



# FOCAL

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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## August 2007

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** Dissident organizations denounce harassment against dissidents and inhumane conditions in Cuban prisons. Cuba releases several political prisoners. Raul Castro signs a decree requiring punishment for public officials who violate labour rules. Vice President Carlos Lage squashes speculation that Cuba is heading toward Chinese-style reforms of its economy. Cuba will not be sending a boxing team to the world championships in Chicago. The Christian Liberation Movement delivers a petition to Cuba's parliament abolishing and replacing the country's electoral law.

**Economy:** The Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation and Cuban CUPET start the first project for offshore exploration in Cuba. Iran increases its trade with Cuba. Russia delivers the first of three jet planes to Cuba. Trade already underway between Venezuela and Cuba has reached more than \$1.8 billion. Eastern Cuba is damaged by sea penetration caused by the passing of hurricane Dean.

**Exile Community:** Cuban-American business leaders call for the creation of a 300 million dollar fund to help build private enterprise in Cuba. Members of Democracy Movement demonstrate in support of Cubans on a hunger strike at the Guantanamo Naval Base. Max Lesnick receives a distinction by the Cuban Journalists Union in Havana. Rumours about Fidel Castro's death circulate in Miami.

**Foreign Affairs:** The number of illegal Cuban immigrants arriving in Mexico increases. Brazil's Federal police investigate the case of two Cuban boxers who absconded from their team during the Pan-American Games. Cuba sends to Peru two planes with tent hospitals and medical staff to aid the victims of the earthquake. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque participates in the Third Forum for East Asia Latin America Cooperation meeting in Brasilia and meets with Brazil's president. The Cuban government brands Hungary an "imperial accomplice" of Washington for granting asylum to a group of Cubans on a hunger strike at the Guantanamo Naval Base. Newspaper reports talk about a private visit Raul Castro would have paid to Italy.

**Security:** Cuba has been upgrading its military arsenal since Fidel Castro fell ill.

**Terrorism:** The Colombian government and the ELN began another round of talks in Havana.

**US-Cuba Relations:** The US Coast Guard informs of Cuban migrants interdicted close to the Florida coast. Cuba's Foreign Ministry protests the US State Department's acknowledgment it will not meet this fiscal year's minimum quota of 20,000 visas for Cubans who want to migrate. A Miami courtroom hears the case of a father seeking to take his daughter back to Cuba. Fidel Castro publishes reflections on the history of US-Cuba relations and US presidential candidates. Cubans held at Guantanamo Naval Base end a hunger strike after learning that they would receive visas to

go to the US or to a third country. Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama calls on the US government to end the travel and money restrictions imposed in 2004.



## **Domestic Affairs**

**August 1:** The outlawed Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation said that three inmates were killed and another seriously injured at a maximum-security prison in the east-central province of Camagüey. "There are three prisoners dead and one seriously injured," Elizardo Sanchez, chairman of the commission, told the press in regard to the incident the previous weekend at the Kilo 8 penitentiary. According to Sanchez, three prisoners overpowered a guard and stole his keys in order to enter the cell of another inmate, whom they stabbed in an apparent "settling of scores." The guards later retaliated against the attackers, according to Sanchez, who said "they hit those involved in the fight with metal bars and other objects and killed two of them." "It was a very serious incident," he said, noting that "many cases of violence have occurred in the prisons." "Our concern is that the government is not assuming the responsibility incumbent upon it, because these people died in the government's custody," he said. (*EFE*, 2/8/07)

**August 1:** Elizardo Sanchez, president of the illegal Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation said that in the same provincial police station in which dissident Manuel Acosta was found dead on June 24 "last week another person committed suicide." Authorities informed Acosta's family members that his death is still under investigation after having previously informed them that he had committed suicide. After receiving notification of his death, one of Acosta's relatives sent a letter to acting President Raul Castro urging that "a thorough investigation" be carried out. (*EFE*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** A new special education project will be implemented in Cuba in the next academic course, as part of the national program "Educate your Child," official sources reported. Eulalia Travieso, Master of Science in Education, said that children with special characteristics need a singular activity in the first years of life, to develop their potential. With that aim, she stated, the country has created a manual for experts, promoters and executers of the project, with theoretical and methodological information and directions to detect cases. The program "Educate your Child," with several years of application in Cuba, is designed for the attention of communities on children from zero to six years old, without links to educational institutions. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** The head of the Office for Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party, Caridad Diego, met with a high-ranking official of the Supreme Council of the Masonic Lodge of Cuba. Diego brought up the upcoming elections in this Masonic body, scheduled for January 2008, and threatened to break all government relations with the Supreme Council if Gustavo Pardo Valdés were elected Grand Master. Diego referred to Pardo as an "enemy of the revolution", who assists "counterrevolutionary" prisoners and maintains contacts with officials of the United States Interests Section. (*Cubanet*, 31/8/07)

