

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba July 2002

Domestic Affairs

July 2: The first regular session of the National Assembly called since organizers of the Varela Project delivered more than 11,000 signatures to the Cuban unicameral parliament seeking a referendum was suspended without explanation. A short note on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma said only that the regular parliamentary session scheduled for July 5 had been "suspended until a future date." The National Assembly had not announced an agenda for the meeting, but it has not responded publicly to the petitions that organizers of the Varela Project delivered on May 10. (AP, 2/7/02)

July 3: The number of Cubans behind bars for political reasons rose by 20 to 230 people in the first half of this year, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said. The rise ended a downward trend during the last decade and was due to increased political repression on the island, mainly in February and March, it said. The commission, headed by veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez, is a dissident group with no legal recognition in communist-ruled Cuba but is tolerated by Fidel Castro's government. (Reuters, 3/7/02)

July 3: Cuban dissident Vladimiro Roca said rumors of another Mariel-style exodus were sparked by Castro's own remarks when he said US political interference in Cuba could sink the migration accords. "The government knows there is a lot of discontent and pressure is growing, and the mass exodus is an escape valve," said Roca, who was freed in May after almost five years in jail. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (Reuters, 4/7/02)

July 6: Five Cuban baseball stars have received permission from the communist government to play or coach teams in Japan for the rest of this season, the official newspaper Granma reported. The special permission is "recognition of the years dedicated by these five athletes to active sports, to the glories they have given to Cuban baseball and their exemplary conduct," said the article in Granma. Third baseman Omar Linares will play with the Chunichi Dragons. First baseman Orestes Kindelán, with nearly 400 home runs in his career, will play with the amateur team Sidas, as will second baseman Antonio Pacheco. Outfielder Luis Ulacia will work as a coach, as will pitcher German Mesa. Granma did not say which teams they would be coaching. There are no professional sports in Cuba and athletes depend on their federations to negotiate agreements that allow them to temporarily play with or coach teams in other countries. (AP, 6/7/02)

July 8: Cuban poet and writer Cintio Vitier was named winner of the prestigious Ibero American Juan Rufo Prize for literature. "I didn't expect anything like this," Vitier said by telephone relay during the announcement ceremony. "It has really moved me." Vitier, 80, is one of Cuba's most-honored writers and critics. The award jury called him "one of the most important writers of his generation" and said he was "an authentic humanist." His works include prose such as "From Peña Pobre," volumes of poems such as "Evenings" and "Testimonies" and books of criticism of literature and culture. Vitier is known as a devout Catholic layman as well as a loyal revolutionary. (AP, 8/7/02)

July 10: Cuba will hold elections within three months to choose deputies to its National Assembly as well as provincial and municipal representatives, Fidel Castro said. The Cuban news agency Prensa Latina said the municipal elections were set for October 20. The date of balloting for National Assembly deputies and provincial leaders will be announced later, the news agency said, citing a report on state television. Cuba's constitution calls for elections at the national and provincial level every five years. The last parliamentary elections were in 1997. (AP, 10/7/02)

July 10: Cuba is marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of its national poet, Nicolás Guillén with a series of activities, including a concert organized by Havana's Casa de las Americas cultural institution and an international colloquium called "Dulce María Loynaz, Nicolás Guillén and the poetry of Spanish speaking countries in the 20th century", in which Jamaican researcher Keith Ellis presented a paper on the work of Cuba's national poet. (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/7/02)

July 15: Cuban Minister of Public Health, Carlos Dotres Martínez, was replaced from his post following Fidel Castro's proposal to the Council of State. According to an official note "new and significant advancements in the field of health are required". Dotres' likely substitution had already been rumoured, especially in the wake of the dengue campaign that began five months ago. (World Data Service, 15/7/02)

July 16: In an unusual reference to drug consumption and prostitution on the island, Fidel Castro said his government would adopt "intelligent" measures to prevent them. "We do not walk away from a fight and the necessary measures will be taken, but not in an abrupt fashion", since these types of problems require "intelligent solutions", said Castro in a speech broadcast on Cuban television. (Notimex, 17/7/02)

July 19: Saetia Key will become the Pioneers Campground "Island of Children". Saetia Key is a park of 42 square kilometres north of Holguín province, which for years had been the private game reserves of Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl. (The Miami Herald, 21/7/02)

July 19: Juan Carlos González, a blind political activist jailed in March, presses fight for human rights in Cuba. Mr. González, a 37-year-old lawyer, is among the scores of dissidents working to bring change to this country. His imprisonment, virtually unknown inside Cuba, has sparked indignation among human-rights activists and the blind as far away as Washington, Brussels, and Capetown. Cuban authorities accuse Mr. González of public disorder and "disrespect," offenses punishable by up to three years in jail. He has not yet been tried. He is now in a prison in Holguín, 200 miles from home. He says his health is deteriorating, and he's convinced he'll never make it out of jail alive, said his wife, Maritza Calderín. Cuba has not let the Red Cross inspect prisons since 1989. The World Blind Union, which says it represents 180 million blind and visually impaired people in 162 countries, has sent two letters of protest to the Cuban government. (The Dallas Morning News, 19/7/02)

July 23: Cuban migratory service officials recently denied prominent dissident Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz a temporary exit visa to attend a Latin American Human Rights Congress July 23-25 in Guatemala. Sánchez had been invited to attend the event and had the appropriate visas to enter Guatemala. Sánchez is the president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (UPECI, 23/7/02)

July 26: Cuban authorities are immersed in intense efforts aimed at renovating schools. In the City of Havana alone, with more than two million people, around 200 schools are being refurbished. For the next school year to commence in September there will be new "professors-training-on-the-job" to increase the number of teaching staff. These are, in most cases, recent young graduates from high school (grade 9). (World Data Service, 26/7/02)

July 28: A large fire destroyed 330 hectares of the "Alejandro de Humboldt" natural park- the most important of the Cuban system of natural protected areas and declared World Heritage Site in 2001- informed a local radio station. The park is located in the municipality of Yateras, in the Guantánamo province. (Notimex, 28/7/02)

July 30: Speculation is mounting that Cuba's charismatic former foreign minister, Roberto Robaina, has been kicked out of the country's Communist Party. Mr Robaina was dismissed as foreign minister in 1999. No reason was ever given for his fall from Castro's grace, but now a

video shown to party leaders which addresses the subject reportedly asserts Mr Robaina was "disloyal to the revolution". Party members who watched the undated two-hour tape told foreign news agencies and the Mexican daily La Jornada that Robaina, 46, was accused of dishonesty in his relations with foreign officials and business people. It was not clear whether criminal or civil charges were filed against Robaina. Mr Robaina was a gregarious and popular minister, widely seen as a potential successor to Fidel Castro. But in the video, Castro's brother, Raul, reportedly rebukes Mr Robaina for his close ties to international political figures as well as foreign reporters in the 1990s. In particular he is said to be taken to task over unauthorised contacts with former Spanish foreign minister Abel Matutes. He is also charged with accepting favours from former Mexican governor Mario Villanueva, who is currently under investigation for alleged links to a drug cartel. And the video reportedly condemns Mr Robaina for seeking the advice of television image consultants with an eye towards his future in a post-Castro era. In addition to being booted from the party, the party elite has also reportedly recommended that Mr Robaina be stripped off his seat in the National Assembly. Robaina also was barred from any kind of leadership role. (BBC News, The Miami Herald, 1/8/02)

