

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

June 2002

Domestic Affairs

June 1: The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has received the Elena Gil Award -- given to individuals or institutions for their promotion of humanistic values and social justice in Latin America. The award, granted by the Félix Varela Center, was presented to the "Human Development Program at the Local Level." The program started in September of 1998 in two Cuban provinces and in Old Havana. It has now been expanded to benefit a larger segment of the Cuban population with initiatives for local economic and social development, the protection of the environment and a revolving fund for financing the expansion of small and medium enterprises -- all with an explicit gender perspective. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/6/02)

June 1: Young people from throughout the region are attending a meeting in Havana of the Board of Directors of the Latin American Youth Forum (FLAJ). Delegates are discussing the regional situation and exchanging views with young people from high schools and universities from Latin America and the Caribbean. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/6/02)

June 4: Cuban farmers are discussing a draft agrarian law, said President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón. The Cuban government is seeking to put more emphasis on the two existing types of cooperative production over large state farming which has reported deficiencies, as well as on private property as permitted in Cuba; i.e, an individual farmer's ownership over a limited land expanse. Alarcón and other leaders of the Cuban Communist Party attended a meeting of peasants in Pinar del Río province, thus commencing a series of similar meetings across the island. (World Data Service, 4/6/02)

June 5: Three-quarters of all housing damaged by Hurricane Michelle in November has been repaired. During a tour of areas hard hit by the worst hurricane seen in more than 50 years, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage praised the efforts of construction workers and local residents in Sancti Spiritus. (Radio Habana Cuba, 5/6/02)

June 6: Former US president Jimmy Carter made the existence of the Varela Project known in an uncensored nationwide television and radio speech, but many Cubans still do not know what it actually says. "You cannot have a proposed law if it is secret, if it is hidden," said Osvaldo Payá, organizer of the Varela Project. "We want to give citizens the opportunity to see it." Payá said Varela Project organizers will launch a campaign for the referendum text to be published by state media--something Carter suggested. "A proposed law has to be known by citizens," Payá said. "That's their right." It was unclear how the organizers intended to get media controlled by Fidel Castro's government to publish the text. (Chicago Tribune, 6/5/02)

June 6: The 3rd International Orfilio Peláez Memoriam Retinitis Pigmentosa Symposium took place in Holguín with the participation of distinguished experts and executives of international organizations on the specialty. Master lectures, roundtables and posters on retinitis and ophthalmology in general have been organized by specialists from Germany, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Spain, the United States, Italy and Cuba. (Granma, 6/6/02)

June 8: The Lay Diocesan Council of Pinar del Rio expressed its support to the Varela Project. In its statement, the Council stresses that "this is a legislative initiative of a civic and non partisan nature since it does not propose a program of government, but rather, legal changes aimed at facilitating the participation of every Cuban". (Iglesia Católica de Cuba, 8/6/02)

June 9: Elena Burke, a noted singer known for her interpretations of a Cuban musical genre known as "feeling," died of Aids-related causes. Burke was nicknamed "La señora sentimiento" ("the feeling lady") by fans who followed her as she performed Cuban "feeling" music and other romantic styles. In recent years, Burke sometimes gave public performances, singing as she sat on the stage in her wheelchair. (AP, 10/6/02)

June 10: Representatives of the popular organizations, which form the pillars supporting Cuba's one-party system, unanimously agreed to ask the National Assembly to consider approving a constitutional amendment. The proposal asks lawmakers to ratify that "Cuba is a socialist state of workers, independent and sovereign, organized with all and for the good of all, as a unified and democratic republic, for the enjoyment of political liberty, social justice, individual and collective well-being, and human solidarity." In addition, it asks that the amendment to Cuba's 1976 constitution state that "the political will of the people is that the economic, political and social regimen consecrated in the constitution of the republic is "untouchable". (AP, 10/6/02)

June 12: Defying calls for democratic reforms to his one-party system, Fidel Castro led hundreds of thousands of people in a march in support of a constitutional amendment declaring Cuba's socialist state "untouchable." Castro called for a massive march in Havana and in cities across the island to support the amendment, announced exactly one month after a group of activists submitted a proposed referendum for deep reforms in the socialist system. Castro has said nothing publicly about Project Varela. In comments to international media, several communist officials have accused project organizers of being on the U.S. government payroll. (AP, 12/6/02)

June 12: Cuba is preparing to conduct its third census on population and housing since 1959, said Juan Carlos Alfonso, national director of the group that will lead the research.. The census itself will be taken September 7 to 16, and at this stage the students and teacher that will act as supervisors and census-takers are being trained. (AIN, 12/6/02)

June 13: Fidel Castro's mobilization of millions of people to ratify Cuba's one-party socialist system as "untouchable" has organizers of a reform movement convinced their project has terrified the government. "We are filled with hope," said Osvaldo Payá, top organizer of the Varela Project referendum. "It was the desperate mobilization of a government that feels panicked. If the government feels so sure that it has the support of the people, then why not have the referendum?" (AP, 13/6/02)

June 13: Fidel Castro announced plans for a change in Cuba's constitution, saying Cubans could sign off on an amendment that would declare the island's economic and political systems "untouchable". Millions of Cubans of voting age will be able to support the proposal by signing petitions at more than 120,000 places around the island, Castro said in a nationwide TV broadcast. (AP, 13/6/02)

June 13: Cuba will declassify secret government documents about the Cuban missile crisis during an international conference in October marking the 40th anniversary of the event that put the world on the brink of nuclear war. Vice President José Ramón Fernández, who organized a similar conference last year on the Bay of Pigs invasion, provided no details about the documents in announcing the conference. Entitled "The Crisis of October: A Political Vision 40 Years Later," the October 11-12 conference in Cuba is expected to include people from the United States and the former Soviet Union. (AP, 14/6/02)

June 14: Fidel Castro was the first person to sign a petition declaring the island's socialist system "untouchable." Cuban officials said they expect to gather about seven million signatures that back proposed amendments making Cuba's socialist workers' state permanent. "Today we are taking another oath (...) that we shall be unshakably faithful to the homeland, the revolution and to

socialism, that imperialist domination and the capitalist system shall never return to Cuba," Castro said. (The Wall Street Journal, 17/6/02)

June 14: Leaders of the Cuban moderate opposition considered the constitutional amendment to declare socialism "untouchable" as an effort to hinder the country's advancement to future levels of development. A statement distributed to the foreign press and signed by the moderator of the Mesa de Reflexión de la Oposición Moderada, Fernando Sánchez, calls for the right of the opposition to continue seeking political and economic changes in Cuba by peaceful means. (Notimex, 14/6/02)