**August 3:** Cuba is prepared for a process of "necessary transformation" without falling into chaos, either with Fidel Castro, or when he departs, according to Mariela Castro, daughter of Raúl Castro. During an interview with the media, Mariela Castro, psychologist and director of the National Center for Sexual Education (Cenesex), defended the need to encourage internal debate and to enrich the revolution for the future. "Cuban society is prepared for a process of necessary transformation to support the revolutionary process, with or without Fidel". (*EFE*, 3/8/07)

**August 6:** Marta Beatriz Roque, president of the illegal Assembly for Civil Society in Cuba, demanded that authorities shutdown the maximum security prison of Kilo 8 in Camagüey province. The demand is based on the severe conditions and the cruel and inhumane treatment prisoners receive. The demand follows a similar request from political prisoners Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta and José Daniel Ferrer García, of the Group of 75, who are held in Kilo 8 prison. In the document—dated August 1—Roque recounts the events of July 29 when four inmates died in a brawl, which provoked a brutal response from prison guards. (*Cubamet*, 6/8/07)

**August 6:** The Catholic Church will increase its visits to Cuban prisons, the future archbishop of the central region of Cienfuegos told the press in an interview. Domingo Oropesa, a Spaniard, is the first foreigner appointed by the Vatican to a post in Cuba since the 1959 triumph of the revolution led by Fidel Castro. "The visiting by the Catholic Church to the jails is going to increase," the prelate said. Facilitating the Church's assistance to the prisoners and their families was one of the requests of the Latin American bishops council, or CELAM, to the island's authorities during the meeting the parties held in Havana in mid-July. "At the moment, it's only in the (east-central) province of Camagüey and the idea is that, when my tenure (as archbishop) begins - in mid-September - it will be taken on as part of the duties by the rest of the diocese to extend it to all of Cuba," Oropesa said. He said that the archdiocese of Camagüey, where Oropesa is still a parish priest, asked for volunteers among the priests and vicars to fulfill religious tasks in the prisons of that province. (*EFE*, 6/8/07)

**August 6:** Two events on dengue fever that started in Havana have attracted world experts to discuss the control and prevention of the disease. The two week-long events, the 10th International Forum on Dengue and the Seminar on Twenty Years of Fighting Dengue, have attracted doctors, virologists, sociologists and epidemiologists from several nations, sharing their experiences on dengue control and prevention. Cuba plans to present its results on the control of dengue and the people's role in the campaign against dengue. The two events are sponsored by the World Health Organization, the Pan-American Health Organization, and the Italy-based International Genetics and Biotechnology Engineering Center. (*Xinhua*, 6/8/07)

**August 7:** The National Workers' Confederation of Cuba (CONIC) in the city of Santa Clara has been restructured and is ready to resume the work of free labour unions in the territory. The new provincial executive is composed of former prisoner of conscience Jorge Luis Artiles Montiel, Olga Lilia González, Sixto Gómez Pérez, Bárbara Jiménez Contreras and Alexis Oms Pérez. (*Cubamet*, 10/8/07)

**August 7:** Fidel Castro said that Cuba might not send boxers to next year's Beijing Olympics to prevent possible defections, vowing his country will not sacrifice its honor for gold medals. Castro wrote in a column published in official newspapers on August 8 that two Cuban boxers who disappeared during the Pan American Games in Brazil last month only to be arrested and sent back to the island "had reached the point of no return" with the national boxing team. Castro said Cuban officials were compiling the list of fighters for the 2008 Olympics, a squad that was scheduled to compete in the world championships in the United States and two other qualifying events before heading to China. "Just picture the mafia sharks lurking about in search of fresh meat," Castro wrote of promoters who could try to persuade Cuban fighters to desert. He said Cuban sports officials hoping to prevent defections are "analyzing all possible alternatives, including the option of changing the list of boxers or of not sending any delegation whatsoever, in spite of the penalties that may be in store for us." [[A Written Record](#)] (*AP*, 8/8/07)