Economy

July 3: Cuban Energy Ministry data showed that crude oil exports fell by 150,000 barrels per day in June. However, industry sources and traders said exports actually rose, but the government was not counting secret oil-shipment schemes. Informed traders estimated that exports increased 50 000 bpd in June if an extra 200 000 bpd of crude exports allocated to finance the shutdown of a Cold War-era spy base in Cuba was counted among June exports. They said the government's exclusion of shipments made under a special program for Cuba showed that Russia, the world's second-largest oil exporter, kept ramping up exports to gradually ease supply curbs it had agreed with OPEC to hold up prices in the first half of the year. "June was a very good month in terms of the weather in the main ports, so I can't see how exports can be down an astonishing 150,000 bpd. It must be due to the Cuban program," a senior Moscow-based Western trader said. (Reuters, 3/7/02)

July 5: Amid financial difficulties, Cuba forecasts a reduction in its oil imports for the generation of electricity in the second semester of the year. "During the months of June to October, it is necessary to tighten control and reduce oil imports for the generation of electricity", said an article published in the official Cuban daily Granma. No figures were given as to how much the reduction would be or how much they have been in recent months. (AP, 5/7/02)

July 6: Trinidad and Tobago announced plans to run an undersea natural gas pipeline throughout the Caribbean, saying the project would open new markets in the region. Trinidadian Prime Minister Patrick Manning said the project could extend to Guyana and perhaps even the Dominican Republic and Cuba, which have a combined population of about 18 million. (AP, 6/7/02)

July 8: Some 100 000 workers in the Cuban sugar sector will have to find new jobs. The workers will need to find employment in other sectors as part of the island nation's plan to restructure its sugar industry, officials said. Manuel Cordero, leader of the National Sugar Industry Workers Union, told the press that "although there is a logical concern regarding wages, we guarantee that all sugar workers will continue to receive these (wages) wherever they are placed." The Cuban sugar industry employs some 400,000 workers, and it is estimated that some two million people depend directly or indirectly on these wages to survive. (EFE, 8/7/02)

July 9: The Cuban government has started implementing measures to put a halt on counterfeiting of Cuban cigars. Among the new measures are limiting the number of cigars that can be purchased; compulsory declaration of all exports of more than three boxes, regardless of the

brand; required that purchase receipts are presented at customs; and a new security feature inside the boxes impossible to reproduce or imitate. (Notimex, 9/7/02)

July 10: Sol Meliá, Spain's largest hotel group, launched its own package tour operator under the name of Meliá Tour, which at present offers trips to Europe, Tunisia, Cuba, the Balearics and the Canary Islands. The tour operator is determined to strengthen its market presence in Cuba. (Financial Times, 10/7/02)

July 12: Cuba and China have agreed to build one hotel in Havana and another in Shanghai, marking the first joint tourism project between the two nations, officials said. The hotel in Cuba will be built at Hemingway Marina, west of Havana. (EFE, 12/7/02)

July 22: Venezuela will resume vital oil shipments to Cuba in the first week of August after a four-month suspension, the two governments announced. The shipments of 53,000 barrels a day on favorable financing terms was suspended in April during the brief overthrow of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. "The difficulties have been overcome and there is an agreement to restart the oil shipments as of the 1st of August," Venezuelan Trade Minister Ramon Rosales said in Havana. (Reuters, 22/7/02)

July 22: This year it will take Cuba longer to reach one million tourists due to the current economic recession and the decline of international tourist flows, forecast Cuban authorities. Last year Cuba reached one million visitors during the first six months while this year it will take seven months, said Cuban Minister of Tourism, Ibrahim Ferradaz. He added that the number of tourists that have visited the island is below what the country wished for due in part to the recession of world markets and the lower numbers of tourists globally. (El Nuevo Herald, 23/7/02)

July 24: Venezuelan and Libyan oil officials have discussed the viability of investing in an idle Soviet-built Cuban oil refinery, although the project was previously rejected by Venezuela, the head of the South American country's state oil firm said. Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) President Ali Rodríguez said experts from his company had shared information with visiting Libyan National Oil Company officials about the Cienfuegos refinery, located on Cuba's south-central coast. "The Libyan side was interested in receiving the information that we had," Rodríguez said. He added the Libyan delegation, which had held two days of consultations with PDVSA in Caracas, had flown on to Cuba to continue their study of the Cienfuegos project. (Gulf News, 26/7/02)

July 24: Eight of the twenty-one sugar mills in the province of Matanzas will continue operating as part of a restructuring program of the sugar industry in Cuba. Out of the eight, six will continue producing sugar, while the rest will be converted to produce molasses. One sugar mill will be used for tourism. The remaining facilities will be dismantled and the parts will be used for maintenance and repairs of those that will remain in operation. (Opciones, 24/7/02)

July 25: The majority of the company board of Venezuela's state-owned oil monopoly Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) opposes the plan to renew shipments of 53,000 barrels of crude a day to Cuba, the local daily El Nacional reported. The board wants first a solid guarantee the Cuban government will honor its payments before resuming shipments, El Nacional quoted company officials as saying. According to PDVSA, Cuba owes the company \$142 million. PDVSA officials couldn't be reached for additional comment. (Dow Jones, 25/7/02)

July 25: The President of Venezuela's state-owned oil company, PDVSA, Alí Rodríguez, said that oil supplies to Cuba would be restarted on August 1, following a decision adopted during a meeting of stockholders. Rodríguez acknowledged that during a company board meeting "there had been some concerns that were sent to Ministry of Energy and Mines; however, the shipments will resume". Rodríguez also stated that "Venezuela and Cuba have agreed on a new payment

arrangement to guarantee both the collection of \$142 million that Cuba's oil company (Cuba Petróleo) owes to PDVSA, and to renew the shipment of 53,000 barrels of crude a day to Cuba. (EI Nacional, 26/7/02)

July 26: The Attorney's Office of Sens, France, has opened an investigation on the oil-related activities of French entrepreneur Gérard Bourgoïn in Cuba, confirmed judicial sources. Authorities suspect that Bourgoïn, known in France as "The King of Chicken" (he is President of a leading poultry meat company) is hiding some of the benefits obtained from the oil company Pebercan to avoid paying his creditors. In 1993, Bourgoïn created this oil exploration company in Cuba, with Fidel Castro's consent. (Notimex, 26/7/02)

July 29: Sources informed that several wealthy Israelis have been showing interest in Cuban investments, despite the country's dictatorship. They apparently believe there will be a regime change within a few years in the island. (BBC News, 29/7/02)

July 29: Cuba has seen more than 1 million foreign tourists arrive in the country since the beginning of this year, a surprising rise considering the fall in international tourism against the backdrop of world economic recession, Cuban Tourism Minister Ibrahim Ferradaz said. Ferradaz said the figure was released four weeks after it was originally estimated, and predicted that the flow of tourists would continue to grow in the second half of this year. (Xinhua, 29/7/02)

