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Highlights:

Domestic Affairs: The 5th Plenary Meeting of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee unanimously adopts Raul Castro's ideas on the role of the organization at a succession process. Fidel Castro undergoes complicated surgery and "provisionally" passes over power to his brother Raul.

Economy: Russia shelves Cuba's external debt with the European nation for indefinite time. Cuba and Venezuela agree to extend their bilateral trade. The Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and Cuba sign an Economic Complementation Accord. Fidel Castro inaugurates the country's largest new power-generator system in the province of Holguin.

Exile Community: Cuban exiles take to the streets of Miami in the thousands convinced that Fidel Castro was at death's door. The executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation reaffirms his organization decision to support a true and peaceful transition to democracy. The association Cuba, Democracy "Now" calls for "serenity and caution".

Foreign Affairs: Fidel Castro participates in a Mercosur Summit in Argentina. Cuba condemns the international community's "lack of action" in the face of the Israeli bombings against Lebanon. Fidel Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez rally thousands of leftist sympathizers in Argentina.

Security: Belarusian Defence Minister Leonid Maltsev meets with the Cuban Minister of Armed Forces Raul Castro in Havana.

US-Cuba Relations: US President George W. Bush approves the second report issued by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC). Dissident organizations criticize the CAFC's Report to the President. The US government makes cautious statements about the situation in Cuba after Fidel Castro cedes power.



Domestic Affairs

July 1: The First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party, Fidel Castro, presided over the 5th Plenary Meeting of the organization's Central Committee. The participants delved into different issues related to the Party's organization,

national defence, the incorporation of new members to the Central Committee, and other subjects related to the country's development and the international situation. In several interventions during the meeting and in his closing remarks, Castro said the Revolution is committed to facing the serious challenges stemming from the complicated international situation and its own deficiencies. The president noted the decisive role that the Party must play in the current battle being waged by the nation and how it needs to be strengthened more than ever. "More than ever we need to strengthen the party...given the decisive role it must play in this battle," Castro said. With a standing ovation, the Plenary unanimously adopted the ideas presented by the Second Secretary of the Party Raul Castro on June 14, on the occasion of the 45th Anniversary of the Western Army, and in particular when he stated: "The Commander-in-Chief of the Cuban Revolution is one and only one, and only the Communist Party, the institution that groups the revolutionary vanguard and guarantees Cubans unity during all times, can be the dignified heir of the trust deposited by the people in its leader. We are working for that, and that's how it will be, the rest is pure speculation". (*Granma, EFE, 4/7/06*)

July 1: The Cuban Communist Party leadership announced that it had resurrected its secretariat, a policy-implementing group that was abolished 15 years ago, officially for financial reasons. Tapped for the new board: long time party stalwarts who represent a younger generation of Fidel Castro's revolution. The move underscores the Cuban government's desire to strengthen ruling institutions for a future when a government currently so dependent on the 79-year-old Castro is no longer possible. Several of the new secretariat members were provincial leaders who were replaced in May. Experts say that was, in fact, the preparation of a promotion of new leaders. "They are reorganizing," said Alcibiades Hidalgo, a former Cuban diplomat and chief of staff to Defense Minister Raúl Castro. "This is not a purge. They are preparing a party that has been asleep for 15 years." The party's newspaper, Granma, said Castro presided over the meeting and will head the secretariat along with his brother, Raúl. One of the 10 other new members is José R. Machado Ventura, 75, right-hand man to Raúl Castro. The others include three women: María del Carmen Concepción González, party first secretary in Pinar del Río province; Mercedes López Acea, first secretary in Cienfuegos; and Lina Pedraza Rodríguez, ex-minister of audits and oversight. But while many of the new members are in their 50s and considerably younger than the Castro brothers, experts noted that they also are longtime party favorites. "They are not the youngest generation," Hidalgo said. "They have a lot of experience and are not at all inclined to changes." Domingo Amuchastegui, a former Cuban intelligence officer who defected in 1994, said the new committee members represent the "middle generation" -- people born into the revolution and tapped for leadership positions since their youth. "These are people with a definite mind-set," he said. "The idea is to strengthen the party and offer a message of institutionalism, that Cuba is not going to replace one "caudillo" for another." (*The Miami Herald, 6/7/07*)

July 3: Only 21 Cuban males have exerted the right to subsidies to take care of their children, although the domestic law ensures any parent to exercise them. The information was provided by Labour and Social Security Ministry's Lawyer Amalay Lam, who has warned of Cuban men's male chauvinism despite achievements in gender equality. It is very hard to see Cuban males washing diapers, preparing pacifiers, cradling his child or helping him/her in physiological needs while his wife is working, she said. Under the social security regime, mothers and fathers are granted monetary benefits for over a year to attend to children, irrespective of their being adopted or blood kids. (*Prensa Latina, 3/7/06*)

July 5: The number of Cuban political prisoners dropped to 316 from 333 in the first six months of this year, but the government stepped up extrajudicial harassment of opponents, the island's main rights group said. "The slight decline (...) appears to reflect a change in the form of political repression," the nongovernmental Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said in a report. The illegal but tolerated group charged the government was organizing supporters to surround and intimidate dissidents at home and on the street, arresting opponents for brief periods of time, increasing visits by security officials and firings from state jobs, among other tactics. "There is a decline in numbers of prisoners, but it is irrelevant because it is still more than 300," commission President Elizardo Sanchez told the press. "Without a doubt the government has changed its tactics. They are resorting more to other methods besides prison." The Commission's report said even harder times were ahead for civil liberties on the Communist-ruled island. [[Alto número de presos políticos](#)] (*Reuters, EFE, 5/7/06*)

July 5: Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Paya talked about different actions implemented by his organization, in spite of systematic repression by Cuban authorities against the dissident movement. In an article published in *The Washington Post*, Paya explained the different initiatives that his Christian Liberation Movement has undergone since the Varela Project in 2002. "In March 2003, dozens of leaders of Cuba's Varela Project and other human rights defenders were detained, subjected to summary trials, condemned to many years in prison and confined in the most inhumane and cruel conditions. In this way the regime attempted to suppress the rebirth of the Cuban Spring initiated by thousands of Cubans who overcame a debilitating culture of fear by including their names, addresses and identification numbers in the text of the Varela Project, a document later presented to the National Assembly asking for a referendum on its human rights principles". Paya said that on May 10 2006 the CLM presented the Program for All Cubans (Programa Todos Cubanos). "It is the product of the National Dialogue and contains proposals for a number of endeavors, including modification of the constitution, a new electoral law, a new law of associations and a plan for changes titled 'Cuba First.'" "The editing of this document was done by Cubans, completely within Cuba", Paya added. (*The Washington Post*, 5/7/06)

July 5: A severe rainstorm lashed the Cuban capital with hail and winds of up to 108 kilometers (67 miles) per hour, causing flooding, knocking down telephone polls and paralyzing traffic in several parts of the city. The downpour flooded two tunnels linking downtown Havana with its western zone, halted traffic, and tore down branches - and even trees - all over the city. "There are reports that the strong winds in some municipalities of the capital knocked down trees and damaged roofs and windows," said the weather institute in a report on its Web page. (*EFE*, 5/6/07)

July 6: More than 1.3 million Cuban students will be mobilized this summer to undertake tasks linked to a drive against corruption and the so-called energy revolution promoted by Fidel Castro. "The organization is aiming to make this its most important mobilization yet," said the first secretary of the Young Communist League, Julio Martínez. Students from universities, as well as from middle and elementary schools "will participate along with social workers in approximately 20 special tasks chosen by the revolution within the framework of an on-going campaign to fight illegal activities, corruption and promote energy-saving." (*AFP*, 6/7/06)

July 6: The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), headed by Elizardo Sánchez, and the National Coordination of Political Prisoners, headed by Aida Valdés, agree in the assessment that police pressure is likely to heat up in the months leading up to the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, to take place in Havana September 11-16. "Now we're seeing signs that the government may be about to tighten the thumbscrews by stepping up 'pre-emptive' repression to prevent incidents and social unrest during the Summit," said a CCDHRN report. The CCDHRN warned that "barring a miracle, the international community should prepare, at least in the short term, to receive nothing but bad news in the areas of civil, political and economic rights in Cuba." (*IPS*, 6/7/06)

July 6: A growing list of international artists and intellectuals are planning to travel to Cuba in August to fete Fidel Castro on his 80th birthday, organizers said. "It's like throwing a birthday party for a friend, a tribute from one brother to another," said Santiago Guayasamin, grandson of the late Ecuadorean painter Oswaldo Guayasamin, whose foundation is sponsoring the celebration of the Cuban leader. South African folk singer Miriam Makeba and Argentine musicians Cesar Issela, Piero and Victor Heredia will be among those performing a concert held in Havana in Castro's honor. They will be joined by Cuban singers Silvio Rodríguez and Omara Portuondo, organizers said. Beginning three days before Castro's August 13 birthday, the celebration will also include an academic conference on Cuba including former Ecuadorean President Rodrigo Borja, former Sandinista rebel leader Tomas Borge of Nicaragua and Hebe Bonafini of Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. (*AP*, 6/7/06)

July 6: Trade union activist and independent librarian Lázaro González Adán, imprisoned without due process in the Cerámica Roja penitentiary of Camagüey since October, 2004, will have to face new charges for allegedly causing

bodily harm on another prisoner who attacked him. This is not the first time that González Adán has been assaulted in the 21 months he has been confined with common criminals. (*Cubanet*, 6/7/06)

July 7: It's been a slow process, but "religious repression has been diminishing little by little" in Cuba, said Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino of Havana, Cuba. Starting in the 1980s "there was an evolution on the part of the government" increasing church-state communication and "the tension began to diminish," the cardinal said in an interview with *The Tidings*, newspaper of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, which appeared June 30. The cardinal was in Los Angeles in June to attend the spring meeting of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and to visit with Cuban-Americans in the area. The limits placed by the communist government on the church now do not involve being able to worship, he said. They involve not being able to have Catholic schools or teach religion in public schools, he said. There is also limited access to the state-controlled media, the cardinal said. "Slowly we are achieving more," he said. "But we don't have customary access to communications media." (*CNS*, July 7/6/06)

July 7: Six months after being returned to Cuba from US custody, the group of so-called "Bridge Rafters" have no choice but to wait amid uncertainty, anxiety and economic hardship for authorities on the island to decide their fate. The 15 would-be emigrants were repatriated on January 9 by US authorities, one week after they landed on the support pylons of an abandoned bridge just off the Florida coast. But, a federal judge ruled February 28, however, that the rafters were eligible to stay in the United States under the existing policy and asked the US government to help them return. Cuban authorities have not yet issued the exit visas and the "rafters" have no option but to wait amid a precarious economic situation, they said. Since presenting their request for exit permits on March 28, the 14 rafters have frequented the immigration office in the west-central city of Matanzas in search of "some news." "When they saw that we were going every day, they met with all of us and told us that all the papers were in order and they were only awaiting an order from Havana and they said they would call us by phone when it arrived," said "Bridge Rafter" Elisabeth Hernandez. "They told us that ours is a special case," said Ernesto Hernandez, another "Bridge Rafter." (*EFE*, 7/7/06)

July 10: Alexander Santos Hernández, Cuban Liberal Movement (CLM) coordinator for the eastern provinces was sentenced to four years in prison following charges for his alleged involvement in a dangerous crime. Santos was a victim of an "act of repudiation" in Gíbara, in the Holguín province, during which he was beaten and humiliated by a rabble organized by forces of the Cuban secret police. His wife Milisa Aballe Ricardo, an independent reporter affiliated with the "Youths Without Censorship" news agency, was also arrested. The Gíbara political police also detained Juan Ramón Claro Infante and Jesús Ramsés, municipal CLM delegate in that city. They were all threatened with lengthy prison terms and "worse" if they maintained their positions against the government of Fidel Castro. (*Cubanet*, 10/6/07)

July 12: Fidel Castro, who turns 80 in August, is an "extraordinarily healthy" man who continues to work very hard every day, parliamentary speaker Ricardo Alarcon said. "Fidel Castro has been given this privilege: he is an extraordinarily healthy man," Alarcon told the press in an interview. "He has always been and remains healthy, although it angers George W. Bush." Alarcon rejected as "completely unfounded" rumors that surfaced recently in Venezuela about the death of the Cuban leader. "These jokes surface from time to time and collapse," the speaker joked. "There have been so many of them that I believe that when it really happens, nobody will believe it." (*AFP*, 12/7/06)

July 12: The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), widely regarded as the "eyes and ears of the Cuban revolution," initiated a "neighborhood watch" exercise that includes a mobilization against corruption and illegal activities. Miguel Marrero, a member of the National Secretariat of the CDRs in charge of neighborhood watch oversight, told local media outlets that the exercise entails implementing measures against corruption and illegal activities in residential areas as well as the business sector. (*EFE*, 12/7/06)

July 14: The 20th Latin American Meeting of Educational Mathematics (RELME), gathering 500 academicians, researchers and professors from 14 Latin American countries and Spain, concluded in the eastern Cuban city of Camagüey. The educators explored ways to make mathematics, one of the world's more complex disciplines both to teach and learn, attractive to students. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/7/06)

July 14: The application of modern technology for early detection of neoplastic diseases has allowed Cuba to attain remarkable results in fighting breast cancer, the main malignant illness affecting women worldwide. Hundreds of mammography studies on Cuban women have resulted in early diagnosis of neoplastic mammary glands, allowing to make timely therapeutic decisions including surgery, chemo and radiotherapy. The preventive work begins at the office of the community family doctor, with suggestions for breast self-examination. Other actions to fight breast cancer include the clinical follow-up of women with previous cases of the illness in the family, along with recommendations for a healthy diet. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/7/06)

July 16: The architectural barriers for differently disabled people have been eliminated in Havana's 19 municipalities, as a contribution to social integration of those people and uplifting their self-esteem. Osvaldo Hidalgo Dominguez, president of the Cuban Association of Physical and Motor Disabled People (ACLIFIM) in that territory, told the press that conditions have been created to allow access of those people to health, education, commercial, food, cultural, and recreational centers. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/7/06)

July 16: For years 4,000 homes in Manzanillo, in eastern Cuba, have depended on wells. For a great part of the families the clock turned back to the time of having to use buckets. But, finally, the days of water have arrived with the construction of the aqueduct. Manuel Garcia, director of Aqueduct and Sewage system, gave the details to the press: "The population of Manzanillo grew a lot. Today it has over 105,000 residents. We had an aqueduct in 1940, built for a much smaller urban population. The pumping of 90 liters per second allowed cycles of water to be supplied through the network, that lasted between 15 and 20 days. Now that the work has finished, we can deliver 500 liters per second, 300 from the wells of Cayo Redondo and 200 from Cuentas Claras". "The investment was more than 14 million pesos and 3.7 million in hard currency", Garcia added. "We provide a service 24 hours a day to 70 percent of the public; and the rest, in the high area of the city receives water from Cuentas Claras. It comes every three days to them, because there are three deep wells. They were very old. When the first one collapsed, we decided to transfer the three. Two of them need a pump motor, and the other pump houses." (*Periodico 26*, 16/7/06)

July 16: Cuba celebrated Children's Day at youth pioneer camps, plazas, parks, video parlors and Youth Computer Clubs. The purpose was to offer a diverse range of cultural, sports, recreational and educational activities so that the nation's kids could both learn and have fun at the same time, said Miriam Yanet Martin, national president of Jose Marti Pioneers Organization (OPJM). The main event was held at Ernesto (Che) Guevara Pioneer Center, where the youth and their parents played, sang, and enjoyed a variety of delicacies. People could buy books and dance to the beats of the group Moncada. Also sponsored by the OPJM this weekend was the Gala of Youth Singing, held at the National Theater of Cuba. Festival activities were also held at pediatric hospitals and children's homes. (*Granma*, 17/7/06)

July 17: Cuban dissident Guillermo Fariñas, who shortly will reach the six-month mark of a hunger strike, will leave the hospital and return home if the doctors treating him continue to keep him isolated, his mother - Alicia Hernandez - told the press. Fariñas, a 43-year-old psychologist who heads the independent Cubanacan Press news agency, began his hunger strike on January 31 to demand unrestricted access to the Internet. The dissident, who has carried out 20 hunger strikes since 1995, is in "serious but stable" condition in an isolated room in the intensive care unit of the Arnaldo Milian Castro Hospital in Santa Clara, some 250 kilometers (155 miles) east of Havana. Fariñas decided to refuse to accept intravenous nourishment and said he would request to be released from the facility voluntarily and go home if the doctors did not lift the isolation imposed upon him and transfer him to a room where he could receive visitors, albeit remaining separated from them by glass, his mother said. (*EFE*, 17/7/06)

July 17: Melba Santana Ariz, wife of Alfredo Batista Domínguez, who was imprisoned following the notorious Trial of the 75, denounced being subject to harassment and threats by a highly dangerous ex-convict manipulated by the Cuban State Security police. "I am making the Cuban authorities responsible for what could happen to me and my children," Melba Santana told the independent press. (*Cubamet*, 17/7/06)

July 18: Reporters Without Borders reiterated its support for two independent journalists, Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez and Oscar Mario González Pérez, who have been held without trial since their arrests one week apart a year ago. Guerra was a regular contributor to the US-based Radio Martí and the Nueva Prensa Cubana and Payolibre websites until his arrest on 13 July 2005. He was also a member of a news centre operated by La Corriente Martiana, a patriotic group. "The plight of Guerra and González suggests that the Cuban authorities apparently no longer need a court's permission to throw journalists in prison," Reporters Without Borders said. "In the absence of any charges against these journalists and in view of their state of health, we call for their immediate release and that of the 20 journalists who have been imprisoned since March 2003. We also call for the release of their colleague, Armando Betancourt, who has been held without any official reason being given since 23 May of this year," Reporters Without Borders added. González's wife, Mirtha Wong, told Reporters Without Borders that her husband is currently being held in the prison known as "1580" in San Miguel de Padrón, in Havana province. Aged 62, he is in the "FD" section of the prison reserved for those for whom there is a "Falta de Documentación," meaning a "lack of documentation." The prison authorities say they are unaware of the charges against him. (*RWB Press Release*, 18/7/06)