June 16: The Cuban authorities have evacuated some 35 000 people as heavy rain threatens to collapse a dam protecting a local reservoir. Evacuations from towns and villages in the state of Sancti Spiritus, 400 kilometres east of the capital Havana, have been continuing for several days after weeks of downpours caused riverbanks to burst and left large areas flooded. In Sancti Spiritus and neighbouring Ciego de Avila, roads have been cut off, crops destroyed and some houses damaged. But there have been no reports of casualties so far. (BBC News, 16/6/02)

June 17: The opposition movement All United for Freedom (Todos Unidos por la Libertad) cautioned the Cuban people of the consequences of perpetuating socialism over the right of citizens to changing and choosing their political and economic system. "The homeland is an altar, not a pedestal", that is why "we demand public consultations so that Cubans can decide on the changes proposed in the Varela Project", added leaders from different organizations affiliated to that movement. (Notimex, 17/6/02)

June 18: Almost 99% of Cuba's registered voters have signed a petition supporting Fidel Castro's government, according to the authorities. Over three and a half days, Cubans went to 130 000 polling stations across the country to support an amendment to the constitution that declares Cuba's socialist system to be untouchable. The move is designed to counter calls from both within and outside Cuba for democratic reforms. While no one was physically forced to sign the petition, many felt obliged to do so, fearing they might lose their jobs or come under scrutiny from ever-vigilant state officials who purveyed every workplace and neighborhood. As a result, it is impossible to gauge how much support Castro has and how many signed the petition for a quiet life. (BBC News, 19/6/02)

June 19: The organizer of a democratic reform effort said that Cubans should not be ashamed if they unwillingly signed a petition to make socialism "untouchable" and exhorted them to claim their rights. Osvaldo Payá also said his democratic reform effort, called the Varela Project, won't be stopped by the pro-government signature campaign. "No Cuban should feel paralyzed or hopeless for having signed against their will," Payá wrote in the communiqué sent to international news organizations. "These impositions by the regime cannot nullify people's dignity, cannot rip away their liberty as children of God." (AP, 19/6/02)

June 20: The president of Cuba's parliament equated socialism with democracy as he received more than 8 million signatures collected for a constitutional change declaring that the island's socialist system is "untouchable." "We will affirm that the political, economic and social bases of our constitution are unchangeable," Alarcón said at a rally in Havana's Revolution Square where he received 23 truck-loads of signatures supporting the amendments. The 8.2 million signatures, amounting to 98 percent of Cuba's voting population, were gathered in a campaign that dissidents said was aimed at crushing their own proposals for internal reform. (Reuters, AP, 20/6/02)

June 21: Cuba's parliament leader requested a special session to amend the constitution to inscribe socialism as "untouchable" - a change called for by millions of Cuban during a signature campaign. "I request that you convoke a special meeting of the National Assembly," Ricardo

Alarcón said in a letter to Fidel Castro. The missive was read during the government's nightly television program, "Round Table" (Mesa Redonda). Alarcón previously had announced that lawmakers would meet in regular session on July 5. But because of "historical transcendence" of the proposed constitutional amendment, "I have received practically unanimous support" for the idea from other lawmakers, Alarcón wrote. (AP, 21/6/02)

June 24: Millions of workers across Cuba were given three days off to watch a televised special parliamentary session to consider amending the Cuban constitution to make the socialist system "untouchable." The communist leadership's decision to close all offices, factories and stores for two full days during its current cash crunch underscored the importance it places on the proposed amendment that would make Cuba's economic, political and social systems unchangeable. (AP, 24/6/02)

June 24: A special session of the National Assembly of People's Power is under way in Havana. It was convened to discuss the constitutional modification bill, which proposes inscribing in the Cuban Constitution that the socialist system is untouchable. With 535 deputies attending (92.56% of the total), the maximum Cuban legislative body was convened by Fidel Castro, for as long as necessary, to a special session at the request of Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón. (Granma International, 24/6/02)

June 26: During a special session of the National Assembly, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, another National Assembly member, said the amendment to the constitution would protect the socialist system and the ruling Communist Party of Cuba for future generations after the deaths of Castro, 75, and his brother and designated successor, Raúl Castro, 71. The amendment is "key," said Pérez Roque, to "what we do when the generation that carried out the revolution, and the command of today, the generation of Fidel, of Raúl (...) is no longer with us." (AP, 26/6/02)

June 27: After three days of speeches, the Cuban National Assembly has voted to amend the country's constitution, making its socialist system of government "irrevocable". A return to the past is undesirable, unthinkable and impossible for our people. The revolution is invincible," Vice-President Carlos Lage told the assembly. (BBC News, 27/6/02)

Economy

June 1: Cuba's 2001-2002 sugar harvest will yield more than 3.6 million metric tons - slightly larger than the previous year's - but will fetch \$120 million less because of low prices for the commodity worldwide, the leading official daily reported. "To have produced 80,000 (metric) tons more of sugar than in the previous campaign, under more disadvantageous conditions, does not make up for the prices," the Communist Party newspaper said in a front-page story on the harvest now wrapping up. (AP, 5/6/02)

June 3: German auto giant Mercedes-Benz has opened a new marketing office in the central Cuban province of Cienfuegos. The company's representative in Cuba, Noel Toledo, said that in addition to consolidating the company's position as the principal supplier for several government agencies, Mercedes-Benz offers an unprecedented marketing integration program. (EFE, 3/6/02)

June 3: Prices on certain products have been increased according to an announcement by the Cuban Ministry of Economy and Planning. An official note from the Ministry says that the economic measures are being taken after a thorough examination of prices. The statement also mentions that prices will actually go down on some products considered to be basic necessities. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/6/02)

June 3: At the Mampostón reservoir, southeast of the Cuban capital, a research center supported by the United Nations Development Program strives to increase the production of fresh water fish -- despite fewer ocean catches and the general decline of fisheries in the Caribbean Sea. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/6/02)

June 4: With the participation of 120 commercial firms from nine nations, the 14th International Trade Fair of Technologies and Products for the Tourism Industry opened at the Pabexpo Pavilion in Havana. The trade fair offers opportunities for potential sellers to the tourist industry to meet with their clients in Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/6/02)

June 5: More than a third of Cuba's sugar processing facilities will be shut down in coming months as the government overhauls the key export industry, sources close to the sugar ministry said. The industry is Cuba's top source of employment with 400,000 salaried workers. With the 2001-2002 sugar crop hitting only 3.61 million tons, a poor showing amid slumping international market prices, about 55 of the total 104 facilities currently in operation will be closed down, the sources said. Another 51 already have been closed. The move would come as another tough blow to Cuba's economic crisis. (AF, 5/6/02)

