, 17/5/04)

**May 18:** Cuba's foreign minister accused the US government of trying to provoke a mass exodus of Cubans to the United States by tightening its economic embargo against the island. Felipe Perez Roque said US President George W. Bush's administration was encouraging Cubans to leave the communist-run island by adopting new measures designed to "increase pressure, provoke more suffering and destabilize the country." Under existing law, the United States can interpret a massive influx of Cubans to its shores as an act of war, Perez Roque told a news conference. "We believe the objective of these measures is to instigate a migration crisis," Perez Roque said. But he stopped short of saying the US government would use a potential crisis as a pretext to invade the island. (*AP*, 19/5/04)

**May 19:** The United States condemned Cuba's sentencing of three dissidents to three years in prison, more than one year after they were arrested for studying human rights in a Havana home. Activists Orlando Zapata, Raul Arencibia and Virgilio Marante, who were arrested in December 2002, were charged with "public disorder, disobedience and resisting authority." They each received the maximum of three years in jail after a one-day trial. "The real, quote-unquote, 'crime' was to study the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at a home in Havana over a year ago. And in the year since that, I would say, innocent gathering, they've been awaiting trial," State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said. (*AFP*, 19/5/04)

**May 20:** Thirty Cuban dissidents are being held by US authorities at the Guantanamo Bay naval base, a Cuban exile leader says. The head of the Miami-based Democracy Movement, Ramon Saul Sanchez, told the press that the dissidents fled Cuba last year after the arrest of 75 activists. They were stopped by US vessels and had been held secretly for the past year - even though they had been promised passage to a third country, he said. The US says its Cuba base holds nearly 600 prisoners from the "war on terror". There is no reported comment from US officials on the allegations. The Guantanamo group is said to include four women and four children. Mr Sanchez told the press that Washington had threatened to hand over the dissidents to the Cuban authorities if they talked to the press. Human rights groups have criticised the facility and the treatment of detainees. [[Denuncia de la situación de cubanos en la Base de Guantánamo](#)] (*BBC*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** President Bush marked Cuban Independence Day by pledging to ratchet up restrictions against Fidel Castro amid signs that his hard-line policy could cost him points among Cuban Americans with relatives on the island. Bush chose an uncharacteristically low-key approach to note the Cuban holiday, in sharp contrast to the fiery speech he gave in Miami six months before his brother, Governor Jeb Bush, faced reelection in 2002. "We stand firmly with the 11 million Cuban people who still suffer under the repressive Castro dictatorship," Bush said in the statement, promising to "vigorously implement" the findings of a Cuba study panel that recommended more aid for island dissidents, less travel to Cuba and greater restrictions on cash and gifts to people on the island. [[President George Bush Statement](#)] (*The Miami Herald*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** US lawmakers introduced a bill that would subject the four-decade-old US trade embargo against Cuba to an annual review by Congress. The bipartisan measure, the latest effort to chip away at the embargo, comes as President George W. Bush prepares to make it harder for Cuban Americans to travel to the communist-run nation and send money to relatives there. "These new restrictions are simply the latest in a long series that have been implemented without congressional consultation," said Senator Max Baucus, a Montana Democrat sponsoring the bill. Introduced on the day when Cuban Americans celebrate the country's independence from Spain more than a century ago, the measure is based on the annual review process that Congress set up last year for sanctions against Myanmar. Baucus was accompanied by Representative C.L. "Butch" Otter, an Idaho Republican, Representative William Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Representative Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican. (*Reuters*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** The Center for Cuban Studies in New York City could soon close its doors after 32 years of operations. The reason: recent restrictions imposed by US President George W. Bush on educational and cultural trips to Cuba. According to the staff and management of the Center for Cuban Studies, in spite of the efforts of its sponsors and members around the United States, the increased restrictions on trips has considerably reduced the center's income. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/5/04)

**May 20:** After a four-day trade mission in Havana and other rice industry areas of Cuba, the USA Rice - led delegation returned to the United States with a stronger trade relationship and a better understanding of Cuba's rice needs. "Cuba is estimated to import 550,000 tons of rice this year, however, only a fifth of that comes from the US due to US-imposed export restrictions," said USA Rice Chairman Gary Sebree, a rice grower from Arkansas. "However, if that market was made available to us, it would become a top market overnight. This visit helped to further strengthen or relationship with the buyers of rice, the users of rice, and most importantly, the consumers of rice in Cuba." The USA Rice

delegation was the largest and most visible among the estimated 400 farmers and food traders in Havana to make trade contacts. (*Southwest Farm Press*, 20/5/04)