**August 8:** One of the two Cuban boxers who disappeared during last month's Pan American Games in Brazil but were subsequently deported back to the Caribbean island told the press in Havana that neither he nor his colleague had any intention of defecting. Guillermo Rigondeaux, in an interview conducted in the Havana apartment he shares with his wife and son, said that there had been no defection but rather a "discipline problem." According to his version, which has many gaps, the two boxers fled from the athletes' compound in Rio de Janeiro because they were overweight for their respective weight categories. They stayed for several days with a group of Cuban and German businessmen in a Brazilian beach-house but finally opted to return to Cuba. "We had no intention of defecting," said Rigondeaux, who

admitted leaving the Pan American Village "without authorization." "We committed a big breach of discipline and we're ready to accept whatever," said the 26-year-old Olympic bantamweight champion, who said that he was questioned by members of the Communist Party Central Committee during his stay at a government guesthouse in Havana. There he was placed under "significant pressure," but "everybody's behavior (was) very good," he said. Now, "we're waiting to see what happens," Rigondeaux said, adding that he was waiting for "higher authorities" to determine if he will be able to box again in Cuba. (*EFE*, 8/8/07)

**August 8:** The Ministry of the Interior has intensified surveillance of beaches in the special municipality of Isla de la Juventud. At 6:00 p.m., at the beaches El Gallego, Punta Piedra, Paraíso and Bibijagua, police officers force swimmers out of the water and to leave the beaches. This measure is believed to be aimed at preventing human smuggling towards the United States through Mexico. (*Cubanet, Miscelánea de Cuba*, 8/8/07)

**August 8:** Outstanding Cuban intellectual Juan Emilio Friguls Ferrer, dean of the journalists of the island, died in Havana at the age of 88. Friguls, as everybody simply called him, was known as the teacher, the loyal colleague, the man of ethics, the extraordinary worker and the unyielding reporter. Friguls worked in the Public Relations Office of Havana's Archbishop. Several years before the 1959 Revolution, he began his career in "*Informacion*" newspaper, but he also penned works in the conservative "*Diario de la Marina*" and the more liberal "*El Mundo*". Friguls received all the honors a reporter could wish. In fact, he was the most awarded of all: National Vanguard since 1981, Jose Marti National Journalism Prize (1996), Jose A. Fernandez de Castro Cultural Journalism (1999), National Radio Prize (2003), the Replica of the Machete of Maximo Gomez, the Giraldilla of Havana, the Alejo Carpentier Order, the Distinction for National Culture, the Felix Elmuza Medal, and the Polish Culture Order among others. (*Cuba Headlines News*, 9/8/07)

**August 8:** Cubans will soon nominate their candidates for delegates to the municipal assemblies of the People's Power (local government), a process that takes place every two and a half years. The electoral process began in July and concludes in 2008 with the election of the National Assembly (Parliament) members. Electoral commissions in Havana are putting the final touches on preparations for the 9,110 meetings that will take place starting September 1 to nominate candidates for delegates to municipal assemblies. This time, there will be 1,433 more meetings than in 2005. Jose Pavon, president of the Provincial Electoral Commission (CEP), told the press that the increase in the number of meetings is to provide citizens with even more opportunities to nominate candidates. According to the Electoral Law, each district must nominate a maximum of eight and a minimum of two candidates. On this occasion, there will be more than 50,600 nomination assemblies nationally, 9,000 more than in the previous electoral process. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/8/07)

**August 8:** Although the pope's influence was considered key to the collapse of communism in John Paul's native Poland, where Catholicism was strong and organized, the church has had much less say in Cuba than in other parts of Latin America. "The Holy Father created great expectations because he was an international figure," Havana's Auxiliary Bishop Juan de Dios Hernández said in an interview with the press. Hernández acknowledged that church attendance has not increased significantly since then, but said numbers "are not the criteria by which the church is defined." A more important legacy of the pope's visit, he said, is that the Catholics who do show up to Mass are generally more spiritually mature, and more inclined to be "disciples" who follow church's teachings. "The Holy Father came to Cuba as he has gone to other churches, to affirm them in the faith," the bishop said. "He came for all of Cuba, but in a special way for those who have had experienced the faith." Church pews were more populated for a while after the papal visit. Christmas was declared an official holiday again, and religious processions went public for the first time in decades. Catholic leaders today can speak or write in state media at times, and relations are cordial between Cuba's church and government, which never cut ties with the Vatican. (*AP*, 8/8/07)