June 6: Montreal-based oil exploration and production company Pebercan has announced an oil find at its Canasi 6 well in Cuba, the company said in a statement. Exploration tests show that the well contains three successive hydrocarbon pools in a 1,572m section. Production tests are still underway, but first test phase average production was 3,500-4,500b/d, the statement said. (Business News Americas, 10/6/02)

June 7: Cuba plans to generate all its electric energy using domestic crude within five years, the Ministry of Basic Industry said. At present, 90 percent of the island's electric energy is generated from Cuban crude, Basic Industry Minister Marcos Portal said. "In less than five years, all our electricity will be produced with national crude," the minister said, quoted by official weekly Granma Semanal. (EFE, 7/6/02)

June 10: Close to 500 Cuban enterprises and 150 foreign firms took part in the eleventh edition of Expo Caribbean. The role of this type of event in promoting economic relations and cooperation among nations of the region was highlighted in Santiago de Cuba by Raúl de la Nuez, Minister of Foreign Trade, during the opening ceremony of what is the most important trade show in the region. (Granma, 10/6/02)

June 14: Led by Alan Linger, President of the "Initiative Cuba", a delegation of fifteen important British companies arrived in Havana. (Notinet, 15/6/02)

June 18: Cuba will reduce the capacity of its sugar industry by 50% and cut back land dedicated to raw-sugar production by as much as 60%, Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro said. The minister's announcement was the first official confirmation of recent reports, according to people with knowledge of the situation, that a dramatic downsizing and reorganization of Cuba's sugar industry was under way because of low sugar prices and inefficient production. "We have the capacity to produce 10 million tons of raw sugar per year but have been producing an average four million tons," Rosales told reporters in Havana, adding that the overcapacity would be reduced by 50%. (The Wall Street Journal, 19/6/02)

June 19: An International Congress on Sugar and its By-products has started in Havana. Its objective is to adapt the Cuban sugar industry to the "current times" by implementing drastic structural changes. "The new sugar industry (...) will have to be based on change as an expression of this century's social dynamism", said Doctor Luis Gálvez, at the inauguration of the Congress, which will put emphasis on the by-products of sugar production. Organizers informed

that delegates from around 20 countries, mainly from Latin America, are attending the event. (World Data Service, 19/6/02)

June 21: Leisure Canada Inc., a leading developer of luxury resorts in Cuba, announced it has reached an agreement with International Capital Inc. (ICI) for the private placement of 10 000 000 units of Leisure Canada at a price of US\$0.4889 (approximately C\$0.75) per unit for aggregate proceeds of US\$4,889,497 (approximately C\$7,500,000). Each unit will consist of one common share and one non-transferable share purchase warrant where each warrant entitles the holder to purchase an additional common share for a period of three years at a price of US\$0.6519 (approximately C\$1.00). The proceeds of the proposed private placement will be allocated primarily to Leisure Canada's accelerated development plan for its Monte Barreto project, a five-star Havana waterfront hotel development. The Monte Barreto project is located in the Miramar District and has the advantage of being the last waterfront hotel to be constructed in the area. (Venture Exchange, 21/6/02)

June 21: Two new entities, the International Sugar Company Inc. (Compañía Azucarera Internacional S.A.) and the Sugar Financial Corporation Inc. (Corporación Financiera Azucarera S.A.) were officially announced during an international fair of the sugar industry, in Havana. The former, as it was explained, will be responsible for conducting sales directly, thus eliminating intermediary mechanism for exports. The latter will be in charge of the financial administration in foreign exchange. (Granma, 21/6/02)

June 21: Venezuela will soon be able to resume its oil supply to Cuba under preferential treatment, said President Hugo Chávez. In statements to the press at the presidential palace of Miraflores, Chávez admitted that his country had stopped the sales of oil to Cuba as a result of the institutional crisis of last April, which coincided with a national strike of the oil industry. (El Nuevo Herald, 23/6/02)

Exile Community

June 3: Molotov cocktails were thrown at the offices of two prominent anti-Castro organizations, Miami police said. No one was injured in either attack. Both groups, Alpha 66 and the Cuban American National Foundation, blamed agents of Fidel Castro for the firebomb attacks. (Sun Sentinel, 3/6/02)

June 12: The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) made an urgent appeal to the international community to protest the Castro regime's latest efforts to crush peaceful, democratic reform in Cuba. Foundation officials also expressed great concern over the safety and liberty of members of the dissident community. "Over the past several months, the Castro regime has been buffeted by a series of setbacks," noted CANF Executive Vice President Dennis Hays, "Cuba's socialist economy continues to implode, its traditional trading partners have become impatient over massive unpaid debts, and attempts to induce US producers into providing new credit have gone nowhere. More significantly, the first nationwide grassroots political movement -- the Varela Petition for basic freedoms -- has been gathering strength both inside Cuba and overseas. Boosted by support from former President Carter during his May visit to the island and President Bush in his "Initiative for a New Cuba" the Varela Project was this week unanimously endorsed by the US Senate and has received support from democratic governments throughout Europe and Latin America." (US Newswire, 12/6/02)

June 17: The Cuban American National Foundation is back on the airwaves with a show that's reaching Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits. "The goal of this project is to bridge all distance," said Ramón Humberto Colás, one of the show's hosts. "We want to transmit a little hope and optimism." The show debuted 10 months after the foundation announced the

controversial decision to end its Voice of the Foundation short-wave broadcasts to the island. (Sun Sentinel, 17/6/02)

June 20: The nomination of Miami lawyer Raúl Cantero to fill a seat on the Florida Supreme Court is drawing fire because several years ago Cantero represented Orlando Bosch, an anti-Castro militant the federal government once labeled a terrorist. Cantero, 41, a prominent Cuban-American lawyer who heads his firm's appellate division, is one of five nominees the Judicial Nominating Commission sent to Governor Jeb Bush. If picked by the governor to replace Justice Major Harding, who is retiring in August, Cantero would become the state's first Hispanic justice. (Sun Sentinel, 20/6/02)

June 21: José Basulto said it was a mistake to repatriate a group of Cubans found lost at sea, especially after they had spoken to Brothers to the Rescue, a known enemy of the Castro regime. "I think it's a tragic decision by the US government once again," he said. "The US is being the real border patrol for Cuba." The US Immigration and Naturalization Service took the decision because the group failed to reach US soil. (The Miami Herald, 22/6/02)