July 19: Cuba has maintained its second place position at the 20th Central American and Caribbean Games by winning 28 gold medals so far, a number surpassed only by Mexico. Cuba has won the greatest number of medals so far in weight lifting, as it concluded the third day of competitions with four gold medals, three silvers and two bronze awards. (*ACN*, 19/7/06)

July 19: The Fifth International Congress on Special Education met in Havana. Teachers, researchers, scientists, relatives and students of Pedagogy were given a warm welcome to the event by students with special educational needs. The Congress, dedicated to promoting social development, includes topics such as diagnosis and methodologies, both in education and for the incorporation of the student into the workforce and society. (*Granma*, 19/7/06)

July 20: Latin America's rumour mill perennially buzzes with stories that Fidel Castro has died, but the 79-year-old communist firebrand says he gets a kick out of it. "I die just about every day," said Castro in an interview with Venezuelan state television, in reference to the rumours. "But it's really a lot of fun for me, and it makes me feel healthier." Castro spoke on Venezuelan television at a meeting of the South American trade bloc Mercosur, held in Cordoba, Argentina. Rumours surfaced that the Cuban leader had passed away, but faded when they turned out to be based on idle speculation broadcast by a Venezuelan radio station. (*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 20: Cuban dissident leader, Oswaldo Paya, denounced to the press a series of acts of harassment against him and his family by dozens of people who have been demonstrating for weeks in front of his home in Havana. Since July 9, Paya said, demonstrations began with people shouting and showing posters that said, "In a country under siege, dissidents are considered traitors". "These policemen, agents, and well known "esbirros" from the Cerro municipality in Havana have been threatening my family and my neighbours", Paya said. "And they will continue", he added in a communiqué handed to the press. (*AFP*, 20/7/06)

July 20: Cuban citizen Angel Enrique Fernández Rivero, 41, was detained by the police for having a tattoo that says "Down with Fidel", "Murderer". Angel Enrique had gone to a cafeteria at the beach in 16th street in Miramar, Havana, when a man saw his tattoo. This man showed Angel an ID from the Ministry of the Interior and called a patrol that took Angel to Villa Marista, the secret police headquarters. Angel has been detained under the alleged crime of "contempt of authority". (*Cubamet*, 20/7/06)

July 23: Fidel Castro and his delegation returned home to Cuba after attending the 30th Southern Common Market (Mercosur) Summit in Cordoba, Argentina. (*Periódico 26*, 24/7/06)

July 24: Cuba had to pay 4 million dollars for satellite Internet access in 2005, 25 per cent more than an underwater cable access would have cost, Cuban officials claimed. The embargo that Washington imposed on Cuba in 1962 precludes use by the communist island nation of an underwater optic fibre cable that runs near its territory. Roberto Santiesteban, of Cuba's Telecommunications Company (ETECSA), who revealed the discrepancy to reporters, said Cuba was also at a disadvantage because cable connections give faster and better Internet quality. The country has had Internet for ten years. The regime led by Fidel Castro has prioritized the web's 'social' use and limited access by individuals, claiming insufficient bandwidth. (*DPA*, 24/7/06)

July 26: Fidel Castro joked about his age - he's about to turn 80 - and told thousands gathered in Bayamo, Granma province, to commemorate the beginning of the Cuban Revolution that he has no plans to still be leading this island nation when he reaches the century mark. Wearing his traditional olive-drab uniform, Castro, whose birthday is August 13, came to Bayamo, in eastern Cuba, to mark the 53rd anniversary of his attack on the Moncada army barracks. "Let the little neighbors to the north be unworried, I don't intend to still be exercising my office until I'm 100," Castro quipped in the course of a 2 1/2 hour speech that he delivered while standing. He also mentioned the tumble he took in October 2004 during a public event in the city of Santa Clara, noting that he continues to undergo rehabilitation for the injuries he suffered to his leg and arm. "It will soon be two years since my elegant fall," Castro said. "What would have become of me without a therapist to make me walk and use the arm, perhaps with not so much punch as in other times? But I still have my left, which is a very symbolic arm." The aging strongman devoted most of the substance of his address to extolling the social programs of the revolution, which he credited with helping to raise Cubans' life expectancy to 77 years, a longevity comparable to that of residents in much-wealthier countries. (*EFE*, 26/7/06)

July 26: Fidel Castro criticized the US role in the Middle East conflicts and its policy toward Latin America, where, he said, new "revolutions" are arising that Washington "won't be able to destroy". During the inauguration of one of the largest power-generator systems in the island, in the north-eastern province of Holguin, Castro referred to the "revolutions" of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. Castro highlighted that "new revolutions are emerging" and warned that, "the US will not be able to destroy them". The Cuban leader made a call to the Venezuelans to gain all the votes required to safeguard the "Bolivarian revolution" headed by Hugo Chavez. "You talk about ten million votes, and you will have all the votes you want if you are able to educate the Venezuelan people, if you are able to develop the people's conscience", Castro said to a group of Venezuelans attending the ceremony. (*EFE*, *AFP*, 7/06)

July 27: A Cuban dissident group announced the creation of a Commission against "apartheid" practices in Cuba to document cases of discrimination and denounce them before national authorities and international institutions. In a communiqué released in Havana, the Commission denounced that "'segregation' according to nationality, color, disagreement with the official party line or actions independent from State policy is manifest among Cubans at different occasions and from diverse perspectives." The Commission is led by opposition activist Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez Valdés. (*EFE*, 27/7/06)

July 27: Five Cuban boxers led by Olympic and World Champ Guillermo Rigondeaux won gold medals at the Central American and Caribbean Games in Colombia. With other victories in Track and Field, Taekwondo and Ping Pong, Cuba harvested 19 gold medals, ratifying its first place position with a total of 104 gold medals, way ahead Mexico now, with 85. (*ACN*, 28/7/06)

July 28: More than 600 new cases of dengue fever have been recorded in the Havana municipalities of El Cerro, Centro Habana, and Arroyo Naranjo, employees of the Public Health department said. Authorities have been meeting with physicians and nurses to

appraise them of the situation. They have also ordered a clean up campaign in Old Havana, presumably to eliminate breeding areas for the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the vector for the disease. The last outbreak of dengue in the Cuban capital was in January 2002. (*Cubanet*, 28/7/06)

July 31: Fidel Castro underwent complicated intestinal surgery for internal bleeding and relinquished power for the first time in 47 years, placing his younger brother, Raul, “provisionally” in charge of the island nation, according to a statement read on Cuban television. The news came in a statement read on state television by his secretary Carlos Valenciaga. The message said Castro's condition was apparently due to stress from a heavy work schedule during recent trips to Argentina and eastern Cuba. He did not appear on the broadcast. His brother, 75, also will assume full control of the armed forces and the Communist Party. Describing his condition as a "health accident," Castro said he was temporarily relinquishing his presidency to Raul, who is Cuba's defense minister and Castro's designated successor. Castro's statement did not say when his surgery took place. [[Proclama de Fidel Castro](#)] (*Chicago Tribune*, *AP*, *EFE*, *Reuters*, 31,1/7,8/06)

July 31: Martha Beatriz Roque, a leading Cuban government opponent in Havana, said she believed Castro must be gravely ill to have stepped aside — even temporarily. "No one knows if he'll even be alive December 2 when he's supposed to celebrate his birthday," she said in a telephone interview. She said opposition members worried they could be targeted for repression during a government change — especially if authorities fear civil unrest. (*AP*, 31/7/06)

Economy

July 3: A shipment of 250,000 energy-saving light bulbs arrived in Jamaica from Cuba, kick-starting Phase two of the Government's plan to distribute four million fluorescent bulbs to Jamaican households, free of cost. Senator Kern Spencer, State Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Technology, Energy and Commerce, said the bulbs were at the Kingston Wharf and would be distributed to residents of four constituencies. He said also that 100 Cuban technicians would be arriving in the island to help with the distribution.

The bulbs were provided by the Cuban government at no cost for Jamaica. However, the overall estimated retail value of the four million bulbs is \$2 billion. (*Jamaica Gleaner*, 3/7/06)

July 4: Experts from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) acknowledged Cuba's willingness to improve the quality of its people's life. The prestigious world organization has implemented a project in Cuba, aimed at raising quality of life, reducing environmental aggression, fostering sustainable agriculture and assuring a constant production of food. The FAO training program includes talks, conferences, videos and workshops in workplaces or homes of Cuban farmers. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/7/06)

July 5: Tourist air transportation by Cuba's Civil Aeronautics Institute grew over seven percent, compared with the same period last year, its president Rogelio Acevedo said.

Acevedo told *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper the country is investing in airports of Santa Clara, Holguin and Manzanillo, with the aim of modernizing runways and other facilities, developing tourism and improving passengers' attention, among others. The Cuban Civil Aeronautics Institute has firmed up passengers transportation plans scheduled from January to June, the daily reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/7/06)

July 5: Cuban Defence Minister Raul Castro said it was necessary to exploit more land near urban areas for agricultural production, provide incentives for these farmers and balance out the prices of these farm products. During a meeting with the largest producers, Raul Castro said that he was considering the fact that 75 percent of the Cuban people live in cities, and it makes sense for food to be grown on land in and around those urban areas, the *Granma*

official daily reported. The urban-area harvest of vegetables, herbs and spices in 2005, including urban farms, intensive gardens, plots of land and family gardens, total 4.1 million tons, according to official figures. (*EFE*, 5/7/06)

July 5: A trade agreement between Cuba and Mercosur (Common Market of the South) will be signed in the Argentine city of Cordoba during the bloc's annual summit meeting, scheduled for July 20-21. Two weeks before, Cuban authorities and a high-level Mercosur delegation worked intensively to harmonize four Economic Complementation Agreements (ECA) that have been in effect since the end of the 1990s between the Fidel Castro regime and the Southern Cone partners: Brazil (ECA 34), Argentina (ECA 45), Paraguay (ECA 52) and Uruguay (ECA 44). Among the principle themes are the question of safeguards, the rules of origin, phytosanitary measures, and the dispute resolution system. The Foreign Ministry believes that Havana will benefit politically. "The harmonization of these accords allows Mercosur to act as a bloc, to eliminate differences in bilateral dealings, and to facilitate the negotiation of a future free trade treaty with Cuba," one high-ranking diplomat explained to the press, on condition of anonymity. He said that the Cuban Government will be able to say that it has an accord with Mercosur. "This carries weight on the international stage, especially in Cuba's case," he assessed. (*Correio Braziliense*, 5/7/06)

July 10: In a move away from the foreign investment-friendly environment it had created and to re-centralize national economic controls, the Cuban government is rapidly breaking its ties with joint-venture companies formed with Spanish capital that had managed to settle in the island during the last decade. Two major Spanish multinational investors, Acciona Infraestructuras, S.A. and Zell Chemie SL have launched lawsuits against the Cuban government this year, invoking the Agreement of Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments (APRI). (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/7/06)

July 11: Cuba hopes to take advantage of high sugar prices and the ethanol boom to revitalise its industry and greatly increase alcohol production, a senior ministry official said. "Our country has begun an accelerated drive to increase alcohol production, modernising existing distilleries and installing new ones to increase by five times installed capacity," Luis Galvez, director of the sugar ministry's Sugar Cane Derivatives Research Institute, said. There has been a sharp increase in worldwide ethanol demand which, Brazil, the biggest supplier may not be able to meet due to its own strong domestic demand. Cuba, which has scaled back its sugar cane industry, is now attempting to refocus the industry on ethanol production. (*Jamaica Gleaner*, 14/7/06)

July 15: Every square meter of Cuba receives 5 kilowatt-hour of solar energy per day, equivalent to half a kilogram of fuel every 24 hours and uniformly spread throughout the island. Emir Madruga, manager of ECOSOL, state-run enterprise in charge of making and installing solar systems, considers energy from the sun a fundamental strategic element for sustained development. In an interview published by Granma International weekly, the specialist said the country has been able to solve numerous power needs for social and economic targets in areas isolated from the national grid. There are applications such as the photo-voltaic electrification program for family doctor offices in the mountains and isolated rural areas, with more than 400 installations up and working; mountain hospitals, boarding schools, social centers; 2,364-plus elementary schools where TV and VCR equipment was installed. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/7/06)

July 15: The Iranian ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrisian met with the Cuban Minister of Light Industries to discuss matters of mutual interest. During the meeting, José Hernández Bernárdez stated he would do anything for broader cooperation with Iran. The Ministry of Light Industries of Cuba is in charge of supplying a variety of products from textile and leather products to cosmetics and toiletries and from detergents to industrial commodities. (*Tehran Times*, 15/7/06)

July 17: After nearly a decade of urging Cuba to pay off a \$22 billion debt to the former Soviet Union, Russia shelved the issue for indefinite time, Deputy Finance Minister Sergey Storchak made clear. Instead, Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov will offer a new loan of \$350 million during his visit to Cuba. During a September tour to Cuba, Russia's PM

Mikhail Fradkov will suggest to restructure Cuba's debt to Russia and to the former Soviet Union, to fix a settlement schedule and to offer a new loan worth \$35 million, according to Storchak. Cuba's debt to the USSR is around \$22 billion, the deputy finance minister said. Other estimates vary from \$16 to \$25 billion. In Cuba, however, they don't think they owe anything to the USSR. To the contrary, Fidel Castro vowed some time ago Cuba that he may claim damages worth \$30 billion due to the abrupt fall of the USSR. (*SKRIN Newswire*, 17/7/06)

July 18: The Cuban Ministry of Food Industries will invest more than 10 million USD to expand soy milk production to more than one million liters per day. The technical director of the Dairy Industry Association, Kenya Silvera, told the media that six soy milk plants are expected to open and begin production this year in Havana, Villa Clara, Ciego de Avila and Pinar del Río. Soy milk is currently produced in all Cuban provinces and this year production will be in the neighbourhood of 250 thousand tons. (*ANSA*, 19/7/06)

July 18: Scientists in Guantanamo, eastern Cuba, are implementing a project for sustainable food production with efficient handling of natural and human resources.

The project, known as Demonstrative Sustainable and Agro-Ecological Production Models in Rural Areas with Adverse Environmental Conditions, is co-sponsored by the UN Development Program. The project also involves Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia. Cuba is represented by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment Centro de Gerencia de Proyectos. Guantanamo is a geographic and climatic paradox in Cuba, as it is the most humid region, contains the driest and most arid region, the Sagua-Baracoa mountain range, and has been severely affected by erosion and salinity in the south. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/7/06)

July 19: Gustavo Márquez, Minister of State for Integration and Foreign Trade, said that during the summit of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), the economic bloc is to initial a trade agreement with Cuba. "All of the member countries of Mercosur have relations with Cuba. The current trade embargo is an imposition of the United States, but it does not include the nations of the southern bloc or the Latin American countries," Márquez said. However, the trade complementary agreement between Cuba and MERCOSUR merely covers 0,17 percent of trade between the South American bloc and the island. (*El Universal, EFE*, 19/7/06)

July 20: British airline Virgin Atlantic described its first year of operations in Cuba as satisfactory, during which it carried 35,000 passengers to the island, Virgin Representative Michelle Southgate said in Havana. In statements to Caribbean News Digital, the executive noted the beneficial ties between the United Kingdom and Cuba, adding that the company reported a 75 percent occupation rate during the period. Virgin Atlantic's two weekly flights between London's Gatwick Airport and Havana's Jose Marti Airport have been well accepted since July 2005. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/7/06)

July 20: Cuba and Venezuela have agreed to extend their bilateral trade which currently exceeds 3.5 billion USD per year. According to the Venezuelan National Customs and Revenue Superintendent, José Gregorio Vielma Mora, the accord "constitutes the foundation for all the agreements signed by presidents (of Venezuela) Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro (of Cuba) to promote bilateral trade." (*AFP*, 20/7/06)

July 21: Canadian engineering graduate Dwayne Wohlgemuth discovered that unlike many underdeveloped countries, the Cuban population that goes without electricity is limited to 4.5 percent. Dwayne Wohlgemuth traveled to Cuba for an internship to immerse himself in yet another culture while working with solar electricity projects in rural communities, says The Gateway, University of Alberta website. Wohlgemuth participated in an existing six-year program, started by Cuban organizations, to install 60 solar panel systems and four medical clinics. "The first installation we helped with, for example, was a nine kilowatt system for a high school in a remote mountainous area," Wohlgemuth explained. "A nine kilowatt system is quite huge for solar, including 90 solar panels with a total area of approximately 100 square meters. This is now the second biggest solar electricity system in Cuba." (*Prensa Latina*, 21/7/06)

July 20: The foreign capital in Cuban companies continued decreasing in 2005, under a reorganization of the country's economy, a report of the Centre for Studies of the Cuban Economy said. A total 258 companies with foreign capital operated in Cuba in 2005, compared to 404 companies with foreign capital in 2002. The contracts for production cooperation decreased to 103 in 2005 from 441 in 2003, the report showed. Spain leads with 77 associations with Cuban companies, followed by Canada with 41 and Italy with 40. Most of the companies operate in the industry sector, mainly mining and crude oil, tourism, and later communications and construction. The retransformation of the free trade areas in Cuba into areas for logistic development, introduced in 2004, led to the dissolution of over 330 businesses between 1990 and 2005. (*Latin America News Digest*, 20/7/06)

July 21: Cuban Transportation Minister Carlos Manuel invited Iranian companies to attend an international Transportation Exhibition in Havana from September 27 to 30.