**August 9:** State Security agents broke up a hunger strike in support of the freedom of political prisoners and of conscience and the "I do not cooperate" campaign. The agents burst into the house of independent librarian Julio Beltrán Iglesias, in Centro Habana, and took five strikers into custody. (*Cubamet*, 13/8/07)

**August 9:** A moderate Cuban oppositionist group thinks that Cuba has begun a new phase of "gradual changes" based on "revolutionary realism" under the government of the acting president, Raúl Castro. The Concertación Pro Diálogo y Reconciliación (CPDR) believes the language of the current leadership, in place since last year following the transfer of power from Fidel Castro to Raúl Castro for health reasons, "continues to give signs of a new time for Cuba". [[Diez claves o enfoques de Seguridad Nacional](#)] (*Notimex*, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** Dissidents were threatened during interrogations by State Security officers on August 3rd and 6th in San Germán, in the province of Holguín. José Antonio Triguero, member of the Liberal Party of Cuba, and the independent journalists Yosvani Anzardo Hernández and Luis Felipe Rojas Rosabal were warned that they would go to prison and their exit permits to leave the country would be denied if they continued their dissident and journalistic activities. (*EER*, 9/8/07)

**August 10:** The Cuban National Liberal Party (PLNC) denounced the increased repression on the part of the political police against members of that organization, especially against the coordinator for the western provinces, Silvio Benítez Márquez. (*Cubamet*, 10/8/07)

**August 10:** Cuba released its longest-serving political prisoner, Francisco Chaviano González, who spent more than 13 years in jail, the country's main human rights group said. Mr. Chaviano, 54, was arrested in May 1994, convicted of revealing state security secrets and sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1995, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said in a statement. He was released on parole. A former mathematics professor, dissident and human rights activist, he was listed by Amnesty International as one of Cuba's 72 prisoners of conscience. The rights group said his military trial fell short of international standards. "We consider his release to be good news, but we regret that -- in his case, as in the cases of many other political prisoners -- the government of Cuba continues to violate the terms of early release, as established by the current penal code," said commission President Elizardo Sánchez. Sánchez said that under the code, Chaviano should have been freed unconditionally on May 7. However, Chaviano remained in prison an extra three months and his release was termed "conditional." (*Reuters, The Miami Herald*, 11/8/07)

**August 10:** A group of top Cuban dissidents told international journalists at the Havana residence of US Interests Section head Michael Parmly that repression continues for critics of the communist government, even though the number of political prisoners has dipped in recent years. Elizardo Sanchez of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation has reported that the number of political prisoners had dropped by more than 20 percent in the year since Raul Castro took power from his ailing elder brother Fidel. The commission said 246 political prisoners were being held as of June 30, compared with 283 at the beginning of 2007 and 316 a year ago. At Parmly's residence, former political prisoner Martha Beatriz Roque and dissident leader Vladimiro Roca said the statistics do not provide a full picture, and that government harassment of critics continues unabated. "There is a general tendency to confuse partial statistics showing a drop in the number of political prisoners with an improvement in the human rights situation," Roque said. Cuban officials dismiss dissidents as "mercenaries" for the US charges Roque and others deny. (*AP, El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/07)

**August 10:** One of Cuba's longest-serving political prisoners, Francisco Chaviano, was released on "conditional freedom" after serving 13 years in prison -- and immediately blasted prison conditions on the island. "I am back from hell," Chaviano, 54, told the press from his home in Jaimanitas, west of Havana. "If Dante had known the Combinado del Este [prison], he would not have needed his imagination to write *"The Inferno"*. He simply would have told what he saw there." "I spent five years stuck in a cell without seeing the sun, two years without receiving visitors and four years