Exile Community

July 3: In response to rumors that Cubans might take to the seas in a mass exodus, Brothers to the Rescue announced that it would suspend its search-and-rescue missions if that occurred. José Basulto, president of the group that patrols the Florida Straits in search of Cuban migrants, said any mass exodus would be engineered by Fidel Castro and they discourage Cubans on the island from participating. "We ask our Cuban brothers on the island who are facing that predicament to also say no," Basulto said. Brothers to the Rescue pleads with you not to play into Castro's hands because if you do we will not be there for you." [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs and US-Cuba Relations.] (Sun Sentinel, 3/7/02)

July 3: Despite historical precedents for mass-departures, Cuban-American Miami Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said she does not think the Cuban government has any interest in allowing a new exodus. Ros-Lehtinen said Fidel Castro makes mistakes, but is not stupid. She said a mass-exodus would be a dangerous thing for the Cuban leader, something he could not control. The congresswoman also said it could provoke a US naval blockade of Cuba, a cut-off of monetary remittances from the United States and a tightening of the US economic embargo of the island. (Voice of America Radio, 4/7/02)

July 8: Cuban exiles seeking an indictment of Cuban leader Fidel Castro in Belgium are undaunted by a Belgian appeals court ruling that dismissed a war crimes complaint against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. "We're confident that our case will be able to proceed," said Larry Klayman, chairman of the conservative watchdog group Judicial Watch and attorney for the Cubans who have filed the human rights complaint against Castro in Belgium. The exiles are hoping to use a controversial law that allows prosecution of foreigners in Belgium for human rights violations committed anywhere in the world. (Sun Sentinel, 8/7/02)

July 9: US Governor Jeb Bush named a grandson of former Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista as the first Hispanic on the Florida Supreme Court. Raoul Cantero III, a Miami attorney and Harvard Law School graduate, replaces Justice Major Harding, who is retiring after 11 years. "I have named a person who is one of the finest appellate lawyers in the state," Bush said. "Above all else, Raoul is a man of exceptional character." Cantero, 41, was born in Spain to parents who

had fled Cuba after his mother's father, Batista, was overthrown by Fidel Castro in 1959. (AP, 9/7/02)

July 15: A man whose father was a Cuban political prisoner cleared the initial round of jury selection in the trial of a reputed Cuban torturer charged with lying about his past to get US citizenship. Defendant Eriberto Mederos has been identified by former prisoners as a Cuban psychiatric hospital nurse who administered electroshock on them as punishment for their political activities. Mederos, 79, who is listening to the trial through Spanish interpreters, faces a possible 10-year prison sentence and deportation if convicted of illegally obtaining citizenship. (AP, 15/7/02)

July 22: Former psychiatric nurse Eriberto Mederos, on trial for allegedly torturing political prisoners in Cuba between 1968 and 1978, left the federal court building in Miami under special protection after receiving a death threat. Mederos, who has been charged with lying about his past to obtain US citizenship, concedes he gave electroshock treatments but says he did so only by medical prescription, never as a method of torture. (The Miami Herald, 23/7/02)

July 22: The leader of an anti-Castro group said it has sent about \$1 million in cash, computers and other aid to dissidents and families in Cuba over the past 18 months. Jorge Mas Santos said the Cuban American National Foundation is using Puerto Rico and Mexico as staging centers, and it has a network of hundreds of dissidents representing every province in Cuba. He declined to provide a breakdown of the assistance. "Cash is not the majority of it," he said. "We've sent a lot of computers, a lot of faxes, a lot of books for the independent libraries." (AP, 22/7/02)

July 25: The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) expressed profound disappointment with the results of votes on various amendments to ease restrictions on Cuba's communist regime inserted into the Treasury Postal appropriations bill. "We will continue to work with our friends in the Congress throughout this process to ensure that US policy protects the security of our country's citizens and doesn't directly or indirectly support a terrorist nation only 90 miles from our shores," said Ambassador Dennis Hays, executive vice-president of the Cuban American National Foundation. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (US Newswire, 25/7/02)

July 29: Joe Garcia, a leader of the Cuban American National Foundation, confirmed Alcibiades Hidalgo's defection. Garcia said Hidalgo was once chief of staff in the office of Raul Castro, Castro's younger brother and no. 2 in the Cuban Communist Party, who is also the president's designated successor. A former member of the Communist Party's Central Committee, Hidalgo was a negotiator for Cuba in talks on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, and former ambassador to the UN. Garcia said that whatever Hidalgo's past, which might arouse negative feelings among some Cuban Americans, the former government official was just now one more Cuban among the many who come to the United States. "We welcome him and move forward," Garcia said. [For more on this, see section US-Cuba Relations.] (Reuters, 29/7/02)

July 29: The US Senate confirmed Miami lawyer and Cuban immigrant Marcos Daniel Jiménez to become the next US attorney for the Southern District of Florida. Jiménez, who moved to Miami as a child, said he received a phone call from the Justice Department telling him he will officially take over the most powerful law enforcement job in South Florida after President Bush formally signs his commission. (The Miami Herald, 30/7/02)

July 30: Ismael Sambra, president of the Cuban Canadian Foundation, which is helping a group of 23 Cuban defectors to Canada, said many Cuban-Canadians have called his organization during the past two days to offer congratulations and help. The defectors, who are described as professionals in their 20s, escaped the watch of Cuban security police as Pope John Paul delivered a mass to 800,000 people in Toronto. "The Cuban community here in Canada is helping us," he said. "They are happy to do so." "They believe in their future. It's a good feeling all

around." "Freedom to express religious and political ideas -- this is what they seek," Samba said of the pilgrims. Joe Garcia, executive director of the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation, which is assisting the Canadian exile group, said of the defectors: "They don't feel safe coming out until the entire Cuban delegation returns to the island." CANF will help provide attorneys for the men and women as they prepare to file their claims for political asylum claims in Canada. "We have offered them any help they need," said Omar Lopez Montenegro, who works with the human-rights branch of the foundation. [For more on this, see section Foreign Affairs.] (The Globe and Mail, The Miami Herald, 30/7/02)

Foreign Affairs

July 1: French police has initiated a training course for Cuban police on drug trafficking and money laundering, according to an announcement made in Havana. Specialist from the French Judicial Police are interested in "passing their experiences in fighting these types of crime to Cuban experts of the Ministry of Interior." (World Data Service, 1/7/02)

July 1: Panama Foreign Minister, José Miguel Alemán, and his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque, met in Panama to review the two countries bilateral political and diplomatic relations after the blow suffered in the case of anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles, said diplomatic sources. [For more on this, see section Terrorism.] (AFP, 1/7/02)

July 2: Cuba looks set to introduce traditional Chinese medicines to the virtually virgin market of Latin America, after signing letters of intent with nine Chinese provinces and municipalities. Under the agreement, provinces like Gansu, Shandong and Sichuan will cooperate with Cuba in such fields as technology for making medicines and the cultivation of medicinal plants. (Xinhua, 2/7/02)

July 4: During a seminar at the European Parliament, that institution sent a message to the Cuban government urging for democratization on the island. The President of the European Parliament, liberal Pat Cox, said that "the European Union has always encouraged Cuba's transition towards a democracy that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms." However, he regretted "deeply" that anti-democratic acts are still being committed like the refusal to grant exit permit to four opposition leaders that had been invited to attend the seminar. (EFE, 5/7/02)