A report released by the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Information and Press Bureau said that Iran's Ambassador to Havana, Ahmad Edrisian met with Cuban Transportation Minister Carlos Manuel. During the meeting, the two sides surveyed the current level of commercial and business transactions between the two countries and stressed the need for the broadening and continuity of their cooperation. The Cuban Minister emphasized that his Iranian counterpart Rahmati should attend Cuba during his country's International Transportation Exhibition. Manuel added, "The Iranian-made transportation facilities are of high quality and can have customers in Cuba." Manuel also said that there is a good market in Cuba for various types of vehicles, including passenger cars, manufactured in Iran, and the Iranian firms' presence at the fair would meanwhile pave the path for further cooperation, as well as a step toward the entry of Iranian cars to Latin American markets. (*FARS*, 21/7/06)

July 21: The Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and Cuba signed an agreement on eliminating tariffs and boosting complementary trade, on the sidelines of the 30th Mercosur Summit held in Cordoba, Argentina. The group deal, known as the Economic Complementation Accord, is an integration of the four agreements that the Mercosur members already had with Cuba, and was signed by presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay on behalf of Mercosur, and Fidel Castro. Cuba-Mercosur trade reached 405 million US dollars in 2005, but still it's 0.17 percent of Mercosur's global transactions. (*Xinhua, EFE*, 21/7/06)

July 26: After an intensive restructuring of its sugar industry, Cuba is planning to make new investments in the sector to produce ethanol, Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro said. During a visit to the eastern province of Granma, the minister told journalists that the Cuban sugar industry had arrived at the "door of development" after the restructuring process it began in 2002. The Communist island dismantled part of its sugar industry after the drop in prices for the sweetener several years ago, but it began to increase production again when prices on the international market began rising. In the new phase, Cuba is focusing its attention on the production of ethanol, which, the minister said, offers a "magnificent outlook for the next harvest." He also said that the government was studying joint investment proposals it had received in the sector, but he added that so far "there is nothing concrete." If these joint investments are agreed, it would be the first time Cuba allows investments of foreign capital in the sugar industry. (*EFE, Reuters*, 26/7/06)

July 26: Fidel Castro, who attended as a special guest a Mercosur Summit in Argentina, said that his country will join the South Common Market bloc when it is suitable to the island, because Cuba "doesn't take decisions following blind rules". "I said in that meeting that we do not act following blind rules", Castro said in a speech delivered during the celebrations for the 26th of July anniversary. "What is a blind rule? I lower the tariffs in order to sell. Those are indirect measures. We apply direct measures. That is what should be done", he said. "We act according to rationality", Castro added. (*AFP*, 26/7/06)

July 26: Fidel Castro inaugurated the country's largest new power-generator system in the eastern province of Holguin. The initiative --connected to the national grid-- is part of the ongoing National Energy Program aimed at boosting the efficient use of fuels. The power generation facility will contribute over 200,000 kilowatts, nearly the same output as

one of the units of the thermoelectric plant operating in that Cuban territory. The mounting and testing of the project took only five months. (ACN, 27/7/06)

July 27: Using its own resources, Cuba will soon start building its first eolian park in a northeastern coastal area, which is ideal to develop that alternative energy source from wind activity. Vladimir Alvarez, a specialist of the Integral Directive Board of the Eolian Project in Holguin, told the press ground movement will start in August on the Gibara coast, where six generators will be placed. That equipment will generate 5.1 megawatts, although the eolian-electrical potential in Holguin is over 500 megawatts, equivalent to the production of the generating units of Lidio Ramon Perez thermoelectric station in Felton area in the same province. Park operations will begin in early 2007, with a design to take advantage of the trade winds from the Atlantic Ocean, which reach this area perpendicularly. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/7/06)

July 30: Cuban authorities are cracking down on people who fail to pay for electric service and break other utility rules in Havana, where more than 800 violations have been registered so far this year, the press reported. Cuba's state-owned power company has deployed 192 inspectors across the capital to uncover fraud by electric customers, the weekly *Tribuna de La Habana* said. Among the violations being targeted are the unauthorized resetting of electric meters and other tactics to avoid paying electricity bills.

Violators face penalties ranging from service cutoffs to fines and even jail time if convicted of a repeat offence. State-owned power company OBE said payments for service in Havana have not been matching consumption, drawing the attention of company personnel. Company officials estimated that fraud in 2006 was running at three times the rate last year. (*EFE*, 30/7/06)

Exile Community

July 2: Czech ex-president Vaclav Havel, an advocate of freedom and human rights observance in Cuba, met with Cuban-born US film star Andy Garcia. Asked by the press whether he would return to Cuba if the current totalitarian regime collapsed, Garcia said he has been dreaming about returning to Cuba for all his life. The family of Garcia, now 50, left Cuba shortly after Fidel Castro's takeover, when Andy was a small boy. Before a private dinner with Havel, Garcia said it is impossible to anticipate what will happen in Cuba. It is only necessary to hope and pray for the changes that can be expected one day, to be peaceful. For 47 years it has been hoped that changes will occur soon, Garcia said. He said he is meeting Havel because he highly esteems his activities in support of human rights. There are many people who have been doing much for Cuba. Mr. Havel is one of them, Garcia said. Garcia is staying in the Czech Republic as a guest to the Karlovy Vary international film festival that has presented him with a Crystal Globe for his extraordinary contribution to world cinema. (*CTK*, 2/7/06)

July 8: The Association of Christian Women in Defense of the Cuban Family held its fourth demonstration against the Bush administration's tightening of travel restrictions to Cuba. Shouting out " Queremos viajar, vamos a viajar !" a group of more than 50 protesters joined together in a demonstration in front of Hialeah's City Hall. The Association of Christian Women in Defense of the Cuban Family is a group of Cuban women, their husbands and other sympathizers who are against the tightened restrictions placed by the Bush administration on travel and remittances to the island. "These are arbitrary laws that separate families, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews; they have no respect for family," a demonstrator said. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/7/06)

July 10: The NGO "Spanish Solidarity with Cuba" published the first "solidarity tourist guide" of a country, in which the customary description of the island and its tourist landmarks is used as a vehicle to deliver abundant information about the prisoners of conscience and his families, activists of human rights and civil society of Cuba. The head of Communications of the organization and coauthor of the guide, Maria Ángeles Altozano, pointed that several NGOs

from other countries "have shown interest in having the guide translated into English, French, German and even Polish." [[Guía Turística y Solidaria de Cuba](#)] (*Europa Press*, 10/7/06)

July 11: In South Florida, reaction to the Report by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba was divided, though somewhat muted, between those who favor or oppose the US embargo policy. Alfredo Mesa, director of the Cuban American National Foundation, said the report sends a message of support to potential reformers in Cuba who may be afraid to speak out. He said reformers should know they can turn to the United States, not to current Castro allies like Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. "At the end of the day, the Cuban American National Foundation is very clear that decisions on the future of Cuba have to be made in Cuba by Cubans," Mesa said. Silvia Wilhelm, head of the Miami-based Cuban American Commission for Family Rights, called the commission's report a "continuation of a totally failed policy." "On the one hand, they talk about engagement and the importance of people-to-people [contacts]. On the other hand, they have rules in place now that prevent families from seeing each other," Wilhelm said. "To me, that is most ironic." Sylvia Irizondo, president of Women and Mothers Against Repression, supported the Report saying that it is "a US commitment with Cuba's democratic future". However, Ramón Saúl Sánchez, president of the Democracy Movement, a well-known Cuban exile organization in Miami, said that the Report is a "mistake", because the funding will go to groups based in the US and not to the Cuban dissidents. He also considered that the dissident movement will be paying a high cost once Fidel Castro takes advantage of the Report to increase repression under the argument that the dissidents are "mercenaries" paid by the US. (*Sun Sentinel, EFE*, 11/7/06)

July 14: The opposition organization Plataforma Cuba Democracia Ya released a letter addressed to US President George W. Bush, criticizing his Plan of Assistance to a Free Cuba for being "timid, confusing and vague" because it views the transition as conditioned upon the death of Fidel Castro, it does not define clear strategies to restore democracy on the island and it "does not guarantee" its own continuity. (*Europa Press*, 14/7/06)

July 15: A presidential commission's report on US plans to promote democracy in Cuba has earned applause from Cuban exiles, particularly for an \$80 million commitment to bolster civil society and independent media. But while many expressed broad support for the commission's message, some were wary of how, and if, the promised funds will be spent. "It would be very harmful if they said that money will come and then people didn't get it," said Orlando Gutierrez, the National Secretary of the Miami-based Cuban Democratic Directorate, which seeks to provide humanitarian aid to the pro-democracy movement on the island. Ninaska Perez Castellon, of the conservative Liberty Council, said concerns about US influence were unwarranted. "Nobody questioned it when Europe was under communism, and it was the United States and Margaret Thatcher that provided the help," she said. (*AP*, 15/7/06)

July 15: Manuel Ochoa, the conductor and musical director of the Miami Symphony orchestra he founded in 1989 passed away of heart failure. He was 80 and had been in poor health for most of the year and, regrettably, was no longer able to conduct. Born into a musical family in the Cuban provincial city of Holguín, Manuel Ochoa first conducted professionally at the age of 17 -- a performance of Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore*. He graduated from Havana's prestigious Conservatorio Internacional de Música, where he would later serve as Professor of Conducting Techniques. In Cuba, Ochoa went on to conduct the Orquesta Filarmonica de La Habana, but it was at choral conducting that he first excelled, becoming the island's preeminent choral conductor. He continued his studies in Europe, graduating from the Real Conservatorio de Madrid and learning conducting techniques in Rome and Vienna. One of his achievements was to be an early interpreter of Cuba's first composer, the now revered Baroque master Esteban Salas. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/7/06)

July 21: The executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), Alfredo Mesa, will resign his post to work for a firm that deals with government affairs, although he will continue to fulfill his duties as spokesman for the Cuban exile organization and could sit at its executive board meetings. "The current position of the CANF is very solid, which allows for these changes," pointed out Mesa, 31, who, following the CANF congress, will become vice-president of the global government affairs strategy and management firm Dutko WorldWide. In letter to Mas

Santos, Mesa praised the current CANF strategy, focused on supporting the dissident movement, a non-violent political transition in Cuba and the articulation last year of the Cuban Consensus project, which brought approximately 20 exile organizations together under the same program. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/7/06)

July 22: The Cuban American National Foundation, the organization that pushed the Cuban exile cause to national prominence, celebrated its 25th anniversary with great fanfare during its annual conference. "This represents a quarter century of victories and sacrifice by so many men and women who worked toward the common goal of liberty in Cuba," said Jorge Mas Santos, current CANF chairman and son of Mas Canosa, who died in 1997. "It reflects on the vision of the founders, who left us their vision to make sure that every Cuban on the island knows that they are not alone." Highlighting the foundation's current focus on providing financial and other support to dissidents still living in Cuba, Mas and his mother Irma Mas Santos announced a \$1 million donation to the foundation to mark the quarter century milestone. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/7/06)

July 25: A coalition of US-based Cuban exile groups launched a campaign to urge their compatriots in the Island "not to cooperate with the dictatorship." According to the organizations, the campaign aims to provide support for civic resistance movements in Cuba and was organized in response to calls from political prisoners and dissidents in the Island. The initiative was launched by the organizations Plantados (made up of former Cuban political prisoners who refused all rehabilitation plans and insisted on their status as political prisoners), MAR Por Cuba and Cuban Democratic Directorate. (*AP, El Nuevo Herald*, 26/7/06)

July 31: Alfredo Mesa, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, a powerful Miami-based exile group, said he believed Castro's medical condition was serious enough to put in place the Cuban government's succession strategy. "It is very important that everyone remain calm," Mesa said. "Those in power need to know that the foundation is ready to support a true and peaceful transition to democracy." (*Chicago Tribune*, 1/8/06)

July 31: Cuban exiles took to the streets of Miami in their thousands convinced that Fidel Castro was at death's door. Castro's move was "a historic chance to peacefully bring an end to an era marked by fear and repression," the Spanish association Cuba in Transition said. The group said it had written to Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero calling on him to "send a message to the members of the Cuba Communist Party and especially to Cuban democrats that Spain will support a peaceful change on the island." The association Cuba, Democracy Now" called for "serenity, caution and a maximum degree of communication between inhabitants on the island and exiles, while we wait for events to develop". "We do not rule out repressive acts by the temporary government presided by Raul Castro to contain any demonstration by the people in the streets of Cuba," the group added. "It's very early to give an opinion," said Janisset Rivero, executive director of the Cuban Democratic Directorate, which supports dissidents on the island. "We will be watching what they are saying in and outside of the island," she said. "Too often it is very different." (*AP, AFP*, 1/8/06)

Foreign Affairs

July 1: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque, addressing the special ministerial session of a summit of the African Union, highlighted the importance and relevance of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). He stressed the significance of the movement in today's world marked by unilateral and aggressive policies and disrespect by powerful countries for the most basic standards of international law and the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. During his speech delivered to the representatives of the 53 nations which make up the African Union, Minister Perez Roque said these were the reasons which show "the urgency for maintaining a united front in the defense of the rights of peoples to self-determination, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. [[Discurso del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores](#)] (*Granma*, 1/7/06)

July 2: Cuban Foreign Ministry condemned Israeli warplane violation of the Syrian airspace, saying that this act "poses a danger to the international peace and security". The Ministry stressed in a statement that the violation further escalates tension in the Middle East. It called on the international community and all peace-loving countries to immediately move and demand Israel to withdraw from Gaza and stop state terrorism against the Palestinian people. (SANA, 2/7/06)

July 3: The Non-Aligned Movement is totally satisfied with preparations for its 4th Conference-Summit in Havana, next September. "The information on those preparations has been positively received given the progress we have achieved," asserted Cuban Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Manuel Aguilera de la Paz. Aguilera briefed the NAM Bureau of Coordination at UN about details of the summit with documentation in an Operating Handbook. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/7/06)

July 4: Supporters of Cubans jailed by the regime for challenging the one-party state held a press conference in Vienna to urge the Castro government to free more than 300 political prisoners. The president of the Dutch-based Cuba Futuro Foundation, Jan ter Laak, and the executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Aaron Rhodes, said that a recent visit to the island left them convinced that "the general human rights situation in Cuba is rapidly deteriorating." Rhodes said that Cuba's more than 300 political prisoners "are suffering from malnutrition, rat infestation and they have little chance of seeing their families." Locked up in Cuban jails, he said, are people who have been arrested for using computers, publishing articles, having telephone conversations with foreigners, owning certain books or disseminating the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Cuban authorities have classified as enemy propaganda. (*EFE*, 5/7/06)

July 4: According to European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel, the European Commission representation in Havana also endures "access restrictions to certain Internet servers, blocked by the only local ISP available in Cuba." In response to a Euro Representative who asked whether the EC delegation in Havana had "unrestricted Internet access," the Commissioner confirmed the access restrictions. (*EFE*, 4/7/06)

July 4: The Canadian University of Quebec, Montreal, and the Pedagogical Superior Institute Enrique Jose Varona in Havana City strengthened ties with the celebration of the event "Following Iberville's Footprints". Both institutions have maintained their exchange program since 2000 and now intend to diversify collaboration perspectives extending them to the fields of science and culture. The event includes a colloquium on the life of Pierre Le Moyne de Iberville, hero of the New France, who died on July 9, 1706, in Havana's harbour. Iberville, the name which refers to the exchange between Cuba and Canada, was an adventurous character who had been a pirate, captain, soldier and even once the prime governor of Louisiana. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/7/06)

July 4: The annual program of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human rights allotted 10, 700, 000 euros for an ad campaign and deemed the government of Cuba to be eligible for national project development. The EU Commissioner for International Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, confirmed the news to José Ribeiro e Castro, representative of the European People's Party, who denounced that the communist regime of Cuba controls and restricts Internet access, echoing some of the accusations by independent journalists imprisoned since March, 2003. (*MartiNoticias*, 4/7/06)

July 4: Peruvian former presidential candidate, Ollanta Humala, said that Fidel Castro visited him when he was been treated in a Havana hospital. Humala said he traveled to Cuba because wanted to avoid the local press. (*El Comercio*, 5/7/06)

July 5: President Nguyen Minh Triet said more efficient co-operation programmes should be carried out to expand the traditional friendly relations between Viet Nam and Cuba. The newly elected President was speaking upon receiving a

high-ranking Cuban Communist Party delegation, led by Vice President of the Cuban Council of State Esteban Lazo Hernandez, in Ho Chi Minh City. (VNS, 6/7/06)

July 5: The Ecuadorian and Cuban governments are determined to strengthen their ties of friendship. Within this context, Foreign Minister Francisco Carrion travelled to Havana for an official two-day visit. According to the Ecuadoran Foreign Ministry, two key issues will be examined during Carrion's stay in Cuba. First, issues of common interest will be reviewed. Second, preparations for the Summit of Non-Aligned Countries will be coordinated. Carrion will meet his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez, to review the bilateral agenda and to make preparations for the presidential summit scheduled for September in Havana. A Foreign Ministry communique said that "the ministers will also sign a cooperation agreement for the exchange of information and technical guidance in the area of historical documents and archives". (El Comercio, 6/7/06)

July 6: Little more than six months after the arrival in Bolivia of the first contingent of Cuban doctors, the Cuban Embassy confirmed to the press that there have been defections. In response to questions regarding reports of 30 Cuban doctors who might have defected, Miguel Ángel Puente, Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Cuba in Bolivia, admitted that "in all the missions there are always members who decide to remain in other countries." However, he dismissed the notion of a massive defection.