June 27: Cuban exiles in Miami consider that the United States should not accept "Fidel Castro's blackmail" of dissolving the bilateral migration accords and the threats of a new mass exodus. Luis Zúñiga, Executive Director of the Consejo por la Libertad de Cuba, said to the press that what Castro really seeks with a likely dissolution of the migration accords is that the U.S. puts a "naval shield around Cuba to fence off a massive invasion of rafters and thus be able to say that Washington plans to invade the island". Zúñiga also added that Havana could declare a "state of war, or even yet, create it in order to avoid addressing the real problems facing Cuba". Joe García, Executive Director of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), pointed out that Castro's discourse shows that for the first time in his life he is "on the defensive". (EFE, 27/6/02)

June 28: Federal officials say they want to move the civil rights trial of a Hispanic immigration agent out of Miami-Dade County because of antigovernment sentiment still spilling over from the seizure of Elián González in 2000. The US attorney's office has asked a Miami federal judge to relocate the September trial of Immigration and Naturalization Service agent Rick Ramírez, saying the government can't get a "fair trial" in Miami-Dade. In his suit, Ramírez claims the INS retaliated against him for saying that anti-Cuban and anti-Hispanic sentiment in the agency led to its use of "excessive force" in the raid on the Little Havana home of the Cuban boy's relatives. (The Miami Herald, 28/6/02)

Foreign Affairs

June 3: Cuba and Grenada have concluded a meeting of a joint commission, reviewing progress in bilateral ties. Grenadian Health Minister Clariste Modeste and Cuban Deputy Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Ernesto Santi signed the final statement. They also signed a cultural accord to extend and develop relations in this area. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/6/02)

June 3: Cuban stars to play corporate ball in Japan. Orestes Kindelán, a two-time Olympic gold medal winner as the cleanup hitter for Cuba's national baseball team, will join corporate league team Shidax for the remainder of the 2002 season. Kindelán, Antonio Pacheco and a Cuban pitcher are expected to arrive soon and take part in August's Intercity tournament, the "Toshi Taiko," and October's corporate league championships. (Yomiuri Shimbun, 4/6/02)

June 4: The ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) group has asked the European Union (EU) to grant Cuba "special guest" status at the next session of the joint ministerial council, to meet June 28 in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. ACP Secretary-General Jean-Robert Gouloungana said at a press conference that he had sent a letter to the EU asking that the island's representatives "be

invited to the session as observers," since Cuba is an ACP member and, at the same time, the only country in the 78-member group that is not signatory to the Cotonou Accord. Cuban officials "have consistently expressed their interest in joining Cotonou," which means that "preconditions applicable to that country alone should not be imposed," Goulongana said, in reference to demands some member countries have made regarding political and economic liberalization in Cuba. (EFE, 4/6/02)

June 4: Cuban Minister of Higher Education Fernando Vecino Alegret has returned to Havana after a four-day visit to the Dominican Republic. During his stay in Santo Domingo, the Cuban official met with Dominican President Hipolito Mejia on two occasions. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/6/02)

June 4: Cuba cast a moderate criticism on the Russian accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Cuba alleges that NATO has hegemonic objectives under the "almost absolute" leadership of the United States. In a statement titled "The alliance with the Alliance (Atlantic)" an official spokesman pointed out that Russia does not have a veto at the Joint Council nor at the Group of 20 countries created last week in Italy. (Notimex, 6/4/02)

June 5: A Mexican citizen of Cuban origin gained custody of seven Cuban rafters that were rescued in Mexican territorial waters last month. The migratory status of the seven will be decided within 60 days, informed the National Institute of Migration (INM). In a released statement the INM says that "rigorously following the word" of the General Law on Population, it "accepted the request from Mr. Armando Bouzon Millar, a Mexican citizen by naturalization and Cuban by origin, to take custody of the rescued rafters". (AFP, 5/6/02)

June 6: Cuba has delivered 800 000 doses of meningitis B vaccine to Uruguay -- despite the fact that Montevideo recently broke diplomatic relations with Havana. Added to an earlier delivery of the vaccine, the donation brings the total to one million 200,000 doses. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/6/02)

June 6: Eighty-nine British Members of Parliament have signed a House of Commons motion protesting at the inclusion of Cuba in the Bush administration's so-called "axis of evil." The motion, entitled "US Threat to Cuba" was tabled by Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn and has reached a total of 89 signatures. (Granma, 6/6/02)

June 7: The People in Need foundation intends to nominate Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá Sardiñas for a Nobel Peace Prize, People in Need head Tomas Pojar told the press, adding that Czech President Vaclav Havel supported the nomination. The People in Need wants to emphasize the effort of the Cuban opposition movement in the fight for freedom and democracy by the nomination. (CTK, 7/6/02)

June 7: A Canadian businessman must wait until August to learn whether he will go to prison for breaking the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba. James Sabzali, who now lives near Philadelphia, is the first foreign national prosecuted in the United States for trading with the Communist country. He will be sentenced on August 22. (The National Post, 7/6/02)

June 10: Japan is celebrating the 100th anniversary this year of state-to-state contact with Cuba. (Japan Times, 6/6/02)

June 10: The Cuban official delegation to the FAO's II World Food Summit, headed by foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, expressed its dissatisfaction for the poor results achieved since the 1996 Summit. (Prensa Latina, 10/6/02)

June 10: A delegation from the Paraguayan Senate is visiting Cuba, where it will hold meetings at the Cuban ministries of Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation. Senator Rodrigo Campos Cervera, Vice-president of Parlatino (Latin American Parliament), heads the delegation. (Notinet, 11/6/02)

June 11: Belize has rejected a US proposal to convert a Voice of America relay station to beam US-operated Radio Martí signals toward Cuba. Belize sought to avoid getting ensnared in U.S.-Cuba frictions. It did not want to risk that Havana would retaliate by withdrawing more than 100 doctors and nurses it has sent to Belize. "We do not want to get involved," said Vaughan Gill, a spokesperson for the Belize government. "Belize has good relations with both Cuba and the United States." (The Miami Herald, 11/6/02)

June 12: Salvadoran President, Francisco Flores, refrained from answering if El Salvador would request the assistance of Cuban doctors to combat the dengue epidemic and said, without elaborating, that the island lives in worst conditions. The Major of San Salvador, Héctor Silva, of the opposition Front Farabundo Martí for National Liberation (FMLN), asked the foreign ministry to consider the possibility of requesting the aid of Cuban doctors to fight the dengue epidemic as they did during a previous outburst in 2000. (Notimex, 12/6/02)