July 5: Cuba's Vice President Jose Ramon Balaguer called on Tehran and Havana to expand their cooperation in the face of US opposition and accusations against the two countries. His remarks were made at a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Cuba Davoud Salehi in Havana at the end of the latter's mission in that South American country. "America is apprehensive about the close ties between Iran and Cuba. Thus, it is trying to portray the humanitarian cooperation of the two countries in a bad light," he said. (Teheran Times, 7/7/02)

July 6: Venezuela's 191st Independence Anniversary was celebrated in Cuba. When speaking during the act, Venezuelan Military Attache in Cuba colonel Kerman Rodriguez assured that the defeat of the April coup d'etat in his country will pass into Latin American history as a reference point for social conquest. Juan Almeida Bosque, commander of the Cuban Revolution, and other political and cultural figures attended the act at Cuba's Hotel Nacional. (Prensa Latina, 6/7/02)

July 7: Göran Holmström, Chairman of the Council for Democracy and Development of the Christian Democratic Party of Sweden, reveals in a party publication the willingness of the Swedish Christian democrats to collaborate with their Cuban brothers of the Christian Liberation Movement (Movimiento Critiano Liberación - MCL). (Revista Cuba Nuestra, 8/7/02)

July 8: The Cuban government sent a team of entomologists and epidemiologists to Honduras to aid local authorities in the fight against the deadly dengue fever that affects that country, said the health ministry in Tegucigalpa. (Notimex, 8/7/02)

July 10: Experts from Cuba and other Caribbean countries are giving an advanced course in Havana on combating drug operations, the state-run daily Granma reported. The course, sponsored by the British Embassy to Cuba, is part of a British-Cuban cooperation on their joint anti-narcotics war in the Caribbean, the newspaper said. (Xinhua, 10/7/02)

July 11: A Cuban physicist living in Brazil is appealing to international human rights bodies in an effort to gain re-entry to his homeland to meet his three-year-old son. The Cuban government, in violation of international accords on the right-of-return, denies entry to its citizens who remained abroad following completion of government-supported study or work programs. Considering them deserters, Havana says such individuals must wait at least five years to return, and then will only be allowed to stay 21 days. Juan López Linares, 31, filed a complaint with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and reported his case to such organizations as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House and Transparency International. (EFE, 12/7/02)

July 13: The BBC is reporting that a number of British politicians have joined the campaign to seek a retrial of the five Cuban spies incarcerated in the United States. One of the US lawyers involved in the trial of the five is lobbying members of the British House of Commons to intercede on their behalf. Paul McKenna has met with MP Jeremy Corbin who has been actively campaigning for the release of the five in England. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/7/02)

July 13: Tokyo has started its governmental technical assistance to Cuba for the cleaning up of the Bay of Havana. Japan has also donated 601 television programs, worth 36 million yens (\$303,465 USD), to the ICRT, the official Cuban TV company. (World Data Service, 13/7/02)

July 15: Latin-America should come together as soon as possible to participate in the important decisions that are shaping the world today, said in Havana Ricardo Alarcón, President of Cuba's National Assembly of the People's Power, during a session of the Latin-American Parliament (Parlatino)- a regional legislative body headquartered in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The remark was made in the wake of the Parlatino's sessions on public health, culture and the youth in the sub-continent. (World Data Service, 15/7/02)

July 16: Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada said that sanctions imposed by the US on Iran and Cuba have resulted in closer relations between the two countries. In a meeting in Havana with a visiting Iranian delegation including Deputy Minister of Health Mohammad Nouri and a number of MPs, Alarcón de Quesada said that the Cuban government is keen to expand ties with Iran. "Although the United States has imposed sanctions on the two countries for several years, we predict a bright future for both states," he said. (Teheran Times, 18/7/02)

July 17: In a congratulatory note to his Iraqi counterpart, Saddam Hussein, on the occasion of the 34th anniversary since the Baas party took power in Iraq, Castro condemns "the cruel US policy towards our friendly people of Iraq". (AFP, 17/7/02)

July 19: The European Union rejected calls to add Cuba to a pact that would bring former colonies \$13.7 billion in aid over the next five years. EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy took the position on the last day of a three-day summit of leaders from African, Caribbean and Pacific nations. He rejected calls from ACP members to include Cuba in the 25-year Cotonou Pact signed between the EU and ACP members in 2000 but not yet ratified by some governments in Europe. As a new member of the ACP group, Cuba is not a signatory. "If we look towards the future and there are economic and political changes in Cuba" then the situation could change, Lamy had told the press on the first day of an EU-ACP meeting in the Pacific Ocean island nation of Fiji. These changes, he added, must be decided by the Cuban authorities because "we're neither inducing them nor requesting them." The head of Cuba's delegation, Ricardo Cabrisas, declined to comment on the decision. (The Wall Street Journal, EFE, 18, 22/7/02)

July 19: The Canadians are at the forefront of a new undersea gold rush, teaming with the Castro government to salvage some of the hundreds of Spanish galleons that dot the seas surrounding Cuba. Visa Gold Explorations Inc., a Toronto company that trades on the Canadian Venture Exchange and with no connection to the credit card firm, is one of five foreign companies allowed to dive in Cuban waters. Under the arrangement, Visa Gold and the Cuban government split the spoils. (The Toronto Star, 19/7/02)

July 19: The governments of Cuba and the Fiji islands established diplomatic relations. (Granma, 21/7/02)

July 20: Mexican officials said they have begun talks with Cuba on returning people who try to flee the communist island without passports. Several Cuban citizens have arrived in Mexico aboard rafts or boats in recent months, raising concern that more migrants might risk their lives to reach Mexico as earlier waves of migrants risked theirs to reach the United States. (AP, 20/7/02)

July 21: Media sources have reported that a group of Cubans is living in very poor conditions of overcrowding, lack of hygiene and promiscuity in a detention centre in the Bahamas. "We know about this case and we have sent notes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [of the Bahamas]. This is a diplomatic process and a procedure that needs to be followed", said Cuba's Vice-Consul to the Bahamas, Miguel Olivero, to the press. "We have received several complaints and we are making efforts to have them returned to Cuba", added the diplomat. The Cuban detainees, three little girls among them, landed in the Bahamas on a raft two months ago. (El Nuevo Herald, 21/7/02)

July 21: President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, returned home from a four-day visit to Cuba where he had meetings with Fidel Castro. During the visit, he toured the Varadero Beach Resort, met African diplomats accredited to Havana and spoke to Zimbabwean students studying on the island state. Mugabe was accompanied by a delegation of deputy minister of Health and Child Welfare, David Parirenyatwa and deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Abednico Ncube. Mugabe discussed the prospect of Cuba supplying Zimbabwe with the much-needed anti-retrovirals, used to suppress the HIV/Aids virus. (All Africa Global Media, 22/7/02)

July 23: Reporters without Borders launched a publicity campaign telling tourists to Cuba, Tunisia and Turkey that the press there is censored. Reporters without Borders said Cuba harassed independent journalists and four were currently in jail. (Reuters, 23/7/02)