**May 20:** A group of leading US personalities has sent an open letter to President Bush, calling on the administration to lift all restrictions on humanitarian trade and free travel to Cuba. The letter was issued by Americans For Humanitarian Trade With Cuba (AHTC) in response to the administration's recent adoption of measures that would limit Cuban American family visits, humanitarian aid and travel. Among the most prominent signers of the document figure David Rockefeller, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford; former chair of the US Federal Reserve Bank Paul Volcker and filmmaker/producers Francis Ford Coppola and Oliver Stone. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/5/04)

**May 21:** US authorities denied statements made by Cuba's Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque regarding migration agreements. Pérez Roque accused Washington of having issued only 700 travel documents to Cuban citizens by the middle of last fiscal year. In a statement distributed to the press by Washington's Interest Section in Havana, it was said that by the middle of last fiscal year (from October 2002 to September 2003) that diplomatic office had issued almost two thousand travel documents. The statement also noticed that the Cuban Foreign Affairs minister "deliberately distorts facts" and "lies" to the international press. (*Notimex*, 21/5/04)

**May 22:** The Cuban government plans to raise prices to replenish its coffers with much-needed funds and is using recent measures announced by Washington as an "excuse" to do so, the head of the US diplomatic mission in Havana said. Fidel Castro "knew exactly when the (US) recommendations were going to come out and he had everything prepared. It was an excuse to raise prices and take money from the population as quickly as possible and direct it toward other uses," James Cason said in an interview. "They are spending a lot of money on repressive forces and the army," the head of the US Interests Section in Havana said. The US diplomat was referring to a decision by the Cuban government to raise the prices of basic products sold at dollar-only stores by up to 30 percent. (*EFE*, 22/5/04)

**May 22:** Resort chain Superclubs, based in Jamaica, was informed by Washington that its top executives, stockholders and their families will be denied entry into the United States due to their investments in Cuba. SuperClubs, with properties in Jamaica, Bahamas, Curacao, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Brazil, operates five hotels in Cuba, accounting for 1,500 rooms. The most recent one is the Grand Lido Varadero in the 5-star category and 442 rooms in the island's most famous beach resort. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/5/04)

**May 25:** In its third report in just over a decade on opportunities in a post-Castro Cuba, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce offers a road map for investing and trade but concedes that it could be a bumpy path to the long-expected economic reforms. The latest study, titled "The Trade Impact of a Free Cuba" which stresses potential business opportunities in the island, was released during a chamber panel discussion that brought together executives, diplomats and Chamber representatives. The study, the Chamber's third on the topic since 1991, aims to provide the local business community with an understanding of the implications -- both in opportunities and challenges -- of a "free" Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/5/04)

**May 25:** Cuban authorities have declined to broadcast a US-made video portraying the often mortal danger faced by emigrants who depart the island illegally on precarious vessels or the "fast boats" of people smugglers. The approximately one-minute video shows images of shipwrecked rafts and fast boats on the Florida Straits as a voice-over lists the perils involved in the journey. But the offer of the tape was rebuffed by officials at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, said James Cason, head of the US Interests Section in Havana. "We can discourage the population from venturing out on rafts without videos such as this," Cuban officials said when asked about the US offer. (*EFE*, 25/5/04)

**May 25:** The Reverend Lucius Walker, founder of Pastors for Peace, describes Washington's latest measures against Cuba as "draconian." Upon his arrival in the Cuban capital, the US religious leader said that in his attempts to get more

votes in Florida, the current occupant of the White House has earned the wrath of many Cuban-Americans and may have shot himself in the foot. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/5/04)

**May 27:** Plantation United Methodist Church is reaching across the ocean to share prayer and faith with Cuba. Four members recently returned from a six-day trip to Cuba, where they visited La Iglesia Metodista del Consolacion del Sur. Plantation United Methodist adopted the church about a year ago and has been swapping e-mails and prayer ever since. "We wanted to establish a personal connection with them, to worship with them and talk with them," Plantation Senior Pastor Tim Smiley said. "We're both praying and fasting for each other." This was the church's first trip to Cuba, Smiley said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/5/04)

**May 30:** John Kerry's campaign team is denying that the Massachusetts senator is not committed to a policy towards Cuba. Kerry's campaign spokesman, Mark Kornblau, stated that the democratic candidate supports the embargo, but that he is interested in lifting travel restrictions in order to encourage changes towards democracy in Cuba. "George Bush has created a positive gap for any candidate when failing to show a coherent policy", Kornblau said. "In several occasions, John Kerry has formulated a clear anti Castro policy, that also explains how it will encourage democracy through person to person exchanges and the revival of Cuban civil society", he added. But, Bush's campaign team has said that the president may show a record of how Kerry has changed his position in relation with Cuba: he supported the 1996 Law that strengthened sanctions against the island, even when he voted against it in its final phase. "The information we are receiving indicates that people are satisfied with Bush's consistent policy against Castro", Bush's spokesman, Reed Dickens, said. (*AP*, 30/6/04)