June 12: An American man who forced an airliner to fly to Cuba in 1971 in the only successful hijacking in Canadian history was sentenced to five years in jail. Patrick Critton, 54, had eluded capture for three decades, at one time working as a school teacher in Tanzania, before being found last year living in New York. News of his arrest broke on Sept. 11 as hijacked jets slammed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Critton was extradited to Canada, where he pleaded guilty to kidnapping and extortion. Judge Casey Hill took two years off his sentenced for time served and recommended accelerated parole, meaning Critton could be released after less than a year in jail. (AP, 12/6/02)

June 14: The governments of Cuba and Great Britain signed an agreement that includes bilateral cooperation on penal issues and the fight against AIDS. (World Data Service, 14/6/02)

June 14: The US coast guard searched for two Canadian men whose empty boat was found off the coast of Cuba. The Cuban border guard had radio contact with James White, 33, of Mississauga, Ontario, and Shane Catherwood, 24, of Cobourg, Ontario. The Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Halifax, working with the RCMP, verified the men's identities and notified their families. A spokesman for the centre said it was believed the men had sailed from Miami. (AP, 14/6/02)

June 15: Britain's top minister for the Caribbean said her government expected Cuba to acknowledge a dissident petition demanding reforms in the one-party communist state. Baroness Amos, the Foreign Office minister responsible for the Caribbean, had breakfast with four leading dissidents, at the end of a three-day visit to Cuba. Among them was Osvaldo Payá, leader of the Varela Project. (Reuters, 15/6/02)

June 17: The Cuban government needs to make "significant changes" to meet the EU's objectives regarding democracy and respect for human rights, states a document of the group of fifteen. The General Affairs Council Meeting, presided over by the European foreign ministers, carried out its 11th revision of the common position on Cuba. "The Council (of the EU) reiterates that the objective of the European Union towards Cuba remains the encouragement of a process of peaceful transition to pluralist democracy, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms", indicated the document approved by the foreign ministers. (Notimex, 17/6/02)

June 18: Syria's Vice-president, Mohamed Zouheir Macharka, initiated a visit to Cuba that was regarded as official and friendly. (World Data Service, 18/6/02)

June 18: Bryan Catherwood and his wife Analicia have arrived in Havana to search for their son, Shane, who disappeared off a boat along with James White, of Malton. Shane Catherwood is from Cobourg, but has been living in Toronto. He and White, age 33, left Ontario June 8 for Miami and set out for Cuba on their 40-foot cabin cruiser to spend a week with friends. They disappeared on June 12. Two Canadian Consuls went with Coast Guard attaché of the U.S. Interests Section Harry Schmidt to meet with officials from the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, namely Col. Jorge Samper, Neysa Lamigueiro Perez (head of the International Relations Department) and Major Manuel Alvarez Peiro (specialist in the Department of International Relations and translator). Col. Samper said the Cuban Coast Guard first made contact with Shane Catherwood and White and their ship at 8:17 p.m. about five miles off the shore of Santa Cruz, Cuba. The Cuban ship pulled alongside and spoke with the Canadians who, although they did not speak Spanish, indicated they were headed to the Marina Hemingway, east of Havana, and were running low on fuel. The Cuban Coast Guard advised them to change course and stay close to the shore given their fuel problems. At dawn the boat was seen drifting off Guanabo Beach, east of Havana. When they get the chance to talk to authorities personally, Catherwood said, the families of both men have many unanswered questions. "Why didn't the Cubans pull along side them and offer to help or give them gas?" she asks. (Coburg Daily Star, 18/6/02)

June 19: A Mexican fishing vessel rescued five Cuban refugees adrift on a makeshift raft off the coast of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, the National Migration Institute said. The five were taken to Mexico City so authorities could review their case, said a migration official who spoke on customary condition of anonymity. The Cuauhtemoc II fishing vessel found the men, the official said. (AP, 19/6/02)

June 19: Fidel Castro received at Havana's Palace of the Revolution, the delegation headed by His Royal Highness Ulukalala Lavaka Ata, Prime Minister of Tonga that is on an official visit. (Granma, 20/6/02)

June 20: Taiwan is expressing "strong support" for US President George W. Bush's new demands that Cuba allow free and fair elections and begin adopting meaningful economic reforms, the foreign ministry said. Bush's policy "is an effort to bring Cuba into the Western Hemisphere's community of democracies," Taiwanese Foreign Minister Eugene Chien said in a statement. (AP, 20/6/02)

June 20: Cuba and the Dominican Republic signed a cooperation agreement on health that provides for academic, scientific, technical and technological exchanges. (Notimex, 20/6/02)

June 20: A Miami-resident group of eleven Cuban doctors arrived in El Salvador to fight the dengue epidemic that affects that country. The intention of the group is to help bring to a halt the propagation of dengue in El Salvador. The Presidency of the Republic and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare made the arrangements for their arrival. (La Prensa, 21/6/02)

June 21: Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá, whose Varela Project hopes to bring democratic changes to Cuba, and the Organization of American States will receive the 2002 Democracy Award from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The award is presented "to those who exemplify a strong commitment to democracy, often at personal risk." Payá and OAS Secretary General César Gaviria will be honored at a ceremony in Washington later this year, the NDI said. (The Miami Herald, 21/6/02)

June 21: President Flores has not as yet responded to a group of Cuban dissident doctors in Angola who have requested to work in El Salvador. They are hoping that the government of Francisco Flores might "contract" their services to help combat the current dengue epidemic that affects that nation. The group remains in Angola and refuses to return to Cuba. (La Prensa, 21/6/02)

June 22: Uruguay's Foreign Minister, Didier Opertti, was confident that bilateral relations with Cuba would resume during the current presidential mandate of Jorge Batlle (2000-2005). (Notimex, 22/6/02)

June 24: Cuba has sent medical specialists who have been working in remote parts of Honduras since late-1998 to help fight dengue fever, the mosquito-borne disease. Some 214 Cuban doctors, who are rotated every six months, are working in poor areas of the country that lack health care facilities. The Honduran Health ministry has recorded 3,110 cases of dengue fever and 108 of the potentially fatal hemorrhagic dengue fever over the first six months of the year, officials said. (EFE, 24/6/02)

June 25: Trinidad and Tobago's Foreign Affairs Minister Knowlson W. Gift has arrived in Havana on an official visit at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. (BBC News, 28/6/02)