July 23: Nigeria has donated 100 000 US dollars to the government of Cuba in support of the country's reconstruction efforts in the wake of last year's destruction caused by hurricane Michelle. A statement by the Nigerian embassy in Havana explained that the donation was presented by a special envoy of the government, Ambassador T. D. Hart. The envoy was accompanied by Nigeria's ambassador to Cuba, Mr. Ngam Nwachukwu. (All Africa Global Media, 23/7/02)

July 23: The Cuban government announced a five-year undergraduate scholarship programme for poor Kenyan students. The Embassy's Chargé d'Affairs in Nairobi, Mr Hugo Ruiz Cabrera, said 10 students from poor backgrounds have been picked to start various degree courses in Cuba in September. (All Africa Global Media, 24/7/02)

July 23: Together with nations like Libya, China and Belarus, Cuba is among the less democratic nations in the world, according to the UNDP Human Development Report released in Manila. This year's report is dedicated to "Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World". As a result of lack of institutional elements necessary for democracy, Cuba ranks -7 in the measure of its level of democracy. This figure is based on a scale of -10 to 10 ranging from the most authoritarian

regimes (headed by Saudi Arabia with -10) to the most democratic nations. (El Nuevo Herald, 24/7/02)

July 24: During Pope John Paul II's visit to Canada, Cuban Bishop of Guantánamo, Carlos Baladrón, said that the attendance of 200 Cuban youths was the result of a "gesture of good will" by Cuban President Fidel Castro with the Catholic Church. The Bishop was confident that all pilgrims would return to the island to "transform what we have". (El Nuevo Herald, 25/7/02)

July 24: The standoff between the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the ruling National Action Party (PAN) sparked by the cancellation of the Interparliamentary meeting with Cuba (scheduled for August 4-7) by PAN Senator Cecilia Romero Castillo, will be dealt with by the Political Coordinating Committee (Junta de Coordinación Política). This is interpreted as a pressure measure from the PRI so that the Committee resolves the commitment assumed by Romero Castillo. (El Universal, 24/7/02)

July 25: The European Commission hopes to inaugurate a representative office in Havana this year. The EC currently has a humanitarian assistance office in Havana, which will close as soon as the new representative office is established. "For the moment our assistance towards Cuba has basically been of a humanitarian nature," said Koos Richelle, director of EC's. (El Nuevo Herald, 25/7/02)

July 26: Russia accused a US official of having a "confrontational mentality" in the wake of strong criticisms against Cuba. Alexandr Yakovenko, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, "regretted" the declarations made to The Washington Times by James Cason, new head of the US Interests Section in Havana. Cason's views "do not befit the spirit of XXI century, where the Cold War rhetoric is a thing of the past", said Yakovenko. (EFE, 26/7/02)

July 29: After several failed attempts, Cuban and Mexican legislators agreed to hold their interparliamentary meeting from September 18 to 22, with an open agenda that includes requests from Mexico's Party of National Action (PAN) to look at human rights and democracy issues on the island. The Cuban side accepted the Mexican proposal to hold the meeting in the second half of September. (Grupo Reforma, 31/7/02)

July 29: Nearly two dozen World Youth Day pilgrims from Cuba are seeking refugee status in Canada, Church officials in the communist country acknowledged. Ismael Sombra, president of the Toronto-based Cuban Canadian Foundation, said the young people, all professionals in their twenties, will argue that they will be persecuted for their religious and political beliefs if they return home. [For more on this, see section Exile Community.] (The National Post, 30/7/02)

July 29: In a statement issued by the Catholic Church in Havana on behalf of the Catholic bishops conference of Cuba, spokesman Orlando Marquez Hidalgo said most of the Cuban youngsters who defected in Canada were from the dioceses of Pinar del Rio, in western Cuba, and Santiago de Cuba, in eastern Cuba. [For more on this, see section Exile Community.] (CNN, 29/7/02)

July 30: US Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart sent a letter on behalf of the Cubans who defected in Toronto to the Canadian ambassador to Washington as well as to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. He also contacted Otto Reich, US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs and the senior US diplomat responsible for Cuban issues. Díaz-Balart's message to Canadian officials: "Protect those young people. Don't force them back to Cuba," he said. The congressman called the episode an embarrassment to Cuba, whose religious leaders had boasted that defections were unlikely during the visit. [For more on this, see section Exile Community.] (The Miami Herald, 30/7/02)

July 30: An official of the pope's World Youth Day expressed disappointment that 23 Cubans used the event as an opportunity to seek asylum. The young Cubans who defected were among a delegation of about 200 Cubans who came to Canada for World Youth Day. "It is very unfortunate. It's not the reason why we put on World Youth Day," said Paul Kilbertus, the event's communications director. "They came for other reasons and they took advantage." "You trust people and you trust the good judgement of people and when people potentially abuse that trust it's sad," he said. (The Washington Post, 30/7/02)

July 30: A high-ranking Cuban cleric said there is no religious persecution on the island and questioned the motives of at least 23 young pilgrims in his delegation who defected in Canada. Bishop Carlos Baladrón denied reports his delegation traveled to Canada under the watchful eye of the Cuban security forces to the World Youth Day Celebration during Pope John Paul II's weekend visit. About the defection, Baladrón said: "To commit an act like this, people say things that are not true (...) for example, we have not had any religious persecution, neither here [in Cuba] nor there [in Canada]. Baladrón hinted material reasons may have lured the group. [For more on this, see section Exile Community.] (The Miami Herald, 31/7/02)

Security

July 15: Cuba wishes to increase its military relations with China, said in Beijing the Director of the Political Department General of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, Sixto Batista Santana, during an interview with his Chinese counterpart Yu Yongbo. Batista Santana added that relations between the armed forces of both countries have been positive in last several years; however, Havana wishes to boost their bilateral military relations. (El Nuevo Herald, 16/7/02)

Terrorism

July 2: The Cuban government media was up in arms with the decisions taken by the Supreme Court of Justice of Panama on the case of Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban-born individual under arrest in that country on charges of organizing an attempt on Fidel Castro's life. According to the official daily Granma the Court dismissed "permanently" an accusation made by Panamanian popular organizations against Posada Carriles. (World Data Service, 2/7/02)

July 22: The US State Department said in a letter to a lawmaker that while it has no "smoking gun," it continues to have "major" and "legitimate" concerns that Cuba is developing biological weapons for offensive purposes. John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, sought in the letter to expand upon remarks he made in a speech without compromising intelligence-gathering methods and sources. "While I cannot go into specifics in this letter due to classification concerns, the intelligence community has evaluated a body of information and has come to the conclusion that Cuba has at least a limited, developmental offensive biological warfare research and development effort," Mr. Bolton wrote in response to a list of questions posed by Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Florida Republican. Mr. Bolton said that he could not prove such an effort beyond a shadow of doubt, but that the conclusion was based on reports from defectors, emigres and other intelligence sources. The July 22 letter reiterated the Bush administration's position, first articulated in Mr. Bolton's May 6 speech at the Heritage Foundation, that Cuba was providing safe haven for terrorists and collaborating with other state sponsors of terror, notably Iran and Iraq. (The Washington Times, 24/7/02)