(El Nuevo Día, 6/7/06)

July 6: Twenty-two Cubans were rescued by a group of Honduran fishermen when they were trying to reach the US coast in two small boats. In 2005, 171 Cubans arrived in Honduras, while 331 have made it between January and June 2006. (AP, 6/7/06)

July 6: The UN Human Rights Council deplored Israel's military operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as breaching international humanitarian law and voted to send a fact-finding mission to the region. The resolution received considerable support from the non-Muslim members of the council, including India, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Cuba, the Philippines and Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Uruguay and Zambia. Canada and European countries opposed it. (AP, 6/7/06)

July 7: The ruling presidential candidate Felipe Calderon affirmed he will seek "constructive, beneficial" relations with Cuba and Venezuela. In a press conference, Calderon indicated that, "as president, I will establish a fruitful relationship with Cuba and Venezuela, apart from the ideological stances of each nation." Shortly before the press conference, he sustained his foreign policy will be based on respect for self-determination, non-intervention, and human rights defence. (Prensa Latina, 7/7/06)

July 7: Cuba's Culture Minister Abel Prieto and Antigua and Barbuda's Eleston Admas signed in Santiago de Cuba an agreement of exchange and collaboration, aimed at fostering bilateral ties of friendship and solidarity. As part of the 26th Caribbean Festival, the document establishes the presence in their respective nations of artists and groups from different tendencies international cultural events, including the Festival of Fire. The accord, in force for five years, also includes, among other things, exchange of trade, displays between the two islands' institutions, as well as the publication of magazines, catalogues and other visual arts materials. (Prensa Latina, 7/7/06)

July 9: Bolivian Ambassador to Cuba Saul Chavez Orozco said that relations between the two countries get stronger according to their peoples' wish. Our mission is to work intensively to consolidate bilateral ties and friendship between our peoples, said Chavez Orozco upon his arrival in Havana after being appointed by President Evo Morales. (Prensa Latina, 9/7/06)

July 10: Francisco Carrion Mena, Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Ecuador said that cooperation between his country and Cuba "is working". During an interview with the local press just a few hours before returning back to

his country, Carrion Mena said that, "there is a historical tuning between the two peoples, that makes that us feel proud of the friendship that exists between Cuba and Ecuador". Invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque, Carrion Mena fulfilled a tight agenda that served, he explained, "to tighten the ties of friendship between the two nations; historical and brotherly ties". The Ecuadorian Minister praised the cooperation provided by Cuba for a campaign in 16 of the 22 departments of that Andean nation, where a Cuban literacy program is been used. He also acknowledged the results of Operation Miracle, which has returned sight to more than 2,000 Ecuadorians, and also the training provided here in Cuba to young health care professionals. (*Granma*, 10/7/06)

July 10: The Cuban doctor who defected while on an aid mission to Bolivia seeks political asylum in another country, another dissident from the island who has lived in Bolivia for several years, Amauri Samartino, told the press. Samartino telephoned from the eastern city of Santa Cruz to say that he has helped Dr. Alberto Aguila Rios hide while he looks for refuge outside Bolivia, and said he had previously done the same for another Cuban doctor whose name he preferred not to reveal. Samartino who is also a physician has lived in this Andean capital since the year 2000 when he arrived from the US Navy base in Guantanamo, Cuba, with 10 of his compatriots seeking political asylum in Bolivia. Samartino cited rumors that there are at least 30 Cuban professionals who have fled the mission in Bolivia and have headed for the neighbouring countries of Argentina and Brazil. In a statement on a local television channel, the Cuban ambassador in La Paz, Rafael Dausa, dismissed Aguila by calling him a "petty traitor." The ambassador has denied that as many as 30 have deserted the mission and would only say that there have been "a few cases", without giving a specific number. (*EFE*, 10/6/07)

July 11: Cuba will receive more than 1,200 foreign "brigadistas" this summer for its social-political tourism program. They are so-called revolutionary tourists who arrive in Cuba each year from about 50 countries for a 'total immersion' in one of the world's few remaining socialist countries. "I call it a revolutionary vacation. I dedicate my free time to doing something concrete for the Cuban revolution," Mr. Carlo Sarpero, a 26-year-old shopkeeper from Genoa, Italy, explained, as he repaired a school. The Caribbean island's government does not measure the program's impact in monetary value, like that of sun and beach tourism which brings in more than \$2.5 billion a year, but in political terms. "A big majority of those who participate become activists in Cuban solidarity groups in their countries," said Mr. Gabriel Benitez of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, the program sponsor. The 21-day trip package, which includes lodging in the modest Caimito camp just west of Havana, costs \$350. Recently, the government has been trying to attract young Europeans during their summer vacations in hopes of influencing a sector of the Left not always sympathetic to Fidel Castro. "That way the revolutionary message reaches places it didn't before," the ICAP's Mr. Benitez said. (*Reuters*, 11/7/06)

July 12: The Honduran government began contacts with Cuba as initial steps on a negotiation between the two countries to avoid the transit of undocumented Cuban immigrants through this Central American nation. "It's a first approach with Havana", the press secretary of the Honduran chancellery said. In the last 18 months most of the almost 600 undocumented Cuban immigrants who have arrived in Honduras have left for Miami. (*AP*, 12/7/06)

July 14: With an interview on "All TV," Brazil started an international crusade to denounce new aggressive US plans for Cuba. The first and largest online TV network of this South American country met live Cuba's General Council to Brazil, Ambassador Carlos Trejo, for almost one hour. On the program, the diplomat spoke of the criminal brutality of these new measures announced against Cuba by US President George W. Bush and his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/7/06)

July 14: Cuba has been appointed to chair the Committee on Rivers of the Pan-American Engineers Associations - made up of 26 countries in the region, with Spain as an observer. With Cuban expert Rafael Feito to head the specialized institution, this is the first time for the island to chair the expert group. (*ACN*, 14/7/06)

July 14: Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto met in Rio de Janeiro with Brazilian intellectuals during his second day of visit. Prieto held talks with a group of cultural figures sympathetic with Cuba, in which he analyzed aspects on the Cuban reality and established priorities for current situations. Prieto invited Brazilian intellectuals to attend festivals like the New Latin American Cinema festival, Havana Biennial, theater and other cultural activities taking place in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/7/06)

July 16: Cuba strongly condemned the Israeli aggressions on Lebanon, which led to the killing of innocent civilians and destruction of the country's infrastructure. "Cuba condemns Israeli violations of the international laws and norms through its military offensive on a sovereign country under different pretexts to protect its security by the military and financial support of the US Administration," a statement by the Cuban Foreign Ministry said. (*SANA*, 16/7/06)

July 17: Honduran authorities are devising a plan to halt what they say is an organized smuggling operation, fearing an "avalanche" of illegal landings by Cuban migrants who are using Honduras as a gateway to the United States. "What we are witnessing is the trafficking of human beings," Germán Espinal, Honduran director general of international migration, told the press. "We need to find a mechanism that will distance us from being accomplices to human trafficking." A record number of Cubans have landed on Honduran beaches this year: at least 380 over the past six months, compared to 179 in all of 2005 and 47 in 2002. Soon after arrival, the Cubans usually leave Honduras by land to make their way to the US-Mexico border and become beneficiaries of the US wet-foot/dry-foot policy upon stepping on US soil. Honduran authorities say they hope to reach some kind of accord with the US and Cuban governments that will dissuade those trying to flee the island from using the Central American nation as a stopover to "El Norte". (*The Miami Herald*, 17/7/06)

July 17: Frederick A. Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Public Service of Bahamas, began an official visit to Cuba at the invitation of his local counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. During his visit, the Bahamas Foreign Minister will open an embassy for his country in Havana. Among those joining Mitchell on his visit to Cuba are Melanie Griffin, Minister of Social Services and Community Development; parliament members Tennyson Wells, Keod Smith and Whitney Bastian; the standing secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Patricia Rodgers; and the Bahamian ambassador to Cuba, Carlton Wright. Diplomatic relations between Cuban and Bahamas were established in November 1974. Bahamas and Cuba are both members of the Association of Caribbean States and the Non-Aligned Movement, which is holding its 14th Summit in Havana in September. (*Granma*, 17/7/06)

July 17: South Africa's Nelson Mandela said he "never imagined" reaching the age of 88 as he received one of his first birthday presents -- a shipment of rum and cigars from Fidel Castro. Mandela's spokeswoman, Zelda La Grange, said the man affectionately known as "Madiba" around South Africa was in fine shape and looking forward to his birthday. La Grange said presents for Mandela were beginning to arrive from around the world, including the special birthday shipment from Cuba's Castro. "The president kept his promise and sent the rum and cigars," La Grange said of Castro. Mandela, however, is a committed anti-smoker and not known as a drinker. (*Reuters*, 18/7/06)

July 18: Cuba's National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon publicly denounced the connivance of the European Union nations with the aggressive US policy against the island. Local Granma daily published an article in which Alarcon termed the EU a "Sleeping Beauty" v/v the most recent public plans of President George W. Bush. Alarcon condemned the additional measures on the Caribbean nation passed July 10 by the White House, which include suits against nations trading with Cuba, as the extra-territorial Helms-Burton Act sets out. He recalled that when the US enacted that legislation in 1996, Europe condemned neither its genocide and interventionist nature nor its aim to wipe out the island's independence and sovereignty. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/7/06)

July 18: Cuba's National Assembly (Congress) Deputy Speaker Jaime Crombet reasserted in Managua the ties of friendship and cooperation that join the island's legislative power with its counterpart in Nicaragua. "Our relations are excellent, because we have historically worked closely," said the Cuban legislator after meeting with his Nicaraguan

counterpart Rene Nuñez. The aim of Crombet's visit to Nicaragua is to attend the celebrations for the 27th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/7/06)

July 18: Cuban analysts linked to official media openly expressed their support for the Mexican presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and demanded a recount of last elections' votes to guarantee the governability in that country. The political crisis in Mexico was the topic of discussion at the Round Table, a television talk show through which the Cuban authorities usually voice their position on current events. On that particular broadcast, the producers interspersed telephone interviews with Mexican analysts partial to López Obrador and with PRD senator Jesús Ortega. (*AP*, 19/7/06)

July 19: Cuba opened its embassy in Islamabad, establishing diplomatic relations with Pakistan for the first time. Cuba evinced interest in establishing formal ties with Pakistan following last year's devastating earthquake when teams of Cuban Doctors helped treat Pakistani quake victims. (*New Kerala*, 19/7/06)

July 19: A Cuban union leader said Australian workers face an attack on their rights from the federal government's workplace reforms. Gilda Chacon-Bravo, head of the Asia Pacific region of the Cuban Federation of Workers, said she found it hard to believe Australian workers were experiencing such an onslaught. "In Cuba, 98 per cent of workers have union affiliation and collectively bargain," said Ms Chacon-Bravo, who will be the keynote speaker at a Australia-Cuba Friendship Society public forum in Adelaide. "It is clear that the Australian government is trying to destroy any opposition it encounters, and that its current target is to divide and undermine Australian working families," Chacon-Bravo added. (*AAP*, 19/7/06)

July 19: Cuban Johandry Núñez Fioveredo spent his 14th day "living" at Juan Santamaría Airport because he has no valid visa to enter Costa Rica. Immigration authorities confirmed that Núñez, 27, tried to clear customs with forged travel documents. According to Deputy Director of Immigration and Foreigner Status Xinia Sossa, his situation is complex as he cannot yet be deported. Meanwhile, Núñez, who cannot leave the airport grounds, strolls around the boarding area, chats with other passengers and borrows the phone to make personal calls. (*La Nación*, 19/7/06)

July 19: In an interview with the Spanish daily ABC, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza, said that "if it is not possible to establish a dialogue with Cuba, we cannot resort to violence either." To a question about how the OAS could influence the process of succession in Cuba, Insulza replied that the sanction applied against Cuba in 1962 imposes limits. "I believe that this policy is not going to change because the Cubans do not want it to either. Now, when the transition takes place, no one knows what will happen." And he added, "if it is not possible to establish a dialogue with Cuba, we cannot resort to violence either." (*ABC*, 19/7/06)

July 19: From inside the Cuban embassy in Mexico City, Peter Gellert, a non-diplomat and representative of the Mexican Movement of Solidarity with Cuba, called upon alternative groups to support the social mobilization before the possible accession of Felipe Calderón to the presidency. "It is important to support the anti-imperialist mobilization before Felipe Calderón takes office," said Gellert. The declarations were made during a conference with the so-called alternative press, where both José Leyva, the embassy's Press Attaché, and Gellert, discussed the events scheduled to take place this year in Havana and Mexico on the occasion of several commemorative dates such as the 53rd anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution on July 26 and the celebration of Fidel Castro's 80th birthday on August 13. (*El Universal*, 19/7/06)

July 19: With the possibility that Fidel Castro will visit Cordova to attend the Mercosur Summit, Roberto Quiñones, son of Cuban dissident doctor Hilda Molina, renewed his calls for the Argentinean government to intercede with the Cuban president so that his mother is allowed to travel to Argentina to meet her grandchildren. He indicated that the Argentinean authorities should deliver a "firm and direct" request to Castro, asking that his mother and his 87-year-old grandmother be allowed to go to Argentina, where Quiñones resides. (*La Nación*, 19/7/06)

July 20: Following the success of the launch of its internet freedom campaign in the UK, Amnesty International is going global with "irrepressible.info", a campaign that aims to claim back the web as a force for change in the face of an increasing willingness on the part of technology companies to aid censorship and repression. AI said that from Iran to the Maldives and Cuba to Vietnam, governments are both cracking down on those who use the internet to communicate their views and denying their citizens access to its wealth of information. "Web users are locked up, internet cafes are shut down, chat rooms are policed and blogs deleted. Websites are blocked, foreign news banned, and search engines filter out sensitive results," a press release said. "The internet can be a great tool for the promotion of human rights -- activists can tell the world about abuses in their country at the click of a mouse. People have unprecedented access to information from the widest range of sources," said Amnesty International. [[AI Campaign](#)] (*AI Press Release*, 20/7/06)

July 20: The Cuban government's rejection of European Union (EU) funds for cooperation projects and new requirements for resource mobilization threaten the continuity of the work of European NGOs in Cuba, said Marco Terreni, one of the directors of the Italian sustainable development project Habana Ecópolis. "We are trying to build up decentralized cooperation," in other words, resources originating from "small organizations, affiliations, mayoralities, regions" in Europe. However, the funds obtained are "insufficient and scattered," which "puts us in a difficult situation," he said. Habana Ecópolis is a consortium of Italian non governmental organizations (NGOs) that since 2000 advances a wide spectrum of projects of collaboration concerned with broad issues affecting the socio-cultural environment, urban environmental sanitation and ecological protection in five municipalities of the Cuban capital. (*IPS*, 20/7/06)

July 20: In a rare trip abroad, Fidel Castro arrived in Cordoba, Argentina's second-largest city, to join a summit of heads of state, boost his island's trade with South America and visit the childhood home of revolutionary hero Ernesto "Che" Guevara. The landing of Castro's plane was broadcast live on many local news channels, and hundreds of curious people waited around the city to catch a glimpse of the 79-year-old who has ruled Cuba since the revolution in 1959. His surprise arrival -- his visit was officially announced only hours before his landing -- at the meeting of heads of state from the trade group known as Mercosur eclipsed many of the other agenda items and events scheduled for the summit, including the formal entrance of Venezuela into the bloc. Castro is expected to sign trade agreements with the Mercosur nations -- Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela -- visit Guevara's home and perhaps attend a rally with his top South American ally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. (*AP*, 21/7/06)

July 20: The "Ladies in White," representing the families of scores of Cuban dissidents jailed in 2003, appealed to the leaders of the Mercosur trade bloc to urge Fidel Castro to free the island's more than 300 political prisoners. In a communique released after learning of Castro's travel plans, the Ladies in White asked the seven other heads of state who will be at the meeting in Argentina to intercede with "the maximum authority in the government of Cuba" in the name of basic human rights. "It is estimated that there are more than 300 peaceful political prisoners in all," the statement said. "All of them should be released." The Ladies in White asked Mercosur leaders to make surprise visits to Cuba jails and to the homes of the prisoners' families in order to see for themselves "the psychological torture, the intimidation and the smear campaigns" to which the prisoners and their relatives are subjected. The Ladies in White, which last year received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for human rights activism, is comprised of wives, mothers, sisters and other female relations of 75 peaceful opponents of the Castro regime who were sentenced in 2003 to stiff prison terms for allegedly conspiring with Washington to undermine the Cuban Revolution. (*EFE*, 20/7/06)

July 20: Cuba condemned the international community's lack of action in the face of the Israeli bombings against Lebanon and called upon the UN to have a hand in the resolution of the conflict. The president of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, said that the United Nations must take the initiative, call a cease-fire and demand that the sovereignty of Lebanon be respected. Alarcón, one of Fidel Castro's closest collaborators, said that the countries of the Third World will "force" to the UN to act.