June 26: A Cambodian-registered ship loaded with two tons of cocaine and fired on by the French Navy two weeks ago, arrived under escort at a military port ending the first chapter in an international high seas drug trafficking drama. The 11 crew members aboard the Winner - two Greeks, four Romanians, three Ukrainians and two Chileans - were jailed on arrival at this Atlantic port. The cocaine had been loaded onto the Winner at sea, shortly after leaving Cuba. (Business Times, 28/6/02)

June 27: Cuba and Jamaica signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement to foster relations between the two countries in 11 areas, including agriculture, science, education, foreign trade, drug-trafficking, health and transport. (Notimex, 27/6/02)

June 27: At the third session of the Cuban Parliament debating a constitutional amendment to reaffirm the "untouchable" nature of socialism on the island, Fidel Castro referred to Uruguayan President as "subservient" and "weeping", without mentioning his name. (EFE, 27/6/02)

June 27: Though it remains the lone holdout after 77 developing countries signed cooperation and trade deals with the European Union, Cuba's "social, economic and political system is simply not negotiable," a senior Cuban official has said. "Everybody's position is perfectly clear, ours as well as theirs," said Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrizas, representing his country as "special observer" at the ministerial-level meeting of the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) bloc of nations. Cuba has not signed the loosely-worded pledge to respect democratic procedures and basic human rights required by the EU as a condition for granting the other countries preferential trade status and access to cooperation funding. (EFE, 28/6/02)

June 27: Members of Parliament of the National Action Party (PAN), to which President Vicente Fox belongs, initiated a campaign in the Mexican capital in support of dissident Osvaldo Payá's candidacy to the Nobel Peace Prize for 2002. Payá, of a Christian upbringing, has been a main promoter of the Varela Project by which democratic changes are sought after on the island. (AFP, 28/6/02)

June 28: Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs and current President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union (EU), Josep Piqué, called on Cuba to "comply with the requirements" in order to benefit from the EU assistance for development. "What needs to be done is to fulfill certain prerequisites if you want to be part of any group and the rest will behave accordingly", said Piqué before presiding over the ministerial meeting between the EU and the ACP group (African, Caribbean and Pacific states)-- to which Cuba belongs-- in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. (AFP, 29/6/02)

June 28: Trinidadian Foreign Minister, Knowlson Gift, proposed in Havana the creation of a joint Cuba-Trinidad & Tobago Commercial Company to promote bilateral trade. During a meeting with Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Marta Lomas, Gift said that this initiative would also facilitate Cuba's trade negotiations with the rest of the Caribbean. Gift also believes that his country could be a bridge to speed the signing of a commercial agreement between Cuba and the Caribbean Community. (Granma International, 29/6/02)

June 30: Fidel Castro said Russia had betrayed Cuba and formed an alliance with the US when Moscow severed agreements with the communist island after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. "I do not try to blame any one leader in particular. It was the fruit of its (Russia's) errors and the painful way in which it lost the ideological battle against the western capitalist and imperialist bourgeoisie, under the standard of the US." Castro said in speech. "Russia, allied with the United States, broke all the accords and betrayed Cuba," Castro said in the speech delivered to mark the recent renovation of more than 100 primary secondary schools in Havana. (AP, 30/6/02)

Security

June 5: Emerson (NYSE:EMR) announced its Emerson Network Power business has been awarded a series of orders totaling more than \$33 million for reliable power technology to upgrade and protect the intranet network serving 300 US Navy and Marine Corps bases throughout the United States, Iceland, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The orders are part of a \$6.9 billion program to upgrade the Navy and Marine Corps Intranet system - the largest federal information technology contract in history. The project is being managed by Dallas-based EDS (NYSE:EDS). (Business Wire, 5/6/02)

June 21: Cuban Armed Forces have started tactical military exercises and maneuvers in a time when the Cuban government has alleged that the US intends to impose belligerently its hegemonic power in the globe, particularly over third world nations. A brief note issued by the official press states that "the Revolutionary Armed Forces will commence today a range of military exercises and maneuvers which will continue until the first half of July as an end to the first phase of instruction of this year's preparedness for defense". (World Data Service, 21/6/02)

Terrorism

June 5: The United States believes that Cuba is developing biological weapons in at least a limited way, but Washington does not have direct evidence for the charge, a senior State Department official said. Carl W. Ford, Jr., the assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research, testifying before a Senate foreign relations subcommittee, acknowledged that the United States does not have "clear, incontrovertible proof." "We feel very confident about saying that they're working on an effort that would give them a limited BW offensive capability. And that's serious enough for us to tell you," he said. "If we didn't think that it was important (...) we would have looked at the evidence and said: 'This is all bogus and there's nothing here worth reporting,' " he added. (The New York Times, The Guardian, 5/6/02)

June 24: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement warning that terrorist Luis Posada Carriles could escape from the hospital where he has been sent by Panamanian authorities. "On previous occasions, when these terrorists have been transferred to hospitals without the necessary guards or adequate security, our government has charged that the terrorists' transfer to these facilities constitutes one of the steps in a possible escape, and has alerted Panamanian authorities about their responsibility to prevent these dangerous and sinister characters, supported and financed by a terrorist network in Central America and the United States, from avoiding justice." (Granma International, 24/6/02)

June 25: The defense of Luis Posada Carriles asked the Panamanian police to ensure the safety of its client, hospitalized for heart problems, fearing for his life or of being kidnapped and taken to Cuba. (Notimex, 25/6/02)

US-Cuba Relations

June 1: One of Governor Jeb Bush's top lieutenants is joining his brother's administration. Frank Jimenez, a Cuban-American born in Puerto Rico who moved to Miami when he was 3, will become chief of staff to U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez. (The Miami Herald, 31/5/02)

June 1: Referring to US President George W. Bush as "Mr. W.," Fidel Castro lashed out at Bush's recent Cuba policy speeches at an enormous government-sponsored rally. Refuting Bush's demands that Cuba be a country that allows for private enterprise and private property, Castro said the Cuban Revolution has turned the Cuban people into the true proprietors of their own country. Speaking before hundreds of thousands of people in a drenching rain, Fidel Castro said the democracy President Bush wants to see in Cuba would be a corrupt and unfair system that ignores the poor. (CNN, AP, 1/6/02)

June 5: For the first time in more than 40 years, the finals of the Cuban Baseball League are to be shown on US television. The Cuban Government has allowed a Brazilian corporation, Tampico and Co., to make the deal with the American broadcaster, TVN Entertainment. The games will be shown with commentaries in Spanish and English, and are expected to reach a potential audience of around 27 million viewers through pay-for-view channels. Cuba produces some of the world's best baseball players and its league is considered second only to the US. (World Data Service, BBC News, 5/6/02)