July 23: One of the three suspected Irish Republican Army members, under arrest in Colombia on charges of teaching bomb-making techniques to leftist rebels, lived in Cuba. Niall Connolly was for several years the representative in Cuba of Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing. Connolly, Jim Monaghan, and Martin McCauley were arrested in Bogotá international airport last August for

allegedly training the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) how to build bombs during a visit to the rebels' former safe haven. (Reuters, 23/7/02)

July 25: A subsidiary of a company once run by Vice President Dick Cheney has won a \$9.7 million contract to build more cells for terrorist suspects at a naval base in Cuba, the Navy announced. The 204 new cells will expand by one-third the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The high-security prison is nearly full, with 564 suspected al-Qaida or Taliban prisoners captured during the war on terrorism. (AP, 25/7/02)

July 30: Cuba's Justice Minister believes the United States has given the communist nation the "cold shoulder" by refusing to sign agreements with the Castro government to fight terrorism, drug-trafficking, and the illegal trafficking of human beings. The State Department said there's nothing to those allegations. Radio Havana quoted Cuban Justice Minister Ramon Diaz Sotolongo as saying, "Despite repeated attempts to sign mutually beneficial agreements with Washington, Havana has constantly gotten a cold shoulder." Sotolongo spoke to reporters in Havana after returning from the an international convention of Justice Ministers in Lima, Peru. (CNSNews, 30/7/02)

July 30: A plenary session of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (CCPCC) expelled Manuel de Jesús Limonta Vidal, former Director of the Centre of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) until 1999, from its ranks. He was accused of "disloyalty". Limonta had been a member of the Central Committee of the Party since 1991. During his tenure at the CIGB, biotechnological transfers to Iran were conducted "without consultation", according to sources. "That is an outright lie", said José de la Fuente, former Research Director at the CIGB until 1999 and now living in exiled in the United States. "Such operations had the express consent of Fidel Castro whose instructions were personally communicated by his Assistant Chomy (José Millar Barruecos)", added the source. [For more on this, see section Domestic Affairs.] (El Nuevo Herald, 1/7/02)

US-Cuba Relations

July 1: American food companies will be able to showcase their products in Cuba during a September 26-30 trade fair as the island makes new deals to buy apples, dried lentils and peas - even brand-name packaged food - directly from the United States. PWN Exhibicon International LLC of Westport, Conn., announced the dates about a month after receiving Cuba's final approval to organize the US Food & Agribusiness Exhibition in Havana. The US Treasury Department earlier granted PWN Exhibicon a license to organize the trade fair - a necessary legal step because Cuba remains under a four-decade-old US trade embargo. (AP, 1/7/02)

July 1: A single boat carrying 33 Cuban migrants came ashore on a tiny island called Little Bahia Honda, US soil in the middle Keys not far from the mainland, a US Coast Guard official said. The official said she believed all were in relatively good health, and that the Coast Guard was transferring the group to Bahia Honda, just south of the Seven Mile Bridge, with the intention of handing them over to the US Border Patrol, which was also on the scene. Coast Guard spokeswoman Anastasia Burns said her agency got word earlier in the day that there may be up to 25 people on their way from Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 1/7/02)

July 2: A number of prominent American companies and subsidiaries of foreign concerns have paid cash settlements during the last four years for violating sanctions on trade and investment in parts of Afghanistan under Taliban control and on North Korea, Libya, Cuba, Iraq and Iran, among others, according to government documents obtained by a trade publication. The publication, the Corporate Crime Reporter, received the documents from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control through a Freedom of Information Act request. (The New York Times, 2/7/02)

July 3: A concert will be held in Havana to commemorate US independence, the Cuban Artists and Writers Union (UNEAC) announced. UNEAC, in association with youth and student organizations and cultural institutions, "has prepared a great tribute to the American people, their authentic culture, roots, traditions and humanistic values," according to a letter read on local television. (EFE, 3/7/02)

July 3: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, said to a group of US academics and university students visiting Cuba that the United States is treating the island with "renewed hostility" and that extremist Cuban-American organizations are "working" for a military conflict between the two nations. Alarcón said that is a result of the links between the current republican administration of George W. Bush and radical individuals and organizations of Cuban origin based in Miami, Florida. (World Data Service, 3/7/02)

July 3: Cuba says it will not allow its citizens to leave the island illegally and blames the exile community in Florida for encouraging Cubans to stage a mass maritime exodus July 4. In a statement, the government accused what it calls "counter-revolutionaries" in Miami of provoking bilateral tensions by saying in radio broadcasts that boats from south Florida will help provide migrants safe passage to the United States. In the statement, Havana said foreign vessels illegally entering Cuban waters will be confiscated and crews will be charged with migrant smuggling. [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs and Exile Community.] (Voice of America News, 3/7/02)

July 3: Responding to rumors buzzing in Cuba that Cubans might be planning an exodus of "rafters" from the communist-ruled island, the US Coast Guard urged Cubans not to take to seas, saying they would be sent home if intercepted by US authorities. The Coast Guard noted the sometimes deadly hazards of the sea crossing and reiterated that US policy is to prosecute smugglers of illegal migrants. For the last few days, the streets of Cuban cities have been abuzz with talk that people were planning an exodus on rafts on July 4, when they would supposedly be picked up by boats crewed by Cuban exiles coming from Florida 90 miles away. [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs and Exile Community.] (Reuters, 3/7/02)

July 4: Cuban police maintained heavier patrols along the Malecon coastal highway after several days of rumors that Cuban exiles planned to sail boats to the edge of Cuban waters to pick up refugees seeking to flee the island. Both Cuban and American authorities sought to puncture the talk, and there were no reports of illegal attempts by Cubans to sail north. The Cuban government said that no permission would be given for a boatlift, and the US Coast Guard warned that any migrants picked up at sea would be repatriated quickly. [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs and Exile Community.] (AP, 4/7/02)

July 4: Fidel Castro attended an unprecedented Fourth of July celebration at the Karl Marx theater in Havana. Despite its friction with Washington, Cuba's communist government announced a Fourth of July observance to illustrate the regime's respect for Americans and their traditions. "The cultural, spiritual and moral legacy of the American people is also the patrimony of Cuba and of the Cuban people," official daily Granma said. (AP, 4/7/02)

July 5: A boat that was to carry 15 Cubans, including two young girls, to the United States was seized and one of two crew members arrested, Cuban authorities said. The craft was detected at Punta Higuera on the island's Northern coast, according to an official communique published in the Communist Party daily Granma. One crew member, a Cuban-born man who has been living in the United States, was arrested near where the boat was seized, the communique said. He was not further identified. The other crew member escaped. (AP, 5/7/02)

July 7: Former US Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader began a four-day visit to Cuba, after being invited by the Cuban Parliament, highlighted the local press. Nader, according

to Granma daily, "is a prominent defender of consumers rights, the environment, and citizens" participation in decisions that affect them." "The trade between the United States and Cuba should be the same as it is between the United States and China," the Green Party 2000 presidential candidate told reporters. (Prensa Latina, Reuters, 7/7/02)