(*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 20: Cuba donated four-million-US-dollars worth of modern medical equipment to Bolivia's hospitals, according to reports. Bolivia's Health Minister Nila Heredia, told Bolivian media that the donation was "state of the art in [terms of] what is needed to attend the patients," and thanked Fidel Castro for his solidarity. (*Xinhua*, 21/7/06)

July 20: The Bolivian Minister of Health, Nila Heredia, will face a disciplinary process that could culminate in the suspension of her professional license for allowing more than one thousand Cuban doctors to practice in the country, the Bolivian Medical College announced. The president of the Medical College, Fernando Arandia, said that the organization will also initiate legal proceedings to seek the annulment of a bilateral agreement signed early this year by virtue of which more than 1,000 Cuban doctors currently provide medical attention in Bolivia free of charge. (*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 21: In contrast with other Latin American countries, Havana will not evacuate 100 Cuban citizens living in Lebanon. According to Cuban Ambassador to Beirut, Dario Urrea, Cuban diplomats will "resist until the end" Israeli attacks against Lebanon. "We will remain here, as our Commander-in-Chief says, 'Homeland or Death'", Urrea told Juventud Rebelde newspaper. Some 100 women married to Lebanese or Palestine young men who studied in Cuba, are living now with their new families in Lebanon. "None of them have died or have been hurt. Most of them have left for safe places and have regrouped with other Cubans", Urrea said. All the relatives of Cuban diplomats in Beirut were evacuated. (*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 21: Fidel Castro briefed the leaders of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) nations on Cuba's experiences in the areas of education, public health and in energy savings. Castro spoke as a special guest at the 30th Mercosur Summit held in the city of Cordoba, Argentina. Fidel Castro stressed the good results obtained with the application of the Cuban literacy program "Yo sí Puedo" (Yes, I can) in Venezuela, where 1.5 million people were taught how to read and write. The Cuban Head of State also underscored the results of the Operation Miracle free eye-surgery and treatment program launched by Havana and Caracas. (*Granma*, 21/7/06)

July 21: Fidel Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez rallied thousands of leftist sympathizers after a South American trade summit in Argentina, railing against U.S.-backed free market policies they blame for many of Latin America's woes. Addressing 15,000 people, Castro praised Venezuela's entry into Mercosur, a move that gave the South American trade bloc a hard push to the left. "Mercosur once was just four countries. Now it is improved and is expanding," Castro declared on a stage beneath a banner reading "integration is our flag." He said a "social Mercosur" could provide millions of Latin Americans with healthcare and education. (*Granma*, *AP*, 21/7/06)

July 21: For the second time, Argentine President, Néstor Kirchner, mediated in favour of Cuban surgeon Hilda Molina trying to facilitate her a trip to Argentina to visit her son and grandson. For over ten years, Molina has requested the Cuban government permission to travel to Argentina for family purposes, but it has been denied. "As you well know, it is in my interest to make possible the reunion of doctor Hilda Molina with her relatives living in Argentina", Kirchner said in a letter addressed to Fidel Castro. The letter was handed by Argentina's Minister of Foreign Affairs Jorge Taiana to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, during a meeting both ministers held in Cordoba, after the celebration of the 30th Mercosur Summit. (*EFE*, 22/7/06)

July 22: Fidel Castro and Venezuelan ally Hugo Chavez toured the Argentine boyhood home of Castro's fallen comrade and legendary guerrilla, Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Cordoba. It was a first visit for both. The two Latin American leaders also saw memorabilia including Guevara's birth certificate and hand-written letters. Castro and Chavez viewed the house with three childhood friends of Guevara's — Calica Ferrer, Enrique Martin and Ariel Vidoza — and left 90 minutes later without talking to the press. (*AP*, 22/7/06)

July 24: Former Czech president Vaclav Havel and former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who is of Czech origin, highlighted the latest project of Cuban Oswaldo Paya, who recently unveiled the programme of non-violent

transition of Cuba to democracy. Havel and Albright said about Programa Todos Cubanos (Programme for All Cubans) that it was an excellent road map for Cuba. Havel and Albright said that the programme had arisen from a discussion among 12,000 Cubans living both in Cuba and abroad. "The Program for All Cubans, and the national dialogue from which it sprang, is an extension of the Varela Project, a remarkable model of an indigenous, grassroots effort to bring about democratic reform," they said. (CTK, 24/7/06)

July 24: Once a subservient member of the Soviet bloc, the Czech Republic is now one of Fidel Castro's top foreign tormentors, providing material and moral support to dissidents, leading efforts to condemn the island's human-rights record in UN bodies and pushing a reluctant European Union to take a tougher stance on Castro. Such actions have earned the tiny nation of 10 million vitriolic condemnations by the Castro government, the harassment of its diplomats in Havana and the gratitude of the Cuban-American community. Lately the Central European nation seems to be devoting more resources to the cause. The embassy has a full-time Cuba desk officer and is distributing pro-democracy literature on the island, said Czech Ambassador Petr Kolar. The 44-year-old Kolar, who worked as janitor in the 1980s after he was ejected from a university for refusing to join the Communist Party, and more recently oversaw a human-rights division in the foreign ministry, said Czechs have a sense of kinship with the Cuban opposition. "After the fall of communism, it became our natural duty to help people in countries where they have authoritarian or totalitarian regimes," he told the press. "We remember how important it was to be supported from outside." (*The Miami Herald*, 24/7/06)

July 26: Bilateral relations between Dominica and Cuba have deepened with the opening of the newly refurbished Nursing School and Nurses hostel. Under the Cuban Technical Assistance Programme, the Cuban Government has so far contributed materials in the amount of over \$500,000 while the Government of Dominica has contributed labour in the amount of \$400,000 towards the refurbishment of the old Nursing School and Nurses hostel, now to be referred to as the Faculty of Health Sciences, Goodwill Campus. Under the Programme, the Cuban Government is providing seventeen nursing tutors over the next two and a half years. (*CaribbeanNetNews*, 28/7/06)

July 27: The Marxist Communist Party of India (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretaries Prakash Karat and AB Bardhan are visiting Havana to attend the birthday celebrations of Fidel Castro on August 13. Communist leaders from across the world are gathering in Havana for a Left re-union of sorts. As Castro, whose movement was an inspiration for the Indian Left, turns 80, Mr Karat and Mr Bardhan will rub shoulders with communist leaders from other Latin American countries including Hugo Chavez. The guest list for the celebrations includes renowned Latin American writer and Castro's friend Gabriel Garcia Marquez, as well as legendary footballer Diego Maradona, who apparently, sports Castro and Che Guevara tattoos. (*The Economic Times*, 27/7/06)

July 27: The Mexican Secretary of External Affairs, Luis Ernesto Derbez, announced he will not be attending the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Havana, next September, due to a very busy agenda. "Unfortunately, there's a UN International Meeting on Migration taking place the same days in New York. México has been very active promoting this meeting", Derbez said. The Secretary also said it hasn't been decided yet who will be heading the delegation that "could" be attending the Havana Summit. "Probably, we'll find someone who will be representing us in that meeting in Havana", he added. Mexico has observer status in NAM. (*AFP*, 28/7/06)

July 28: Cuba has re-affirmed its strong support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and given a positive response to the candidature of Mr Shashi Tharoor, India's nominee for the post of the UN Secretary General. The two countries held extensive exchange of views on issues related to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), preparatory to the 14th NAM Summit which will take place in Havana in September. The Indian delegation which was led by Ms. Shashi U. Tripathi, Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, met Acting Foreign Minister of Cuba, Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Deputy Foreign Ministers Marcos Rodriguez Costa and Abelardo Moreno, responsible for bilateral and multilateral affairs, respectively, and other senior officials. (*UNI*, 28/7/06)

July 28: As the head of Cuba's National Centre for Sexual Education, Mariela Castro is a vocal supporter of rights for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and the transgendered. That support brought her to Montreal, Canada, to speak at the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights, being held in conjunction with the First World Outgames. Castro, 43, is the daughter of Raul Castro, Cuba's defence minister and the first in line to succeed 80-year-old dictator Fidel Castro, who has ruled the country for 50 years. Mariela Castro's participation was a matter of controversy. Some applauded her for supporting Cuba's sexual minorities; others, however, were skeptical. "Perhaps her intentions are good, but until people can express themselves freely in Cuba and have freedom to associate, I won't believe things have changed for gays and lesbians," said Toronto film editor Ricardo Acosta, a gay man who was expelled from Cuba in 1980 as part of a massive deportation that became known as the Mariel boatlift. Speaking to reporters, Castro acknowledged Cuba's history of suppressing LGBT rights, but she insisted the mass arrests, imprisonments in work camps, job discrimination and deportations of the 1960s, '70s and '80s are things of the past. (*Montreal Gazette*, 29/7/06)

Foreign Affairs

July 1: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque, addressing the special ministerial session of a summit of the African Union, highlighted the importance and relevance of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). He stressed the significance of the movement in today's world marked by unilateral and aggressive policies and disrespect by powerful countries for the most basic standards of international law and the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. During his speech delivered to the representatives of the 53 nations which make up the African Union, Minister Perez Roque said these were the reasons which show "the urgency for maintaining a united front in the defense of the rights of peoples to self-determination, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. [[Discurso del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores](#)] (*Granma*, 1/7/06)

July 2: Cuban Foreign Ministry condemned Israeli warplane violation of the Syrian airspace, saying that this act "poses a danger to the international peace and security". The Ministry stressed in a statement that the violation further escalates tension in the Middle East. It called on the international community and all peace-loving countries to immediately move and demand Israel to withdraw from Gaza and stop state terrorism against the Palestinian people. (*SANA*, 2/7/06)

July 3: The Non-Aligned Movement is totally satisfied with preparations for its 4th Conference-Summit in Havana, next September. "The information on those preparations has been positively received given the progress we have achieved," asserted Cuban Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Manuel Aguilera de la Paz. Aguilera briefed the NAM Bureau of Coordination at UN about details of the summit with documentation in an Operating Handbook. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/7/06)

July 4: Supporters of Cubans jailed by the regime for challenging the one-party state held a press conference in Vienna to urge the Castro government to free more than 300 political prisoners. The president of the Dutch-based Cuba Futuro Foundation, Jan ter Laak, and the executive director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Aaron Rhodes, said that a recent visit to the island left them convinced that "the general human rights situation in Cuba is rapidly deteriorating." Rhodes said that Cuba's more than 300 political prisoners "are suffering from malnutrition, rat infestation and they have little chance of seeing their families." Locked up in Cuban jails, he said, are people who have been arrested for using computers, publishing articles, having telephone conversations with foreigners, owning certain books or disseminating the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Cuban authorities have classified as enemy propaganda. (*EFE*, 5/7/06)

July 4: According to European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel, the European Commission representation in Havana also endures "access restrictions to certain Internet servers, blocked by the only local ISP available in Cuba." In response to a Euro Representative who asked whether the EC delegation in Havana had "unrestricted Internet access," the Commissioner confirmed the access restrictions. (*EFE*, 4/7/06)

July 4: The Canadian University of Quebec, Montreal, and the Pedagogical Superior Institute Enrique Jose Varona in Havana City strengthened ties with the celebration of the event "Following Iberville's Footprints". Both institutions have maintained their exchange program since 2000 and now intend to diversify collaboration perspectives extending them to the fields of science and culture. The event includes a colloquium on the life of Pierre Le Moyne de Iberville, hero of the New France, who died on July 9, 1706, in Havana's harbour. Iberville, the name which refers to the exchange between Cuba and Canada, was an adventurous character who had been a pirate, captain, soldier and even once the prime governor of Louisiana. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/7/06)

July 4: The annual program of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human rights allotted 10, 700, 000 euros for an ad campaign and deemed the government of Cuba to be eligible for national project development. The EU Commissioner for International Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, confirmed the news to José Ribeiro e Castro, representative of the European People's Party, who denounced that the communist regime of Cuba controls and restricts Internet access, echoing some of the accusations by independent journalists imprisoned since March, 2003. (*MartiNoticias*, 4/7/06)

July 4: Peruvian former presidential candidate, Ollanta Humala, said that Fidel Castro visited him when he was been treated in a Havana hospital. Humala said he traveled to Cuba because wanted to avoid the local press. (*El Comercio*, 5/7/06)

July 5: President Nguyen Minh Triet said more efficient co-operation programmes should be carried out to expand the traditional friendly relations between Viet Nam and Cuba. The newly elected President was speaking upon receiving a high-ranking Cuban Communist Party delegation, led by Vice President of the Cuban Council of State Esteban Lazo Hernandez, in Ho Chi Minh City. (*VNS*, 6/7/06)

July 5: The Ecuadorian and Cuban governments are determined to strengthen their ties of friendship. Within this context, Foreign Minister Francisco Carrion travelled to Havana for an official two-day visit. According to the Ecuadoran Foreign Ministry, two key issues will be examined during Carrion's stay in Cuba. First, issues of common interest will be reviewed. Second, preparations for the Summit of Non-Aligned Countries will be coordinated. Carrion will meet his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez, to review the bilateral agenda and to make preparations for the presidential summit scheduled for September in Havana. A Foreign Ministry communique said that "the ministers will also sign a cooperation agreement for the exchange of information and technical guidance in the area of historical documents and archives". (*El Comercio*, 6/7/06)

July 6: Little more than six months after the arrival in Bolivia of the first contingent of Cuban doctors, the Cuban Embassy confirmed to the press that there have been defections. In response to questions regarding reports of 30 Cuban doctors who might have defected, Miguel Ángel Puente, Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Cuba in Bolivia, admitted that "in all the missions there are always members who decide to remain in other countries." However, he dismissed the notion of a massive defection. (*El Nuevo Día*, 6/7/06)

July 6: Twenty-two Cubans were rescued by a group of Honduran fishermen when they were trying to reach the US coast in two small boats. In 2005, 171 Cubans arrived in Honduras, while 331 have made it between January and June 2006. (*AP*, 6/7/06)

July 6: The UN Human Rights Council deplored Israel's military operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as breaching international humanitarian law and voted to send a fact-finding mission to the region. The resolution received considerable support from the non-Muslim members of the council, including India, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Cuba, the Philippines and Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Uruguay and Zambia. Canada and European countries opposed it. (*AP*, 6/7/06)

July 7: The ruling presidential candidate Felipe Calderon affirmed he will seek "constructive, beneficial" relations with Cuba and Venezuela. In a press conference, Calderon indicated that, "as president, I will establish a fruitful relationship with Cuba and Venezuela, apart from the ideological stances of each nation." Shortly before the press conference, he sustained his foreign policy will be based on respect for self-determination, non-intervention, and human rights defence. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/7/06)

July 7: Cuba's Culture Minister Abel Prieto and Antigua and Barbudas' Eleston Admas signed in Santiago de Cuba an agreement of exchange and collaboration, aimed at fostering bilateral ties of friendship and solidarity. As part of the 26th Caribbean Festival, the document establishes the presence in their respective nations of artists and groups from different tendencies international cultural events, including the Festival of Fire. The accord, in force for five years, also includes, among other things, exchange of trade, displays between the two islands' institutions, as well as the publication of magazines, catalogues and other visual arts materials. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/7/06)

July 9: Bolivian Ambassador to Cuba Saul Chavez Orozco said that relations between the two countries get stronger according to their peoples' wish. Our mission is to work intensively to consolidate bilateral ties and friendship between our peoples, said Chavez Orozco upon his arrival in Havana after being appointed by President Evo Morales. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/06)

July 10: Francisco Carrion Mena, Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Ecuador said that cooperation between his country and Cuba "is working". During an interview with the local press just a few hours before returning back to his country, Carrion Mena said that, "there is a historical tuning between the two peoples, that makes that us feel proud of the friendship that exists between Cuba and Ecuador". Invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque, Carrion Mena fulfilled a tight agenda that served, he explained, "to tighten the ties of friendship between the two nations; historical and brotherly ties". The Ecuadorian Minister praised the cooperation provided by Cuba for a campaign in 16 of the 22 departments of that Andean nation, where a Cuban literacy program is been used. He also acknowledged the results of Operation Miracle, which has returned sight to more than 2,000 Ecuadorians, and also the training provided here in Cuba to young health care professionals. (*Granma*, 10/7/06)

July 10: The Cuban doctor who defected while on an aid mission to Bolivia seeks political asylum in another country, another dissident from the island who has lived in Bolivia for several years, Amauri Samartino, told the press. Samartino telephoned from the eastern city of Santa Cruz to say that he has helped Dr. Alberto Aguila Rios hide while he looks for refuge outside Bolivia, and said he had previously done the same for another Cuban doctor whose name he preferred not to reveal. Samartino who is also a physician has lived in this Andean capital since the year 2000 when he arrived from the US Navy base in Guantanamo, Cuba, with 10 of his compatriots seeking political asylum in Bolivia. Samartino cited rumors that there are at least 30 Cuban professionals who have fled the mission in Bolivia and have headed for the neighbouring countries of Argentina and Brazil. In a statement on a local television channel, the Cuban ambassador in La Paz, Rafael Dausa, dismissed Aguila by calling him a "petty traitor." The ambassador has denied that as many as 30 have deserted the mission and would only say that there have been "a few cases", without giving a specific number. (*EFE*, 10/6/07)

July 11: Cuba will receive more than 1,200 foreign "brigadistas" this summer for its social-political tourism program. They are so-called revolutionary tourists who arrive in Cuba each year from about 50 countries for a 'total immersion' in one of the world's few remaining socialist countries. "I call it a revolutionary vacation. I dedicate my free time to

doing something concrete for the Cuban revolution,” Mr. Carlo Sarpero, a 26-year-old shopkeeper from Genoa, Italy, explained, as he repaired a school. The Caribbean island’s government does not measure the program’s impact in monetary value, like that of sun and beach tourism which brings in more than \$2.5 billion a year, but in political terms. “A big majority of those who participate become activists in Cuban solidarity groups in their countries,” said Mr. Gabriel Benitez of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, the program sponsor. The 21-day trip package, which includes lodging in the modest Caimito camp just west of Havana, costs \$350. Recently, the government has been trying to attract young Europeans during their summer vacations in hopes of influencing a sector of the Left not always sympathetic to Fidel Castro. “That way the revolutionary message reaches places it didn’t before,” the ICAP’s Mr. Benitez said. (*Reuters*, 11/7/06)

July 12: The Honduran government began contacts with Cuba as initial steps on a negotiation between the two countries to avoid the transit of undocumented Cuban immigrants through this Central American nation. “It’s a first approach with Havana”, the press secretary of the Honduran chancellery said. In the last 18 months most of the almost 600 undocumented Cuban immigrants who have arrived in Honduras have left for Miami. (*AP*, 12/7/06)

July 14: With an interview on "All TV," Brazil started an international crusade to denounce new aggressive US plans for Cuba. The first and largest online TV network of this South American country met live Cuba's General Council to Brazil, Ambassador Carlos Trejo, for almost one hour. On the program, the diplomat spoke of the criminal brutality of these new measures announced against Cuba by US President George W. Bush and his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/7/06)

July 14: Cuba has been appointed to chair the Committee on Rivers of the Pan-American Engineers Associations - made up of 26 countries in the region, with Spain as an observer. With Cuban expert Rafael Feito to head the specialized institution, this is the first time for the island to chair the expert group. (*ACN*, 14/7/06)

July 14: Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto met in Rio de Janeiro with Brazilian intellectuals during his second day of visit. Prieto held talks with a group of cultural figures sympathetic with Cuba, in which he analyzed aspects on the Cuban reality and established priorities for current situations. Prieto invited Brazilian intellectuals to attend festivals like the New Latin American Cinema festival, Havana Biennial, theater and other cultural activities taking place in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/7/06)

July 16: Cuba strongly condemned the Israeli aggressions on Lebanon, which led to the killing of innocent civilians and destruction of the country's infrastructure. "Cuba condemns Israeli violations of the international laws and norms through its military offensive on a sovereign country under different pretexts to protect its security by the military and financial support of the US Administration," a statement by the Cuban Foreign Ministry said. (*SANA*, 16/7/06)

July 17: Honduran authorities are devising a plan to halt what they say is an organized smuggling operation, fearing an "avalanche" of illegal landings by Cuban migrants who are using Honduras as a gateway to the United States. "What we are witnessing is the trafficking of human beings," Germán Espinal, Honduran director general of international migration, told the press. "We need to find a mechanism that will distance us from being accomplices to human trafficking." A record number of Cubans have landed on Honduran beaches this year: at least 380 over the past six months, compared to 179 in all of 2005 and 47 in 2002. Soon after arrival, the Cubans usually leave Honduras by land to make their way to the US-Mexico border and become beneficiaries of the US wet-foot/dry-foot policy upon stepping on US soil. Honduran authorities say they hope to reach some kind of accord with the US and Cuban governments that will dissuade those trying to flee the island from using the Central American nation as a stopover to "El Norte". (*The Miami Herald*, 17/7/06)