June 5: The government of Cuba has provided final approval for PWN Exhibicon International LLC (PWN Exhibicon) to schedule the first United States government authorized U.S. Food & Agribusiness Exhibition in Havana, Cuba, in 2002. Products which may be featured at the U.S. Food & Agribusiness Exhibition include, but are not limited to: commodities; food (snack, food service, etc.); feed; fish, shellfish and fish products; beer, wine and spirits; soft drinks; livestock; fiber, including cotton, wool and other fibers; tobacco and tobacco products; wood and wood products, including lumber and utility poles; seeds; reproductive materials such as fertilized eggs, embryos, and semen; vitamins, minerals, food additives and dietary supplements; bottled water; and some fertilizers. In 2001, PWN Exhibicon became the first and only U.S. company to be issued a license by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury to conduct a U.S. Food & Agribusiness Exhibition in Havana. (US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, 5/6/02)

June 5: Vicki Huddleston, the top American diplomat in Cuba, has been nominated by US President George W. Bush as ambassador to Mali and will be replaced in Havana by James Cason, a longtime Department of State official. Cason serves in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs in Washington. His appointment does not require senatorial confirmation and he is expected to be at his new post at the end of Huddleston's tour duty in mid-September. (The Miami Herald, 5/6/02)

June 6: Eight Cubans who reached the U.S. Virgin Islands by boat said that Radio Martí broadcasts led them to believe they could legally immigrate if they landed at the shore. The eight were among 13 Cubans who arrived at this U.S. territory after a two-day journey from the communist island. (AP, 7/6/02)

June 8: Fidel Castro said that the US is ruling world politics under Nazi methods. "The power and prerogatives of that country's President are so extensive, and the economic, technological and

military power network in that nation is so pervasive that due to circumstances that fully escape the will of the American people, the world is coming under the rule of Nazi concepts and methods." Castro made the remarks before over half a million people who gathered in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba, the second most important city of the island. This is the third consecutive week that Castro censured Bush after attending several rallies in the cities of Sancti Spiritus and Holguin. (World, Data Service, Xinhua, 8/6/02)

June 10: Officials from Cuba pitched their Communist country as a hotbed for biotechnology. Cuba's big successes so far have been with genetically engineered vaccines, one for hepatitis B and another for meningitis, which the U.S. is poised to import despite its 40-year-old economic embargo against the Caribbean island nation, because no similar vaccines exist. (The Globe and Mail, 11/6/02)

June 10: The US Senate unanimously passed a resolution backing the Varela Project. "If Castro is serious about his constitution, he would hold a referendum on reforms outlined in the Varela Project," said US Republican Jeff Flake, a member of the House International Relations Committee and of the newly formed House Cuba Working Group, which favors easing sanctions against the island. Flake, who spoke in Washington, is chief Republican co-sponsor of the House resolution that praises Cubans who signed the Varela Project. (AP, 13/6/02)

June 11: Two groups of Cuban migrants totaling 43 people landed in the Florida Keys, US Border Patrol officials said. The first group of 23 migrants -- 11 men, five women, six boys and a girl -- was found south of Key Largo. They told authorities they had been smuggled. A second group of 10 men, six women, two girls and two boys landed in the mangroves at Long Key State Park, said US Coast Guard spokeswoman Angela Caldwell. (The Miami Herald, 12/6/02)

June 12: Cuba is buying 22-hundred tons of dry peas from North Dakota. Senator Byron Dorgan says it's the first time in 40 years North Dakota farm goods have been sold to that country. The North Dakota Democrat says Alimport, the agency that buys food for Cuba, bought the peas from three companies. He also says sales of black beans and pintos are expected to be announced soon. Food sales are allowed under an exception to the U-S trade embargo with Cuba. (AP, 12/6/02)

June 13: Fidel Castro bowed to US accusations of running a totalitarian regime -- noting that it has "total support of the population." US State Department spokesman Philip Reeker sneered at a recent string of mass protests in Cuba against US foreign policy, deriding them as a sign that Castro was growing desperate in the face of challenges to his leadership. "Totalitarian governments like that of Mr Castro specialize in these mega-rallies," Reeker said. "He is right, or at least partially right," Castro said, "because the revolutionary Cuban government has the total support of the population." (AFP, 14/6/02)

June 13: Charter flights from the west coast of Florida to Cuba could begin in July, an airport spokeswoman said. Elaine Smalling, marketing director for St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport, was quoted in the Internet edition of the Tampa Tribune as saying that Robert Curtis had been issued a federal license to operate flights to Cuba under the name Air Marbrisas. The charter carrier expects to start flying passengers and light cargo between the west coast of Florida and four cities in Cuba, including Havana, in July. (EFE, 13/6/02)

June 14: The United States dismissed Fidel Castro's campaign for signatures supporting the communist system, saying he was trying to obscure popular support for a reform petition through a popular referendum known as the Varela Project. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker agreed. "Instead of addressing this peaceful plea for change, Castro has chosen to manufacture an alternative petition supporting the current constitution and to intimidate the population into signing it," he told a daily briefing. He added: "Obviously, given Castro's control over the Cuban

population, he is no doubt going to try to get more signatures on this than on Project Varela. "No matter what the outcome, he's not going to be able to obscure the fact that one important thing has occurred with Project Varela, and that's it's succeeded in getting 11,000 Cubans to brave Castro's tyranny and to call for change." (Reuters, 14/6/02)

June 15: As the new chief of the US Interests Section in Havana, James Cason plans to expand the outreach programs with dissidents on the island and come up with "creative ways" to foment change from within. "I've worked under dictatorships just about everywhere I've been," said Cason, 57. "I was in Uruguay when there was a dictator. I was in Panama when [Manuel] Noriega was in charge. I was in Portugal during the dictatorship there. So I'm aware of dictators and the kinds of things they do." "I don't want to tip my hand before I get down there (...). But I plan to be creative and active and vigorous." (The Miami Herald, 15/6/02)

June 17: US and Cuban officials are to meet in New York for migration talks during which the United States is to renew complaints that Havana is not allowing Cubans with valid US visas to leave the country, the State Department said. "This meeting will review the implementation of the existing migration accords," the department said in a statement, noting that the talks would be the 17th round of semi-annual discussions that began in 1994. "The United States is committed to full implementation of the migration accords," it said. "While the accords have largely achieved their central purpose of encouraging safe, legal and orderly migration between our two countries, we will again voice our concerns over remaining Cuban barriers to the legal departure of Cubans as called for in the accords," the statement said. (AFP, 18/6/02)