July 7: Former US presidential candidate Ralph Nader attended a dinner with Fidel Castro as the consumer advocate began a three-day visit to the communist nation. Nader, who says he is visiting to learn more about Cuba's disease-fighting efforts, met with Castro and was planning to attend another dinner with him. The visit comes as communist leaders are giving renewed attention to Americans who can influence public debate over decades-old US restrictions on trade with -- and travel to -- the island. (CNN, 8/7/02)

July 8: The State Department accused Fidel Castro of duplicity for showing up at a US Independence Day party in Havana while denying the Cuban people their freedoms. Castro joined Cuba's communist elite and thousands of others at a Havana theater for the celebration. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the freedoms Americans enjoy have been ``sadly denied to the Cuban people these last 43 years." ``The celebration of US independence in Cuba will only be meaningful fully to us when the Cuban people are permitted to enjoy democracy, individual rights and freedoms," he said. ``The fact that Castro attended this, one has to wonder about the sincerity of his motives," Boucher said, noting ``the duplicity of the action." (AP, 8/7/02)

July 8: Cuban authorities have arrested a second man suspected of immigrant smuggling after he arrived from Florida on a motorboat, the government said. José Gabriel Cruz Rodríguez was arrested in Camajuaní, about 170 miles east of Havana, according to an official statement. Cuban officials said Cruz arrived in Cuba on July 3 in a speedboat registered in Florida, along with César Rufino Díaz Aparicio, who was arrested that same day by Cuban border patrols. (The Miami Herald, 9/7/02)

July 9: Ralph Nader, on a visit to Cuba, called on the United States to lift its trade embargo and remove travel restrictions to the communist country. Washington should give Cubans "space to determine their own future, without outside intervention," Nader said after meeting separately with Fidel Castro and two members of Cuba's political opposition. Both the dissidents, Oswaldo Payá and Elizardo Sanchez, told Nader about Proyecto Varela, a petition seeking a referendum that would ask voters if they support rights including freedom of expression and the right to own a business. (AP, 9/7/02)

July 11: The first direct shipment of American apples to Cuba in 40 years had arrived in Havana. The 17 tons of Washington-grown Red Delicious apples, about 100,000 pieces of fruit in all, is the latest import of American food since shipments began in December. "Cuba represents a new market with a lot of potential," said Rebecca J. Baerveldt, international marketing manager for the Washington Apple Commission as the shipment arrived. (AP, 11/7/02)

July 12: The US Coast Guard repatriated 24 Cubans to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, after intercepting them off the Florida coast trying to enter the United States illegally. The Coast Guard said in a press release that the group and two immigrant-smuggling suspects were detected on a 24-foot vessel 27 kilometers (17 miles) north of Bahía de Cabañas. The crew of the Coast Guard's vessel Key Largo picked up the Cubans and the alleged smugglers and took them to another Coast Guard ship, where they were given food, water and medical care. US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) officials interviewed the would-be immigrants and decided they should be returned to the Caribbean island. The two alleged immigrant smugglers were handed over to the Border Patrol. (EFE, 12/7/02)

July 15: Lifting the ban on Americans travelling to Cuba would boost the US economy by as much as \$1.6-billion (US) annually, and create up to 23,000 new jobs each year, according to a study. The new report, conducted by the Brattle Group consulting firm, analyzed the economic impact of the United States lifting the travel restrictions. The study's release coincides with a renewed effort by members of the US House of Representatives to lift the travel ban. About three million Americans would visit Cuba each year. Demand for US air travel to Cuba would rise, boosting profits of American airlines by as much as \$415-million a year and the US economy by about \$1-billion annually, said Dorothy Robyn, an economic consultant for the Brattle Group. (The Globe and Mail, 15/7/02)

July 16: The US Coast Guard returned 20 illegal Cuban migrants to their homeland at Bahía de Cabañas, Havana province. All the migrants were from a group rescued from a homemade raft located about 15 miles southeast of Marathon in the Florida Keys. The raft was spotted by a boater, who alerted the Coast Guard, said Petty Officer Anastasia M. Burns. Federal Immigration and Naturalization Service agents later interviewed each of the migrants and determined they should be repatriated. Fifty-seven migrants have been repatriated to Cuba this month. (Sun Sentinel, 16/7/02)

July 16: US President Bush notified Congress that he will waive Title III of the Helms Burton Act, a measure barring lawsuits by Americans who saw their property in Cuba confiscated by Fidel Castro and turned over to others. Bush's latest waiver extends the prohibition through January and "is necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba," Bush said in a letter to House and Senate leaders. He last extended the waiver in January. A 1996 law, written by Senator Jesse Helms –Republican, North Carolina--, and Representative Dan Burton –Republican, Indiana--, gives Americans the right to sue any individual, investor or business that uses property seized after Castro took power in 1959. The Helms-Burton law, passed in the aftermath of the downing of two small private planes by Cuban air force fighters, also gives the president authority to waive enforcement of the ban at six-month intervals. (AP, 16/7/02)

July 16: The US House of Representatives is taking up proposals to ease US policies toward Cuba but President Bush is expected to have his veto pen ready if anti-embargo lawmakers get their way. Several amendments were expected to go to the House floor. The one given the best chance was a proposal to eliminate travel restrictions to the island. A similar measure was approved 240-186 last year. (AP, 16/7/02)

July 18: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, said that the waving of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act for another six months by US President George W. Bush proves that the US President "is ignorant, but not crazy". In declarations made to the press, Alarcón said that the enforcement of Title III would be chaotic for the US courts. (AFP, 19/7/02)

July 21: Close to a hundred members of the XIII United States-Cuba Friendship Caravan arrived in Cuba from Tampico, Mexico. Leading the Caravan was US Reverend Lucius Walker, Executive Director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO)/Pastors for Peace. The caravan project, which started ten years ago, challenges the US embargo against Cuba. (Granma, 22/7/02)

July 22: US Assistant Secretary of State Otto Reich implored the House of Representatives to reject a proposal to ease restrictions on travel by US citizens to Cuba, arguing that the measure will not lead to a democratic opening. Reich, in an interview, said the amendment will only benefit the Cuban government. Far from planting democratic seeds in Cuba, he said US citizens and others from Western democracies have only a limited opportunity to meet with Cubans in social settings. "Hotels, restaurants and even hospitals that are available only to hard currency tourists are not available to Cubans, unless a Cuban happens to accompany one of those tourists into a hard currency facility," Reich said. "We don't think that this is the kind of exchange that is going to

lead to a democratic opening in Cuba," said Reich, who heads the State Department's Western Hemisphere affairs bureau. (AP, 22/7/02)

July 22: Governor John Hoeven of North Dakota traveled to Cuba on a trade mission, making him only the second US governor to visit in more than 40 years. The Republican governor's four-day visit comes as he and other officials from farming states press Congress to expand a 2-year-old law allowing direct sales of food to Cuba, an exception to sanctions prohibiting most trade with the island. "We are working hard to stir up new contracts for more North Dakota food," Hoeven said upon his arrival. "We are going to focus on the food contracts." (AP, 22/7/02)