July 17: Frederick A. Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Public Service of Bahamas, began an official visit to Cuba at the invitation of his local counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque. During his visit, the Bahamas Foreign Minister will

open an embassy for his country in Havana. Among those joining Mitchell on his visit to Cuba are Melanie Griffin, Minister of Social Services and Community Development; parliament members Tennyson Wells, Keod Smith and Whitney Bastian; the standing secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Patricia Rodgers; and the Bahamian ambassador to Cuba, Carlton Wright. Diplomatic relations between Cuban and Bahamas were established in November 1974. Bahamas and Cuba are both members of the Association of Caribbean States and the Non-Aligned Movement, which is holding its 14th Summit in Havana in September. (*Granma*, 17/7/06)

July 17: South Africa's Nelson Mandela said he "never imagined" reaching the age of 88 as he received one of his first birthday presents -- a shipment of rum and cigars from Fidel Castro. Mandela's spokeswoman, Zelda La Grange, said the man affectionately known as "Madiba" around South Africa was in fine shape and looking forward to his birthday. La Grange said presents for Mandela were beginning to arrive from around the world, including the special birthday shipment from Cuba's Castro. "The president kept his promise and sent the rum and cigars," La Grange said of Castro. Mandela, however, is a committed anti-smoker and not known as a drinker. (*Reuters*, 18/7/06)

July 18: Cuba's National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon publicly denounced the connivance of the European Union nations with the aggressive US policy against the island. Local *Granma* daily published an article in which Alarcon termed the EU a "Sleeping Beauty" v/v the most recent public plans of President George W. Bush. Alarcon condemned the additional measures on the Caribbean nation passed July 10 by the White House, which include suits against nations trading with Cuba, as the extra-territorial Helms-Burton Act sets out. He recalled that when the US enacted that legislation in 1996, Europe condemned neither its genocide and interventionist nature nor its aim to wipe out the island's independence and sovereignty. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/7/06)

July 18: Cuba's National Assembly (Congress) Deputy Speaker Jaime Crombet reasserted in Managua the ties of friendship and cooperation that join the island's legislative power with its counterpart in Nicaragua. "Our relations are excellent, because we have historically worked closely," said the Cuban legislator after meeting with his Nicaraguan counterpart Rene Nuñez. The aim of Crombet's visit to Nicaragua is to attend the celebrations for the 27th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/7/06)

July 18: Cuban analysts linked to official media openly expressed their support for the Mexican presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and demanded a recount of last elections' votes to guarantee the governability in that country. The political crisis in Mexico was the topic of discussion at the Round Table, a television talk show through which the Cuban authorities usually voice their position on current events. On that particular broadcast, the producers interspersed telephone interviews with Mexican analysts partial to López Obrador and with PRD senator Jesús Ortega. (*AP*, 19/7/06)

July 19: Cuba opened its embassy in Islamabad, establishing diplomatic relations with Pakistan for the first time. Cuba evinced interest in establishing formal ties with Pakistan following last year's devastating earthquake when teams of Cuban Doctors helped treat Pakistani quake victims. (*New Kerala*, 19/7/06)

July 19: A Cuban union leader said Australian workers face an attack on their rights from the federal government's workplace reforms. Gilda Chacon-Bravo, head of the Asia Pacific region of the Cuban Federation of Workers, said she found it hard to believe Australian workers were experiencing such an onslaught. "In Cuba, 98 per cent of workers have union affiliation and collectively bargain," said Ms Chacon-Bravo, who will be the keynote speaker at a Australia-Cuba Friendship Society public forum in Adelaide. "It is clear that the Australian government is trying to destroy any opposition it encounters, and that its current target is to divide and undermine Australian working families," Chacon-Bravo added. (*AAP*, 19/7/06)

July 19: Cuban Johandry Núñez Fioveredo spent his 14th day "living" at Juan Santamaría Airport because he has no valid visa to enter Costa Rica. Immigration authorities confirmed that Núñez, 27, tried to clear customs with forged

travel documents. According to Deputy Director of Immigration and Foreigner Status Xinia Sossa, his situation is complex as he cannot yet be deported. Meanwhile, Núñez, who cannot leave the airport grounds, strolls around the boarding area, chats with other passengers and borrows the phone to make personal calls. (*La Nación*, 19/7/06)

July 19: In an interview with the Spanish daily ABC, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza, said that “if it is not possible to establish a dialogue with Cuba, we cannot resort to violence either.” To a question about how the OAS could influence the process of succession in Cuba, Insulza replied that the sanction applied against Cuba in 1962 imposes limits. “I believe that this policy is not going to change because the Cubans do not want it to either. Now, when the transition takes place, no one knows what will happen.” And he added, “if it is not possible to establish a dialogue with Cuba, we cannot resort to violence either.” (*ABC*, 19/7/06)

July 19: From inside the Cuban embassy in Mexico City, Peter Gellert, a non-diplomat and representative of the Mexican Movement of Solidarity with Cuba, called upon alternative groups to support the social mobilization before the possible accession of Felipe Calderón to the presidency. "It is important to support the anti-imperialist mobilization before Felipe Calderón takes office," said Gellert. The declarations were made during a conference with the so-called alternative press, where both José Leyva, the embassy's Press Attaché, and Gellert, discussed the events scheduled to take place this year in Havana and Mexico on the occasion of several commemorative dates such as the 53rd anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution on July 26 and the celebration of Fidel Castro's 80th birthday on August 13. (*El Universal*, 19/7/06)

July 19: With the possibility that Fidel Castro will visit Cordova to attend the Mercosur Summit, Roberto Quiñones, son of Cuban dissident doctor Hilda Molina, renewed his calls for the Argentinean government to intercede with the Cuban president so that his mother is allowed to travel to Argentina to meet her grandchildren. He indicated that the Argentinean authorities should deliver a "firm and direct" request to Castro, asking that his mother and his 87-year-old grandmother be allowed to go to Argentina, where Quiñones resides. (*La Nación*, 19/7/06)

July 20: Following the success of the launch of its internet freedom campaign in the UK, Amnesty International is going global with “irrepressible.info”, a campaign that aims to claim back the web as a force for change in the face of an increasing willingness on the part of technology companies to aid censorship and repression. AI said that from Iran to the Maldives and Cuba to Vietnam, governments are both cracking down on those who use the internet to communicate their views and denying their citizens access to its wealth of information. “Web users are locked up, internet cafes are shut down, chat rooms are policed and blogs deleted. Websites are blocked, foreign news banned, and search engines filter out sensitive results,” a press release said. "The internet can be a great tool for the promotion of human rights -- activists can tell the world about abuses in their country at the click of a mouse. People have unprecedented access to information from the widest range of sources," said Amnesty International. [[AI Campaign](#)] (*AI Press Release*, 20/7/06)

July 20: The Cuban government's rejection of European Union (EU) funds for cooperation projects and new requirements for resource mobilization threaten the continuity of the work of European NGOs in Cuba, said Marco Terreni, one of the directors of the Italian sustainable development project Habana Ecópolis. "We are trying to build up decentralized cooperation," in other words, resources originating from "small organizations, affiliations, mayoralities, regions" in Europe. However, the funds obtained are "insufficient and scattered," which "puts us in a difficult situation," he said. Habana Ecópolis is a consortium of Italian non governmental organizations (NGOs) that since 2000 advances a wide spectrum of projects of collaboration concerned with broad issues affecting the socio-cultural environment, urban environmental sanitation and ecological protection in five municipalities of the Cuban capital. (*IPS*, 20/7/06)

July 20: In a rare trip abroad, Fidel Castro arrived in Cordoba, Argentina's second-largest city, to join a summit of heads of state, boost his island's trade with South America and visit the childhood home of revolutionary hero Ernesto

"Che" Guevara. The landing of Castro's plane was broadcast live on many local news channels, and hundreds of curious people waited around the city to catch a glimpse of the 79-year-old who has ruled Cuba since the revolution in 1959. His surprise arrival -- his visit was officially announced only hours before his landing -- at the meeting of heads of state from the trade group known as Mercosur eclipsed many of the other agenda items and events scheduled for the summit, including the formal entrance of Venezuela into the bloc. Castro is expected to sign trade agreements with the Mercosur nations -- Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela -- visit Guevara's home and perhaps attend a rally with his top South American ally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. (*AP*, 21/7/06)

July 20: The "Ladies in White," representing the families of scores of Cuban dissidents jailed in 2003, appealed to the leaders of the Mercosur trade bloc to urge Fidel Castro to free the island's more than 300 political prisoners. In a communique released after learning of Castro's travel plans, the Ladies in White asked the seven other heads of state who will be at the meeting in Argentina to intercede with "the maximum authority in the government of Cuba" in the name of basic human rights. "It is estimated that there are more than 300 peaceful political prisoners in all," the statement said. "All of them should be released." The Ladies in White asked Mercosur leaders to make surprise visits to Cuba jails and to the homes of the prisoners' families in order to see for themselves "the psychological torture, the intimidation and the smear campaigns" to which the prisoners and their relatives are subjected. The Ladies in White, which last year received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for human rights activism, is comprised of wives, mothers, sisters and other female relations of 75 peaceful opponents of the Castro regime who were sentenced in 2003 to stiff prison terms for allegedly conspiring with Washington to undermine the Cuban Revolution. (*EFE*, 20/7/06)

July 20: Cuba condemned the international community's lack of action in the face of the Israeli bombings against Lebanon and called upon the UN to have a hand in the resolution of the conflict. The president of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, said that the United Nations must take the initiative, call a cease-fire and demand that the sovereignty of Lebanon be respected. Alarcón, one of Fidel Castro's closest collaborators, said that the countries of the Third World will "force" to the UN to act. (*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 20: Cuba donated four-million-US-dollars worth of modern medical equipment to Bolivia's hospitals, according to reports. Bolivia's Health Minister Nila Heredia, told Bolivian media that the donation was "state of the art in [terms of] what is needed to attend the patients," and thanked Fidel Castro for his solidarity. (*Xinhua*, 21/7/06)

July 20: The Bolivian Minister of Health, Nila Heredia, will face a disciplinary process that could culminate in the suspension of her professional license for allowing more than one thousand Cuban doctors to practice in the country, the Bolivian Medical College announced. The president of the Medical College, Fernando Arandia, said that the organization will also initiate legal proceedings to seek the annulment of a bilateral agreement signed early this year by virtue of which more than 1,000 Cuban doctors currently provide medical attention in Bolivia free of charge. (*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 21: In contrast with other Latin American countries, Havana will not evacuate 100 Cuban citizens living in Lebanon. According to Cuban Ambassador to Beirut, Dario Urra, Cuban diplomats will "resist until the end" Israeli attacks against Lebanon. "We will remain here, as our Commander-in-Chief says, 'Homeland or Death'", Urra told Juventud Rebelde newspaper. Some 100 women married to Lebanese or Palestine young men who studied in Cuba, are living now with their new families in Lebanon. "None of them have died or have been hurt. Most of them have left for safe places and have regrouped with other Cubans", Urra said. All the relatives of Cuban diplomats in Beirut were evacuated. (*Reuters*, 21/7/06)

July 21: Fidel Castro briefed the leaders of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) nations on Cuba's experiences in the areas of education, public health and in energy savings. Castro spoke as a special guest at the 30th Mercosur Summit held in the city of Cordoba, Argentina. Fidel Castro stressed the good results obtained with the application of

the Cuban literacy program "Yo sí Puedo" (Yes, I can) in Venezuela, where 1.5 million people were taught how to read and write. The Cuban Head of State also underscored the results of the Operation Miracle free eye-surgery and treatment program launched by Havana and Caracas. (*Granma*, 21/7/06)

July 21: Fidel Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez rallied thousands of leftist sympathizers after a South American trade summit in Argentina, railing against U.S.-backed free market policies they blame for many of Latin America's woes. Addressing 15,000 people, Castro praised Venezuela's entry into Mercosur, a move that gave the South American trade bloc a hard push to the left. "Mercosur once was just four countries. Now it is improved and is expanding," Castro declared on a stage beneath a banner reading "integration is our flag." He said a "social Mercosur" could provide millions of Latin Americans with healthcare and education. (*Granma*, *AP*, 21/7/06)

July 21: For the second time, Argentine President, Néstor Kirchner, mediated in favour of Cuban surgeon Hilda Molina trying to facilitate her a trip to Argentina to visit her son and grandson. For over ten years, Molina has requested the Cuban government permission to travel to Argentina for family purposes, but it has been denied. "As you well know, it is in my interest to make possible the reunion of doctor Hilda Molina with her relatives living in Argentina", Kirchner said in a letter addressed to Fidel Castro. The letter was handed by Argentina's Minister of Foreign Affairs Jorge Taiana to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, during a meeting both ministers held in Cordoba, after the celebration of the 30th Mercosur Summit. (*EFE*, 22/7/06)

July 22: Fidel Castro and Venezuelan ally Hugo Chavez toured the Argentine boyhood home of Castro's fallen comrade and legendary guerrilla, Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Cordoba. It was a first visit for both. The two Latin American leaders also saw memorabilia including Guevara's birth certificate and hand-written letters. Castro and Chavez viewed the house with three childhood friends of Guevara's — Calica Ferrer, Enrique Martin and Ariel Vidoza — and left 90 minutes later without talking to the press. (*AP*, 22/7/06)

July 24: Former Czech president Vaclav Havel and former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who is of Czech origin, highlighted the latest project of Cuban Oswaldo Paya, who recently unveiled the programme of non-violent transition of Cuba to democracy. Havel and Albright said about Programa Todos Cubanos (Programme for All Cubans) that it was an excellent road map for Cuba. Havel and Albright said that the programme had arisen from a discussion among 12,000 Cubans living both in Cuba and abroad. "The Program for All Cubans, and the national dialogue from which it sprang, is an extension of the Varela Project, a remarkable model of an indigenous, grassroots effort to bring about democratic reform," they said. (*CTK*, 24/7/06)

July 24: Once a subservient member of the Soviet bloc, the Czech Republic is now one of Fidel Castro's top foreign tormentors, providing material and moral support to dissidents, leading efforts to condemn the island's human-rights record in UN bodies and pushing a reluctant European Union to take a tougher stance on Castro. Such actions have earned the tiny nation of 10 million vitriolic condemnations by the Castro government, the harassment of its diplomats in Havana and the gratitude of the Cuban-American community. Lately the Central European nation seems to be devoting more resources to the cause. The embassy has a full-time Cuba desk officer and is distributing pro-democracy literature on the island, said Czech Ambassador Petr Kolar. The 44-year-old Kolar, who worked as janitor in the 1980s after he was ejected from a university for refusing to join the Communist Party, and more recently oversaw a human-rights division in the foreign ministry, said Czechs have a sense of kinship with the Cuban opposition. "After the fall of communism, it became our natural duty to help people in countries where they have authoritarian or totalitarian regimes," he told the press. "We remember how important it was to be supported from outside." (*The Miami Herald*, 24/7/06)

July 26: Bilateral relations between Dominica and Cuba have deepened with the opening of the newly refurbished Nursing School and Nurses hostel. Under the Cuban Technical Assistance Programme, the Cuban Government has so far contributed materials in the amount of over \$500,000 while the Government of Dominica has contributed labour in

the amount of \$400,000 towards the refurbishment of the old Nursing School and Nurses hostel, now to be referred to as the Faculty of Health Sciences, Goodwill Campus. Under the Programme, the Cuban Government is providing seventeen nursing tutors over the next two and a half years. (*CaribbeanNetNews*, 28/7/06)

July 27: The Marxist Communist Party of India (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretaries Prakash Karat and AB Bardhan are visiting Havana to attend the birthday celebrations of Fidel Castro on August 13. Communist leaders from across the world are gathering in Havana for a Left re-union of sorts. As Castro, whose movement was an inspiration for the Indian Left, turns 80, Mr Karat and Mr Bardhan will rub shoulders with communist leaders from other Latin American countries including Hugo Chavez. The guest list for the celebrations includes renowned Latin American writer and Castro's friend Gabriel Garcia Marquez, as well as legendary footballer Diego Maradona, who apparently, sports Castro and Che Guevara tattoos. (*The Economic Times*, 27/7/06)

July 27: The Mexican Secretary of External Affairs, Luis Ernesto Derbez, announced he will not be attending the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Havana, next September, due to a very busy agenda. "Unfortunately, there's a UN International Meeting on Migration taking place the same days in New York. México has been very active promoting this meeting", Derbez said. The Secretary also said it hasn't been decided yet who will be heading the delegation that "could" be attending the Havana Summit. "Probably, we'll find someone who will be representing us in that meeting in Havana", he added. Mexico has observer status in NAM. (*AFP*, 28/7/06)

July 28: Cuba has re-affirmed its strong support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and given a positive response to the candidature of Mr Shashi Tharoor, India's nominee for the post of the UN Secretary General. The two countries held extensive exchange of views on issues related to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), preparatory to the 14th NAM Summit which will take place in Havana in September. The Indian delegation which was led by Ms. Shashi U. Tripathi, Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, met Acting Foreign Minister of Cuba, Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Deputy Foreign Ministers Marcos Rodriguez Costa and Abelardo Moreno, responsible for bilateral and multilateral affairs, respectively, and other senior officials. (*UNI*, 28/7/06)

July 28: As the head of Cuba's National Centre for Sexual Education, Mariela Castro is a vocal supporter of rights for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and the transgendered. That support brought her to Montreal, Canada, to speak at the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights, being held in conjunction with the First World Outgames. Castro, 43, is the daughter of Raul Castro, Cuba's defence minister and the first in line to succeed 80-year-old dictator Fidel Castro, who has ruled the country for 50 years. Mariela Castro's participation was a matter of controversy. Some applauded her for supporting Cuba's sexual minorities; others, however, were skeptical. "Perhaps her intentions are good, but until people can express themselves freely in Cuba and have freedom to associate, I won't believe things have changed for gays and lesbians," said Toronto film editor Ricardo Acosta, a gay man who was expelled from Cuba in 1980 as part of a massive deportation that became known as the Mariel boatlift. Speaking to reporters, Castro acknowledged Cuba's history of suppressing LGBT rights, but she insisted the mass arrests, imprisonments in work camps, job discrimination and deportations of the 1960s, '70s and '80s are things of the past. (*Montreal Gazette*, 29/7/06)