June 18: A Cuban man facing deportation for allegedly spying on behalf of Fidel Castro's government will continue to be held without bond at the Krome Detention Center in Southwest Miami-Dade. Lawyers for both the government and Juan Aboy said after a closed hearing that an immigration judge declared he had no jurisdiction over whether to grant bond for Aboy -- taken into custody last month on allegations he was part of the Wasp Network, a Cuban spy ring cracked by US officials in 1998. Lawyers for Juan Emilio Aboy admit that their client, while employed as a commercial diver, plunged into a vat in a nuclear reactor at Turkey Point and installed a drainage pipe around Miami International Airport. But they say that does not prove Aboy was also working as a spy for the Cuban government. (The Miami Herald, 18/6/02)

June 18: A Cuban intelligence chief asked a retired commander of the Southern Command earlier this year how Havana might help speed the release of the spies captured in South Florida for, among other things, trying to infiltrate Southcom. Retired Marine General Charles Wilhelm's reply: Wait, they were convicted in a fair trial. Wilhelm divulged the conversation with General Jesús Bermúdez Cutiño during a talk on Cuba at Florida International University. Wilhelm argued for improved Cuban-U.S. military cooperation. (The Miami Herald, 19/6/02)

June 19: The United States is seeking the deportation of Cuban citizen Juan Emilio Aboy, for being a member of the "Wasp Network", the largest spying network uncovered in 1998, confirmed official sources. Juan Emilio Aboy has not been accused of any crime nor is he facing any criminal charges; however, the US government is trying to deport him arguing that he did not disclose he was a foreign agent when applied for residency in that country. (Notimex, 19/6/02)

June 20: The United States has renewed a complaint with Cuba about that country's alleged refusal to grant exit permits to many Cubans found to be eligible for US visas, the State Department said. The issue was raised during talks on migration issues between the two sides in New York. The US delegation also said that some migrants repatriated to Cuba by the US are mistreated, the State Department said. It also called on Cuba to permit the repatriation of Cubans in the US who are ineligible to remain because of criminal activities. The US delegation was headed by Deputy Assistant Secretary Dan Fisk. The Cuban team was led by Rafael Dausá, North America Director in the Ministry of External Affairs. (AP, 20/6/02)

June 20: Accused Cuban spy Juan Emilio Aboy adamantly denied federal allegations that he was a covert agent for the Fidel Castro government and a member of a Cuban spy ring dismantled by the FBI in Miami four years ago. "Someone is trying to frame me," Aboy, 41, said in his first interview since federal immigration agents arrested him at his southwest Miami home. "I never came to this country to spy. Never in my life, did I come here to spy. No one sent me here to spy. The government of Cuba did not send me here to spy. I escaped from Cuba on a boat." (The Miami Herald, 21/6/02)

June 21: Seven Cuban migrants who were lost at sea for two days aboard a 16-foot boat were returned to Cuba by the US Coast Guard. The group's journey was a little different from most. The vessel's captain, Pedro Orestes Reyes Matos, had a 20-watt ham radio aboard the boat that allowed him to communicate with a group of ham radio operators affiliated with the Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue. [For more on this, see section Cuban Exiles.] (The Miami Herald, 22/6/02)

June 24: Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban National Assembly, has advised US President George W. Bush to "listen to the opinions of the US people" with the same attention that he reserves for the large corporations and his "Miami mafia terrorist friends". Addressing the National Assembly, during the special session called to debate the constitution modification initiative, Alarcón added that Mr. Bush had "gravely offended the Cuban people", above all by his "insolent ignorance of Cuban national independence", by his promise to intensify economic warfare and internal subversion – with the announcement of direct funding for his "employed servants" - and even the threat of military aggression. (Granma International, 25/6/02)

June 25: Congressman Jeff Flake, a member of the bipartisan, forty-four member House Cuba Working Group, announced a bill to lift the ban on Americans from travel to Cuba. The announcement of the bill is timed with the release of a new study commissioned by the Cuba Policy Foundation that reveals the potential economic benefits to the US economy of Americans traveling to Cuba. The results of the study demonstrates that, "the ban on travel to Cuba hurts the US economy, and lifting the travel ban would provide a much-needed source of growth to the US travel sector, particularly the troubled airline industry," according to Ambassador Sally Grooms Cowal of the Cuba Policy Foundation. (Cuba Policy Foundation, 25/6/02)

June 26: The Bush administration is planning to offer scholarships to Cuban students and professionals, hoping the skills they acquire will be useful if and when the island embarks on a democratic path. When the US diplomatic mission in Cuba passed word of the plan recently, long lines formed outside the building, causing traffic problems. The Cuban Foreign Ministry held the mission responsible and lodged a diplomatic rebuke. President Bush mentioned the plan in a speech last month, indicating some scholarships would go to relatives of Cuban political prisoners. (AP, 26/6/02)

June 26: In a response to President Bush's policy speech in Miami, Fidel Castro rejected his American counterpart's vision for putting Cuba on a "path to freedom" and warned that the migratory accords and US Interests Section in Havana could be jeopardized. (Sun Sentinel, 26/6/02)

June 27: The State Department defended US diplomats in Cuba against charges by Fidel Castro that they are violating the country's sovereignty. Spokesman Richard Boucher called the US mission in Havana "a vital link to the Cuban people," providing them information on such issues as democratic development and open markets. Boucher also said the migration agreements between the US and Cuba have provided safe passage for Cubans who want to come to the United States. "Moving away from this system would be a mistake and dangerous for the Cuban people," Boucher said. (The Washington Post, 28/6/02)

June 27: Florida Governor, Jeb Bush, said that any action on the part of Fidel Castro regime that may lead to a mass exodus of Cubans to the U.S. would be seen as an “act of aggression” against that country. The also brother of President George W. Bush criticized Castro’s statements regarding the likelihood of dissolving bilateral migration accords and the closing of the United States Interest Section in Cuba. (Notimex, 27/6/02)

June 28: Three Cuban migrants who leaped from a boat that had brought them over the Florida Strait swam the last mile to shore, but others in the same group were seized by the Coast Guard and returned to Cuba, authorities said. (Reuters, 29/6/02)

June 28: According to reports, approximately 100 Americans including university students and academics are in Cuba to “discuss” political, cultural and national identity issues as well as economic and educational topics. The visitors come from 20 U.S. universities and their objective is to “analyze and look closer” at this island ruled by a communist based system. (World Data Service, 28/6/02)

© 2002 FOCAL Research Forum on Cuba