July 23: The Bush administration and Republican leaders in the US House of Representatives lost a key vote on Cuba policy when the House voted to defeat a measure that linked the lifting of the Cuba travel ban to evidence the communist nation is not developing biological weapons. The defeat cleared the way for the 262-167 passage of a second spending-bill amendment to lift the travel ban without restrictions. Despite efforts by anti-Castro lawmakers and the administration to link the sanctions against Fidel Castro's Cuba to the war on terrorism, many House members agreed on a series of votes. By a 262-167 margin they approved Representative Jeff Flake's amendment to a spending bill that would eliminate restrictions on American tourists traveling to Cuba. They followed with a 251-177 vote on another Flake measure lifting the cap, now \$1,200 a year, on what Cuban-Americans can remit to their families in Cuba. Additionally, one measure, sponsored by Representative Jerry Moran, Kansas Republican, would allow private financing of food and medicine sales to Cuba. Current law allows Cuba to buy food and medicine but it must acquire financing through international sources. The most far-reaching attempt to reverse the four-decade-old policy of isolating Cuba, an amendment by Representative Charles Rangel, Democrat-New York, to lift the economic embargo, was defeated, but by a narrow 226-204. (CNN, The Washington Post, AP, 24/7/02)

July 23: The New York Academy of Science has awarded the Heinz R. Pagels Science award for 2002 to dissident Cuban economist Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello. The Academy's release states the prize is awarded "To Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello for her untiring efforts in promoting democracy." Roque is the director of the Institute of Independent Economists. (Cubanet, 23/7/02)

July 24: White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said the US President will veto decisions taken by Congress that changes the US administration policy toward Cuba. Asked about the lifting of the Cuba travel ban and on what Cuban-Americans can remit to their families in the island, Fleischer said that "the administration had issued a statement of administration policy on that matter, and that remains an issue in contention which the President has said he will veto if that remains in the final bill". "The President is hopeful that that provision will be removed so that the bill can be signed into law", Fleischer added. (The Washington Post, 24/7/02)

July 24: The US Coast Guard repatriated 14 Cuban migrants after they were picked up in two groups earlier this week. The cutter Drummond dropped off the 14 undocumented Cubans at Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, after they were interviewed by Immigration and Naturalization Service officials. One of the groups was found on a raft 40 miles south of Key West by the cutter Forward. The second group was found after a C-130 airplane spotted them about 50 miles south of Key West. (Jacksonville.Com, 24/7/02)

July 25: A historic North Dakota agricultural trade delegation to Cuba, led by Governor John Hoeven, finished with a document signing ceremony in which the North Dakota Farm Bureau promised to help consummate sales of state farm products totaling about \$2 million. (The Miami Herald, 26/7/02)

July 26: Court records in the US Virgin Islands show that at least 60 Cuban migrants have arrived there since April as smugglers, apparently trying to open a new route to get to the United

States. At more than 1 200 miles from Havana, the US Virgin Islands would seem an unlikely destination for immigrants determined to reach America. However, investigators suspect some smugglers prefer the longer route rather than risk interception on the heavily patrolled and more commonly used Cuba-to-Florida Keys run. (The Miami Herald, 26/7/02)

July 26: Fidel Castro, in an address on Cuba's national day, condemned recent Wall Street scandals as "bald-faced robbery" and said they only confirm what he has been saying about capitalism for more than 40 years. He also expressed gratitude to US lawmakers who voted to ease sanctions against the communist-ruled island. The US House of Representatives voted "with determination and courage for three amendments that bring glory to that institution," Castro told tens of thousands of people gathered in this central provincial capital for the Revolution Day commemoration. In his government's first official response to the votes, Castro said he considered the action so important that it didn't matter if President Bush vetoed them, as he has indicated he would. "We shall always be grateful for that gesture," Castro said. (The Miami Herald, 27/7/02)

July 29: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, called the refusal by US authorities to allow the wife of one of the five Cubans sentenced for espionage in the United States to visit her husband a "despicable act". (EFE, 29/7/02)

July 28: Former Cuban ambassador to the United Nations Alcibiades Hidalgo Basulto escaped from Cuba on a raft and is currently in the US city of Miami, according to an interview with the ex-diplomat published in the Spanish daily ABC. Hidalgo Basulto, 56, told ABC in a phone conversation that he made his daring escape because in Cuba "there isn't the slightest will" for democratic reform. He recalled in the interview that the communist regime of Fidel Castro named him to the UN post in 1992, but that a year later he was fired and then tricked into returning to Cuba. "From that very moment I began to go through the same hell as others who had served the Cuban regime," he said. Describing himself as "a top aide to the Cuban Defense Minister," Raul Castro, Fidel's brother, Hidalgo had also served as deputy foreign minister, ambassador to the UN and Namibia and the number two man in charge of the mission that negotiated the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in 1989, "There must be complete submission (in Cuba) to a single way of thinking, and anyone who expresses their own opinion is subjected to constant repression," said Hidalgo Basulto. He described the current situation in Cuba as "political senility" with an economy growing worse by the day and a population "living at a basic level of subsistence." (EFE, The Miami Herald, 28, 29/7/02)

July 29: The US Coast Guard repatriated six Cuban migrants, two days after they were found in a crudely constructed boat six miles south of Long Key. The Coast Guard repatriated other migrants, who were found in three different groups last week. (AP, 29/7/02)

July 30: A top Cuban athletic official informed Annia Portuondo-Hatch in a letter that he will not grant the 24-year-old permission to compete for the United States at an international meet in Hungary this fall. Portuondo-Hatch, formerly of Cuba, recently became a US citizen. She is the owner of Stars Academy gymnastics school in West Haven, Connecticut. (The Connecticut Post, 30/7/02)

July 30: Two Cuban men who faced the death penalty were sentenced to less than five years in federal prison for a deadly alien smuggling voyage that killed six people. Osvaldo Fernandez Marrero, who lost his wife and two daughters in the illegal crossing, received two years and nine months in prison. Roberto Montero Domínguez received a four-year, nine-month term. "Those who boarded the vessel were not victims. They were willing participants and were responsible for overloading the boat," said US District Judge Shelby Highsmith. Twenty-six people were on the 27-foot open boat when it flipped in choppy seas about 20 miles southwest of Key West. Prosecutors could have asked for the death penalty under the original charges. An independent recommendation called for nine-year sentences on four counts of attempted alien smuggling

resulting in death and conspiracy, to which both men pleaded guilty. Prosecutor Curtis Miner described events after the boat was swamped. A man who couldn't swim clung to an inner tube and his son's body for hours. A woman lost her grip on her 3-year-old daughter, whose body was never found. A man survived by treading water for 12 hours in high seas. Miner had no comment leaving the courtroom. (Jacksonville.Com, 30/7/02)

July 30: Tampa Mayor Dick Greco and the chairman of the city's chamber of commerce left over the weekend for a trip to Cuba, a visit that prompted condemnation from some local Cuban activists. Beth Leytham, vice president of public affairs for the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, said "Sandy" McKinnon, chairman of the chamber and president of Tampa-based Yale Industrial Trucks, was not representing the chamber on the trip. She said Greco and McKinnon were on the mission as individuals. The mayor's office organized the trip, Leytham said. "I believe the purpose of the trip is to see Cuba and the condition of the Cuban people firsthand," she said. (The Tampa Tribune, 30/7/02)

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