US-Cuba Relations

July 1: A senior Cuban official has sharply criticized a US report on the future of Cuba after Fidel Castro leaves office. A draft of the report calls for a "democracy fund" to boost opposition to Cuba's communist government. The report is being issued by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, created by President George W Bush in 2003. For the government, the fact that the US would plan for the day when Fidel Castro's time in power ends should come as no

surprise. However, the president of the Cuban parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, feels there is cause for anger and even concern. Mr Alarcon describes the report as nothing short of an aberration which should be read as an act of war, as it publicly contemplates how to bring the government of a sovereign foreign nation to an end. (*BBC*, 1/7/06)

July 1: The US-based international humanitarian agency Church World Service (CWS) is alarmed about the recommendations in an advance draft of a new report by the Bush Administration's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba - which CWS says would end its ability to provide basic relief aid to people in need in the island nation and seriously hamper religious freedom. A draft copy of the report was supplied to Church World Service, the ecumenical relief and development body related to the National Council of Churches USA. "If the recommendations contained within this report are accepted by President George Bush and put into effect by the Commerce Department, it is likely that we will no longer be allowed to provide humanitarian aid through the Cuban Council of Churches, our agency's partner in Cuba for 60 years," said CWS Executive Director the Reverend John L. McCullough. (*Ekklesia*, 3/7/06)

July 1: Thirty of Cuba's leading libraries joined in a "national campaign" against the attempt in Miami to ban the book "Vamos a Cuba" and its English-language version "A Visit to Cuba," whose distribution in US schools has stirred controversy. "What has brought out thousands of people around the country is something scandalous that is happening these days in Miami-Dade County (Florida)," Eliades Ochoa, head of the Jose Marti National Library in Havana, said. "There is an attempt to take this children's book off the shelves of student libraries of that country (...) a children's book that would never have been famous except for this barbaric attempt to ban it," he said. The dispute over the text by US author Alta Schreier started after a Cuban-born father in Miami, Juan Amador Rodriguez, criticized the children's book for not accurately reflecting life on the island and omitting the fact that Cuba is a Communist dictatorship. The Miami-Dade School Board subsequently banned it. (*EFE*, 1/7/06)

July 2: Taking the back door into the United States, droves of Cubans are crossing some of the world's stormiest seas and clambering onto this rugged speck of an island belonging to Puerto Rico. Forsaking the heavily patrolled Florida Straits, Cubans are increasingly reaching the US by flying to the Dominican Republic and traveling about 40 miles by boat to Mona Island. In fiscal year 2001, no more than five Cubans landed on Mona. But in the past nine months 579 have arrived, Jorge Diaz, a senior US Customs and Border Protection agent, said. The Cubans said they fly to the Dominican Republic on commercial airliners. Even accomplishing that step required patience and luck. To leave Cuba legally, Cubans must generally get a visa from the country they're going to visit, plus a letter of invitation from a citizen of that country. They then must seek an exit visa from the Cuban government, which is sometimes denied. The process can take months. The Cubans - who couldn't simply fly from the Dominican Republic to the United States without a US visa - then pay between \$1,500 and \$2,000 to be taken by boat to Mona. That's at least \$12,000 total for one boatload. Dominican people-smugglers are turning huge profits in this growing industry, and few are prosecuted. (*AP*, 2/7/06)

July 2: Dulce Maria Téllez, one of the key players in Cuba's women's volleyball team, who were in Puerto Rico taking part in the Pan-American Cup, left her team to remain in the USA, reported the president of the North, Central America and Caribbean Volleyball Confederation (NORCECA), Cristóbal Mars Hoffitz. (*EFE*, 3/7/06)

July 3: The humanitarian activist group Bikes Across Borders will cross the Texas-Mexico border with New York-based Pastors for Peace on a mission to deliver bicycles and aid to Cuba. The group arrived at the border, sorting out medicines and cash donations, before it crosses the border into Mexico. Bikes Across Borders has sent more than 500 bicycles to Cuba, Mexico and Central America. (*The Daily Texan*, 3/7/06)

July 5: A wide-ranging report on US policies toward Cuba's possible transition to democracy was officially presented to President Bush at a meeting of the White House's National Security Council. The report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, co-chaired by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the Cuban-American Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, makes recommendations to hasten the end of the island's communist government and

assist the transition. Announcing the report's presentation to Bush, White House Press Secretary Tony Snow said ``a lot of the thinking is, what do you do in a post-Castro era?" (*The Miami Herald*, 5/7/06)

July 5: Two senior Cuban officials charged that a report on the communist nation delivered to the Bush administration's National Security Council amounted to a blueprint for an Iraq-style regime change in the Caribbean. "We are facing a real threat of aggression," National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon said of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba's report, flashing a draft he said had appeared briefly on the US State Department's web page, to a national television and radio audience. The new report supports the earlier one and calls for building an international coalition to support a transition, increased organizational and financial support for dissidents and a further tightening of economic sanctions, among other measures. The first chapter, entitled "Hastening the End of the Castro Dictatorship: Transition not Succession," includes a separate "classified annex" of recommended actions. "You can't accomplish what they propose without an invasion, without a war (...) This plan implies a US military invasion of Cuba, a direct US intervention," said Bruno Rodriguez, First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. (*Reuters, AP*, 6/7/06)

July 5: US president George W. Bush and his national security team met to review the report by the official Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. A White House spokesman said it was the first meeting of the National Security Council dedicated to Cuba in 16 years, and that the report reaffirmed US commitment to a "democratic transition in Cuba". (*The Financial Times*, 6/7/06)

July 6: Another children's book about Cuba will be challenged in Miami-Dade County schools, with a formal complaint expected to be filed. Political activist David Rosenthal, a Broward resident, said the book *Cuban Kids* "is nothing more than a series of falsehoods and distorted information, published with the intention of misleading children, and their parents, relatives and friends, about the reality of the totalitarian Castro regime of Cuba." The author of the book, which is available in six Dade elementary school libraries, was pleasantly surprised to learn of the complaint. "I've never been so flattered," said Santa Fe photographer George Ancona. "This is going to boost sales." Ancona's 40-page book, intended for third- to fifth-graders, paints a largely flattering portrait of life under Fidel Castro. A few photos and some text hint at the deep poverty, but most of the book focuses on free healthcare, housing and education. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/7/06)

July 6: The US government arrested a Miami friend of Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles in Texas as part of an ongoing grand jury probe into Posada's illegal entry into the United States from Mexico. Ernesto Abreu, son of well-known Cuban exile militant Ernestino Abreu, was jailed in El Paso after he pleaded the Fifth Amendment and refused to testify before the grand jury investigating how Posada entered the United States, the elder Abreu said. Shana Jones, a spokeswoman for the US Attorney's Office Western District of Texas, said she could neither confirm nor deny Abreu's arrest. Abreu's father said his son was arrested on contempt charges for refusing to talk, even after prosecutors offered him immunity. He is being held in a jail in New Mexico, his father said. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/7/06)

July 7: Augsburg College must pay a \$9,000 fine to the US Treasury Department to settle accusations that the college violated the US travel ban to Cuba. Augsburg is one of many US institutions that has had trouble meeting rules on travel to Cuba since the restrictions were tightened in 2004 to prohibit educational programs that last less than 10 weeks. In a retroactive snag, the Treasury Department told Augsburg it did not have the necessary travel provider license for four trips between January 2000 and June 2004. (*AP*, 7/7/06)

July 7: The Texas port of Corpus Christi renewed its commitment to keep shipping American food to Cuba despite US efforts to tighten sanctions on the communist-run island. Ruben Bonilla, chairman of the Corpus Christi Port Commission, and Pedro Alvarez of the Cuban food import company Alimport, signed a letter of intent to maintain their trade relationship. "We accept the commitment to broaden our relationship with Corpus Christi," Alvarez told a news conference. "And they, we are sure, will work to normalize" relations between the two nations, he added. US Representative Solomon Ortiz, a Texas Democrat, accompanied Bonilla on the trade mission. The port of Corpus

Christi signed its first agreement with Alimport three years ago, and since then more than 100,000 metric tons of U.S. agricultural goods has moved through the port on its way to Cuba, Alvarez said. (*Kristv.com, AP, 8/7/06*)

July 8: A senior Cuban official blasted new restrictions proposed in a US draft report aimed at hastening change on the communist-run island, saying they will harm Protestant churches that count on their American counterparts for aid. Parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon told the press that the proposed restrictions would also hurt needy people benefiting from Cuba's international medical programs. If adopted, those proposals would prove "a very grave violation of international law," Alarcon said. In an interview at National Assembly headquarters, Alarcon repeated his earlier charge that the upcoming report aimed at speeding up a transition to American-style democracy in Cuba is a sinister plan for regime change. "The impact that they want is not a change in the future, but now," the National Assembly president said. Alarcon said the draft report also calls for a revision of US licenses for medical equipment that could be used in large-scale Cuban operations that benefit foreigners. Among Cuba's large-scale medical programs for foreigners is Operation Miracle, which offers free eye surgery to needy people from around Latin America. (*Sun Sentinel, 10/7/06*)

July 8: The Bush administration is said to be considering retaliation for what it claims are harassments that US diplomats face in Havana, including the poisoning of family pets and the dumping of feces in US diplomats' homes. A US government official, who asked for anonymity because of the delicate nature of the issue, said reprisals against the Cuban mission in Washington were "always under consideration." He declined to elaborate. Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart (Republican-Miami), is pushing a measure that would force diplomats from countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism -- including Cuba -- to register all their lobbying contacts in Congress, presumably making congressional offices more reluctant to talk to the Cubans. (*The Miami Herald, 8/7/06*)

July 8: A woman on a boat loaded with Florida-bound Cubans perished from injuries she received as the vessel tried to flee from the Coast Guard, authorities said. Amay Machado Gonzalez, 24, died from head trauma and also had injuries on her arms, legs, back and chest, according to a Monroe County Medical Examiner's autopsy report. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Officials believe the injuries came from rough seas jostling the crowded boat, said spokesman Ivan Ortiz. Immigration officials will decide whether to repatriate the survivors, one of whom is a pregnant woman who was taken to a Key West hospital and released to her family in Miami. The Coast Guard was holding 29 other Cubans, including two teenage girls, 21 men and six women, on a cutter off the Keys. (*Sun Sentinel, 10/7/06*)

July 8: The US Citizenship and Immigration Services has expanded the list of documents that people born to Cuban parents outside Cuba can use to apply for permanent residency in the United States. For years, the agency routinely rejected green card applications that did not include a Cuban birth registry, citizenship certificate or passport to prove Cuban citizenship. Now, as a result of a June 30 decision from immigration authorities, the US government will also accept several other documents, including a Cuban Civil Registry document, as long as they are signed by an appropriate Cuban official and prove Cuban citizenship, a CIS spokeswoman said. The decision could potentially impact thousands of Cuban nationals who have been turned down for green cards in the past, including a large number of Venezuelans with Cuban parents. (*AP, 8/7/06*)

July 8: The groups fighting the Miami-Dade School Board's decision to yank a controversial Cuba book off school shelves have unlikely partners in their struggle against censorship: Cuban state librarians. The librarians, from a country that bans books and music it considers politically incorrect, compared the School Board to Nazis who censored Alice in Wonderland, according to a report in the Cuban press titled "The True Censors are in Miami." Outraged over the School Board's vote to pull the children's book "Vamos a Cuba" out of school libraries because of what critics call its distorted portrayal of life on the communist island, the Association of Cuban Librarians and the José Martí National Library in Havana have launched a protest. Dubbed "Yes, Let's Go to Cuba," the campaign seeks signatures worldwide to present at the 72nd International Federation of Library Associations General Conference and Council in South Korea next month. (*The Miami Herald, 8/7/06*)

July 8: A caravan organized by the Pastors for Peace to show solidarity with Cuba arrived in Havana without experiencing any problems crossing the US-Mexican border, local media reported. "This time we arrived at the US border with Mexico really early in the morning and the officials decided not to confront us," said the head of the Protestant group, Lucius Walker, at the Havana airport, the daily *Juventud Rebelde* reported. Walker said that the 97 members of the caravan from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Denmark, Sweden, England, Scotland and Germany made it to Cuba, in contrast to their attempt last year, when he and others remained at the US-Mexican border to demand the return part of their Cuba-bound humanitarian cargo which US authorities had seized. (*EFE*, 9/7/06)

July 10: A leading Cuban rights group criticized the US Coast Guard for firing shots at the engine of a boat overcrowded with US-bound migrants during a confrontation that killed one woman and injured several other people off the Florida Coast. "We cannot understand why they were firing with weapons of war against a small civilian craft," Elizardo Sanchez of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation said in a statement distributed to international news media in Havana. A woman relatives identified as 24-year-old Anei Machado Gonzalez died of blunt force trauma consistent with striking her head on the boat during a confrontation off the Florida coast, according to preliminary autopsy results. "The violence of this interception led to this tragedy and the case should be investigated," the rights commission said. (*AP*, 10/7/06)

July 10: The academic community grouped under the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), chose the Canadian city of Montreal as the venue for its upcoming 27th international congress, to allow Cuban colleagues to attend its sessions. The meeting had originally been planned for Boston, Massachusetts, but faced with evidence that the US government would not allow the participation of researchers and professors from the island as in previous congress the LASA board moved the meeting to Canada. "This is a clear signal that US scholars, who make up 25% of LASA members, are fed up and will not be held hostages by US hostility against Cuba, a policy that goes against the free flow of ideas and culture," said a source close to the organizers. The Association's co-chair of the Cuba section, Professor Felix Masud Pilot, from DePaul, University in Illinois, said "it is impossible to organize a LASA Congress without the attendance of Cuban academics, because of the depth, diversity and wide scope of their contributions and this is why we are going to Montreal in September. In that way, US authorities will not be able to deny visas or sabotage the conferences." (*Granma*, 10/7/06)

July 10: President Bush approved a long-awaited update on US policies to hasten and assist a Cuban turn to democracy after Fidel Castro's reign, including possible assistance to Havana's military and an \$80 million-plus fund to boost the opposition to Castro. "We are actively working for change in Cuba, not simply waiting for change," Bush said in a statement unveiling the 95-page report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, a multiagency panel he created in 2003. Arguing that vital US interests are at stake in pushing for a transition to democracy, instead of a succession by new communist leadership after the 79-year-old Castro leaves power, the report underlined Bush administration pledges to promote freedom and democracy worldwide. The text -- accompanied by a two-page "Compact with the People of Cuba" that promises to "work with the Cuban people to attain political and economic liberty" -- predicts a clash between an "energized" opposition and an "inherently unstable" attempt at succession. "The opposition movement is creating momentum for democratic change in Cuba," said the State Department's Cuba transition coordinator, Caleb McCarty. "With our offer of advice and assistance (...) we hope to add to this momentum." [[Report to the President by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba](#)] (*The Miami Herald*, 10/7/06)

July 10: Some dissidents worried that new funding to opposition groups on the island included in a report by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba could be used as a pretext by the Cuban government to harass or even arrest them. "I don't doubt the report's good intentions, but it just adds kindling to the fire," said veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. "I really appreciate the solidarity of the United States government and people, but I think that this report is counterproductive," said dissident journalist Oscar Espinosa Chepe. "It supports the government's hardline sector to justify repression." "The plan insists in a wrong US policy toward Cuba, which is this attempt of tutoring the dissidence politically and economically", the spokesman

of the Progressive Arch (Arco Progresista), Manuel Cuesta Morua said. The US offer is a "poisonous embrace", he added. Other dissidents in Havana met the report with mixed reactions. "We didn't ask for economic help, and we don't want it," said Miriam Leiva, founding member of dissident group Ladies in White, in a telephone interview. "This report serves as supposed evidence for the government to take us to jail." Former political prisoner Vladimiro Roca, who along with several other dissidents attended a teleconference on the report from Washington at the US diplomatic mission in Havana, said he would accept any aid. "It would be more than welcome," he said in a telephone conversation. "The government is going to call us that anyway. That's what they want, for us not to take money (...) We need materials, equipment, clothes, everything." (*The New York Times, The Miami Herald, EFE, 11/7/06*)

July 10: The Bush administration vowed to crack down on nickel exports from Cuba, at least half of which are accounted for by Canada's Sherritt International Corp., alleging that the money from the sales is being "diverted to maintain the regime's repressive security apparatus." But Sherritt's chairman, Ian Delaney, immediately labelled the proposed actions as "nothing new" and said that the continuing US embargo on the Communist nation is simply "nonsense." The report specifically calls for a crackdown on nickel exports, which it says now account for "nearly half of the regime's current foreign income." "The revenue from these sales does not go to benefit the Cuban people, but is diverted to maintain the regime's repressive security apparatus and fund Castro's interventionist and destabilizing policies in other countries in the hemisphere," the report said. "There's always been more heat than light in this discussion," Mr. Delaney continued, arguing that the idea that Cubans are hiding assets abroad is a "ludicrous joke." "We're dealing with a country that really has the moral high ground," he continued. Officers and directors of Sherritt, including Mr. Delaney, have been banned from entry into the United States under the 1996 Helms-Burton Act. (*The Globe and Mail, 11/7/06*)

July 10: The Council of Cuban Churches (CIC) criticized the measures taken by the US government to restrict contact with that country's National Council of the Churches of Christ (NCCC). CIC President Rhodes Gonzalez of the Christian Pentecostal Church accused Washington of making "another attempt to try to impose conditions on our relations". The minister thus alluded to recent regulations included in the new "[Commission] for Assistance to a Free Cuba" programme announced by the George W. Bush administration as an attempt to re-establish democracy on the island. According to the source, these regulations prevent the Church World Service (CWS) of the United States, an agency of the NCCC, from sending humanitarian aid to this country via the CIC. "I believe that no matter how many attempts are made, we will be able - as we have always been - to overcome all situations, because the relationship between the Cuban and US churches is a historic relationship," she said. The Reverend Oden Marichal, director of the CIC Research Centre and minister of the "Faithful to Jesus" Episcopal parish in Matanzas, said that in taking the measure they had argued that the CIC is "controlled by the government". Rejecting this, Marichal said that he "has never felt controlled" by President Fidel Castro's government or by the ruling Communist Party of Cuba. (*BBC, 12/7/06*)

July 11: Cuba's National Assembly president, Ricardo Alarcon, said the Report by the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba was a "politically delirious provocation". Mr Alarcon told the press, that any dissidents who "conspired" with Washington and accepted its funding would have to "face the consequences". It would be a crime to accept such money under Cuban law, as it would be in any country, Mr Alarcon aid. "Imagine that someone in the US were to be supported, trained, equipped and advised by a foreign government, that in itself would be a crime. It would be a serious crime in the US, punished with far more years in prison than here in Cuba," Mr Alarcon said. (*BBC, 12/7/06*)

July 11: President Hugo Chavez rejected a US government report accusing Venezuela of funding efforts by Cuba's Fidel Castro to subvert democracy in Latin America, saying it indicated Washington's aggressive intentions toward the Caribbean island country. "They've launched what I consider a new imperialist threat," Chavez said in a nationally televised speech. "They've publicized a plan of transition, they think Fidel is going to die." "This is what I say to US imperialism: Now is when Venezuela will support the Cuban revolution," Chavez added. "Long live Fidel -- brother, comrade and partner!" Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel alleged the report was an announcement of

Washington's "intention to attack and subjugate" Cuba. "The implicit message (...) must not be underestimated," Rangel said in a statement. "It confirms a policy to which we must be alert." Chavez was defiant as he warned Washington to watch its own back.

"Instead of thinking about a plan of transition for revolutionary Cuba or revolutionary Venezuela, they should be developing a plan of transition for themselves because this century the US empire will end," he said. (AP, 11/7/06)

July 11: As the United States again toughens its sanctions against Cuba, in what the Fidel Castro government says amounts to a "declaration of war," another caravan organized by the inter-faith foundation Pastors for Peace arrived in the island nation's capital with 100 tons of humanitarian aid. After passing through 124 communities in Canada and the United States promoting an end to the four-decade blockade against Cuba imposed by Washington, more than 90 "caravanistas" crossed the US border into Mexico on July 6. They reached Havana on July 8, without applying for the permits that the US government requires of its citizens to travel to this socialist-run country. Caravan No. 17 crossed the US-Mexico border and, unlike several other occasions since the first such caravan in 1992, no one was detained and nothing was confiscated, the Reverend Lucius Walker, director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) Pastors for Peace, said in Havana. "They have arrived at a deeply significant time," just as President Bush approved a new plan that is seeking, among other things, "to support a group of people who want a different Cuba," Baptist pastor Raúl Suarez, the director of the non-governmental Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center in Havana, told the press. (IPS, 12/7/06)

July 12: The Bush administration's updated plan to speed up and support a shift toward democracy in Cuba means three things for the island: terrorism, assassinations and the use of force, Havana said in an official statement. This year's report -- an update of a 2004 document -- is controversial because it calls for \$80 million in increased funding for anti-Castro activities, such as Radio and TV Martí. The Cuban government condemned the increased funding as an outright violation of international law, and particularly attacked the report's classified annex, which they allege may include plans to murder Fidel Castro. An article in the international edition of the Communist Party daily Granma noted that the US report uses the word "regime" 145 times. "It's a true gift to those in Miami who advocate terror and annexation (...) The text, which shows an abysmal ignorance of the Cuban reality, affirms that the 'regime' does not attend to the 'basic human necessities' of the people," the article said. "The entire document reflects the will to sooner or later annex the island of Cuba." (The Miami Herald, 13/7/06)

July 13: Cuba suspects the Bush administration has military plans to topple Fidel Castro's Communist government, but is too bogged down in Iraq to invade, one of Castro's closest aides said. What has worried Havana most is a classified annex containing recommendations that were kept secret for national security reasons. "What they always keep secret are plans for political assassination, a campaign of terror or a military invasion," Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly and Castro's point man on US affairs, said in an interview. Alarcon said US President George W. Bush's loss of popularity over the protracted war in Iraq ruled out another "military adventure" by the United States. "At this time they are wondering how and when to pull out of Iraq, not how to get involved elsewhere," Alarcon said. "Still, we shouldn't forget we are only 90 miles away," he said. US officials deny Washington has any military designs on Cuba. (Reuters, 14/7/06)

July 14: The new measures approved by US President, George W. Bush, to toughen the embargo against Cuba, have resulted in increased harassment of dissidents on the Island, said Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement. "The secret police sends agents every Sunday to the church where we go, intercepting some of those who greet me to ask them for information. If they refuse, the threats are bone-chilling," he added. "Once again the Cuban government feels that it has an excuse to unleash its repression against us," he said. "This report, regardless of its intention, creates a negative environment that shifts the focus away from the important issues towards the conflict between Fidel Castro and the United States," said Payá. (Reuters, 17/7/06)

July 17: The complaint against a controversial children's book was given new life when an anti-Castro activist and his daughter asked for "Cuban Kids" to be removed from two Miami-Dade schools. Former Cuban political prisoner Emilio Izquierdo filed the complaint at Bob Graham Education Center in Miami Lakes, one of six Miami-Dade schools that own the book. His adult daughter, Dalila Rodriguez, filed a similar complaint at Christina Eve Elementary in Southwest Miami-Dade. "I have to fight this or else move to Switzerland," said Izquierdo, best known for leading protests against the Latin Grammy Awards in 2001 and for being arrested outside a 1999 performance by Cuban dance band Los Van Van. Two prior complaints about the book have been summarily dismissed -- Rodriguez had filed one at a school that had lost its copy of the book, and the other was made by an activist who lives in Broward. In both cases, district lawyers said there were no grounds for the lengthy book-appeals process to begin. Neither Izquierdo nor Rodriguez have children at the schools where they complained, but the district's rule allows any "citizen" to file a complaint. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/7/06)

July 17: US President George W. Bush extended for another six months the suspension of a measure allowing US citizens to sue foreign firms which use property seized by Havana after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the White House announced. The determination on the property rights of US citizens is included in Chapter 3 of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which strengthens the trade embargo imposed on the Communist island by Washington in 1961. Bush sent a brief letter to the foreign relations and appropriations committees of both houses of Congress in which he said, "I hereby determine (...) that suspension for 6 months beyond August 1, 2006, of the right to bring an action under title III of the Act is necessary to the national interests of the United States." The short statement concluded by adding that the suspension "will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba." The law in question allows former owners of the confiscated property to sue foreign companies the Cuban government has permitted to make use of it. (*EFE*, 17/7/06)

July 17: US officials have begun cracking down on its citizens who fly to Cuba from Toronto. About 50 members of Venceremos Brigade, a US aid group, were questioned by agents and issued summonses at the Peace Bridge after returning home from two weeks in Cuba. "These people are violating economic and trade sanctions based on US foreign policy," said Kevin Corsaro, of US Customs Border Protection. (*Toronto Sun*, 19/7/06)

July 19: Ten Cuban immigrants arrived in Mona Island, an islet between Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic. Police said that one of the immigrants was suffering from severe burns in different parts of his body, as consequence of an incident that took place in Cuba two weeks before, and was taken to a hospital. The immigrants, --three women and seven men-- arrived in Puerto Rico from the Dominican Republic in a boat that returned to DR without been intercepted by local authorities. (*AP*, 20/7/06)

July 20: Cuban migrant Odalys Conde was the first of 28 Cuban migrants to hug her South Florida family after a federal court hearing in an alleged smuggling case involving the death of a 24-year-old woman during a high-speed chase. Conde's teenage daughters, who had also made the trip but were released earlier, welcomed her with kisses and hugs at the federal courthouse. The US Coast Guard brought the 28 Cuban migrants ashore after detaining them off shore since July 8. The migrants will be material witnesses in the alleged smuggling case in which Anei Machado Gonzalez suffered fatal head injuries during a high-speed chase to reach Florida. The migrants were allowed to stay so they can testify directly against three men charged with the smuggling attempt that caused the 24-year-old woman's death. "This decision is the result of the unique circumstances of this specific criminal matter," said interim US Attorney R. Alexander Acosta. "[It] is a reflection of our determination to engage in a complete investigation and a vigorous prosecution of all individuals associated with this incident using all prosecutorial tools at our disposal." (*The Miami Herald*, 20/7/06)

July 20: A Senate panel moved to boost US food sales to Cuba with legislation that effectively would end a US regulation requiring Havana to pay cash for goods before ships leave American harbours. The Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously approved the amendment to a fiscal 2007 spending bill that funds the Treasury Department, which administers the controversial rule. In June, the US House of Representatives voted to overturn the Bush

administration regulation. But during a similar effort in Congress in 2005, the Bush administration threatened to veto the fiscal 2006 spending bill because of the Cuba language and lawmakers backed down. A similar result could occur this year. (*Reuters*, 20/7/06)

July 21: US officials condemned potential outside interference in Cuba's future by those who don't support democratic elections there - singling out Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as "meddling" in Cuban affairs. US Senator Mel Martinez (Republican-Florida), distinguished between aid from Venezuela and other countries to help the current Cuban government maintain its control over the island after 79-year-old Fidel Castro dies, and U.S. aid to promote democracy. "There's a big difference between attempting to prevent a transition and being of assistance to a transition," Martinez said. "If there are those who believe they can impose upon Cuba a succession of a tyranny, they are wrong, and this government will not permit that." Martinez, who fled Cuba as a teen, was joined by three Cuban-American US Congressional representatives, and by Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez to promote a presidential commission report calling for democracy in Cuba. They met with reporters after speaking at an event sponsored by the non-partisan lobbying group Cuba Democracy Advocates. (*Gainesville.Com*, 21/7/06)

July 24: With Congress deadlocked over allowing oil drilling in presently restricted areas of the Gulf of Mexico, communist Cuba is already drilling for oil 60 miles off the coast of Florida. Republicans in Congress have tried repeatedly in the past decade to open up the outer continental shelf to exploration. There are an estimated 45 billion barrels in oil reserves and 232 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves in banned drilling areas of the Gulf, and Florida's waters hold the promise of major energy finds. They have been strenuously opposed by Florida and environmental-minded legislators from both parties. Florida's powerful tourism and booming real estate industries fear that oil spills could hurt their business. Meanwhile Cuba "is exploring in its half of the 90-mile-wide Straits of Florida within the internationally recognized boundary as well as in deep-water areas of the Gulf of Mexico," the Washington Times reported. A Senate bill would permit drilling in a key area in the eastern Gulf but allow Florida to retain a 125-mile no-drilling buffer zone. (*NewsMax.Com*, 24/7/06)

July 24: A federal judge ordered all copies of "Vamos a Cuba" and 23 other children's books returned to Miami-Dade school libraries, hobbling the Miami-Dade School Board's attempt to ban the controversial books. In a sometimes-scathing 89-page opinion, US District Judge Alan Gold said the School Board "abused its discretion in a manner that violated the transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment." His ruling was not final, but the preliminary injunction will apply while the American Civil Liberties Union and Student Government Association continue their lawsuit against the School Board. Depending on the board's response, that could be weeks or years. (*The State.Com*, 24/7/06)

July 24: The Scots surgeon Stephen MacLeod was told by the US Treasury that he was banned from travelling to Cuba as he had violated US laws the last time he visited the island. The news published by The Herald online explains that MacLeod specializes in jaw-repairing surgery at the University of Minnesota and his crime was that he and a group of his colleagues delivered medicine to the Jewish community in Havana. They also met students and academics at Havana University, and gave some lectures. He has been invited back more than once, but cannot take up the offers, and is bemused to think his visit, a few months ago, is a threat to the stability of the region. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/7/06)

July 26: Fidel Castro compared Cuba's social and humane exploits to a Plan devised by US President George W. Bush for "a democratic transition" on the island. "Granma province does not need a Yankee transition plan to educate, vaccinate and provide health care to the people," said Castro on addressing National Rebel Day celebration. "We should invite Mr. Bush and those talking of plans of transition to see in Granma the achievements of literacy, arts and culture," he said. The White House recently approved a Report from the Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba. Cuba, Castro boasted, has an infant mortality rate of 5.56 per 1,000 births and more than 7,000 TV sets in Granma province elementary schools alone, according to Cuban government news websites. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 26/7/06)

July 27: A growing chorus of experts say America will pay a price for maintaining its 45-year trade ban with the

communist nation — a strategic and economic price that will have negative repercussions for the United States in the decades to come. What has changed the equation is oil. To be more specific, recent, sizable discoveries of it in the North Cuba Basin — deep-water fields that have already drawn the interest of companies from China, India, Norway, Spain, Canada, Venezuela and Brazil. This, in turn, has reheated debate in the U.S. Congress and the Cuban-American community on an old question: Has the time finally come to shelve the embargo — given America's need for more sources of crude at a time of rising gas prices, soaring global demand and the outbreak of war in the Middle East? Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, an expert on Cuba energy matters and a political science professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, says America's thirst for oil will soon force a fundamental change in Washington's relations with Havana. "I've always argued that we would keep the Cuban embargo in place until we got to the point where it started to cost us something." Today, he added, "we're almost there." Phil Peters, vice president of the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Virginia, said that, "If Cuba discovers a lot of oil and becomes an oil exporter, the embargo almost becomes an absurdity." Kirby Jones, founder and president of the US-Cuba Trade Association in Washington, D.C. said, that, "Our choice is: Are we going to let those other countries take that oil? Or are we going to look at our strategic interests and recognize that very close to our shores is a substantial quantity of oil that is going to be exploited?" (*The Globe and Mail*, 27/7/06)

July 28: More US-produced poultry and beans are set to head through Corpus Christi to Cuba starting August. Alimport, Cuba's food importing agency, has promised to buy nearly 17,000 tons of poultry from Arkansas-based Ozark Mountain Poultry. The meat will be shipped through the Port of Corpus Christi starting this fall. Corpus Christi is one of about 17 US ports that have been trading with Cuba since the US government in 2000 eased a trade embargo put in place in the 1960s to pressure the communist Cuban government. "This is a significant market for our port," said Michael Perez, the Port of Corpus Christi's business development director. "You're talking about an island with the buying power of the greater New York City area." WestStar Food Co. in Corpus Christi, which has been exporting to Cuba since 2003, is preparing to ship 10,000 pounds of pinto beans next month. (*Tribune Business News*, 28/7/06)

July 28: Critics of the second Report by the US Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba such as Elizardo Sanchez, an activist who heads the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation in Havana, described the increased \$80 million support to the dissidence as "counterproductive". Sanchez said authorities already are using the Commission's July 10 announcement to harass the dissidents. "This is putting gasoline on the fire," he said. "This is fuel for the Cuban government's propaganda." Sanchez said the US aid program is characterized by "a lot of inconvenient rhetoric from Washington and few practical results." Vladimiro Roca, another prominent opposition leader, complained that only a small fraction of the assistance actually reaches the dissident community. "What arrives here to us is very limited," Roca said. "Fundamental things have to change." One initiative cited by Sanchez and others as ill-conceived is the Georgetown University Scholarship Program, which received a \$400,000 grant to provide family and friends of dissidents two years of study at US community colleges. Jorge Olivera, a dissident journalist in Havana, said it is "impossible to think that they can implement this program. It's an illusion." (*Chicago Tribune*, 28/7/06)

July 27: The Bush administration's plans to send an additional \$80 million over the next two years to support Cuba's struggling opposition movement is being criticized by the very people the money is intended to help. Caleb McCarry, Bush's top adviser for Cuba, said recently that the additional \$80 million in support to Cuba's dissidence movement included in the Report will help "empower and support Cubans as they lead the way toward a democratic transition in their country." Despite the program's failure, U.S. officials are allocating \$10million of the additional \$80million to fund more scholarships for Cubans to study abroad. During a US Congress hearing, McCarry was asked why the US is expanding a scholarship program for Cubans that has been paralysed. "This is a serious offer to support young Cubans, economically disadvantaged Cubans," he responded. (*Chicago Tribune*, 28/7/06)

July 29: The Cuban government has become more selective of the US groups that it allows in, disillusioned with efforts to lobby for easing US sanctions and trying to shift its foreign policy priorities elsewhere, Cuba watchers said. Organizers of two missions -- one of congressional staff members and another of former chiefs of the US diplomatic

mission in Cuba -- say they have been denied visas in recent months. But more trade-related missions have been given the green light. "My guess is that they are having some discussions over foreigners coming, and until they come to some agreement, they're going to sort of hold off," said Wayne Smith of the Center for International Policy, a liberal Washington think tank that promotes more contacts with Cuba. Smith was organizing the delegation of former heads of the US Interests Section, which serves as a quasi-embassy, as the two countries have no formal diplomatic relations. Smith is a former Interests Section chief and has been critical of US policy toward Cuba. Many experts believe the rejections underscore the increasingly low priority that the United States represents for Cuban leader Fidel Castro's government. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/7/06)

July 31: In a stunning development, Fidel Castro temporarily ceded presidential power to brother Raúl Castro due to "an intestinal crisis with sustained bleeding" that required "complicated surgery." In Washington, the White House was "monitoring the situation," a spokesman said. Without speculating on Castro's health, the spokesman said the administration will "continue to work for the day of Cuba's freedom." Eric Wainwright, a State Department spokesman, said: "We are not in a position to comment on Fidel Castro's health." The streets were quiet around the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, according to mission spokesman Drew Blakeney. He said the Cuban security presence around the building along the Malecón seaside promenade had been increased a bit, but is "not heavy." "It's very hard to judge the mood at this late hour (...)," he wrote in an e-mail. "People are paying close attention, but aren't sure what to think, and are taking a wait-and-see attitude. There are no public celebrations here of which we're aware." (*The Miami Herald*, 1/8/06)