without conjugal visits," he added. "It was a cruel, merciless treatment that was also extended to my family, my wife and my children." Chaviano, a mathematics professor at Havana's Institute of Chemistry, was arrested on May 7, 1994, and sentenced by a military tribunal to 15 years in prison on charges that he "disclosed secrets concerning the state security" and falsified documents. He had been chairman of the Cuban Civil Rights Council, an organization that supported civil liberties and denounced the penetration of State Security agents into the dissident movement. Chaviano said prison life had seriously harmed his health, and that he now suffers from a rapidly growing tumor in one of his lungs and a serious heart condition. During the last two years, he was hospitalized several times with serious pulmonary and cardiac problems, he said. "The damage in my lungs I owe to them [the government]. In Cuba, imprisonment kills," Chaviano said. But he added that he will not seek exile abroad and vowed to continue to actively oppose the government from inside the island. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/8/07)

**August 11:** Cuban university students celebrated 41 years of the foundation of the Latin American and Caribbean Continental Organization of Students (OCLAE) in a ceremony dedicated to the heroes and martyrs of the students continental movement. The soiree, held at Havana's park "13 of March", was dedicated to Cuban University Martyr Jose Antonio Echevarria and the Puerto Rican combatant Jose Rafael Varona who died fighting in Vietnam. OCLAE was founded in Havana in 1966 and presently has nearly 40 organizations from 23 countries as full members or friends that represent about 120 million of university and secondary students. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/8/07)

**August 11:** Cuba is free of dengue cases today due to the existence of an epidemiological security service system that allows to control this increasing problem existing all over the world, affirmed Cuban deputy minister of health Gonzalo Estevez. The doctor emphasized that the country is free of infection thanks to the national sustainability program the country is carrying to fight the aedes aegypti's mosquito, carrier of the disease. He highlighted the educational actions within the community, where the family plays the main role intensifying the searching and defusing of aedes aegyptis' breeding grounds which increase during summer. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/8/07)

**August 12:** Cuba won the title of the 11th edition of the International Baseball Tournament of Port Cities that concluded in the Dutch city of Rotterdam. This was the seventh crown for Cuba in 10 participations in the Rotterdam contest. On this occasion, the United States walked away with the bronze medals. (*ACN*, 13/8/07)

**August 12:** Celia Guevara March, the Cuban-born daughter of legendary communist revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, became a citizen of Argentina, the daily Clarin newspaper reported. Guevara, who was four years old when her Argentine-born father was killed in Bolivia in 1967, took her oath at the Argentine consulate in Havana, the daily said. A veterinarian in charge of animal health at Havana's National Aquarium, Celia Guevara chose her father's nationality under an Argentine law that grants citizenship rights to children of Argentine nationals regardless of their place of birth. Celia Guevara, who told Argentine officials that she has no plans to leave Cuba, began the nationalization process in January. The paperwork was approved and is on its way to Cuba, according to Clarin. (*AFP*, 12/8/07)

**August 13:** Fireworks exploded over Havana Bay as ailing leader Fidel Castro turned 81, spending his second consecutive birthday convalescing at an unknown location. No major public celebrations of Castro's birthday were announced, and there was no expectation that he would make a public appearance more than a year after he announced he had undergone emergency intestinal surgery and was temporarily ceding power to his brother Raul, who is now 76. Even when well, Castro traditionally has always celebrated his birthday in a low-key manner, often simply sharing a cake with Cuban school children. Mexico's most influential newspaper, Reforma, reported that Castro had several surgeries in the past few weeks in an attempt to stave off a potentially fatal blood infection. Castro, the paper said, has lost a lot of weight and no longer wishes to receive visitors. (*AP, The Miami Herald*, 13,14/8/07)

**August 13:** The five Cubans held in US jails ratified their loyalty to Fidel Castro by sending their regards to the leader of the Cuban Revolution on the occasion of his 81st birthday. Granma newspaper published letters written by Ramon

Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero, as well as a caricature drawn by Gerardo Hernandez. Likewise, the Official Organ of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party issued a commentary by Rene Gonzalez on the happy coincidence of his birthday with Fidel Castro's. (ACN, 13/8/07)

**August 13:** A hundred Cuban youths will represent Cuba at an international meeting that will take place in Venezuela from August 22-27 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the World Festivals of Youth and Students. According to Ernesto Fernandez, member of the national bureau of the Cuban Young Communist League, most of the island's representatives to the event are members of the Cuban internationalist contingent that is currently making their contribution in the South American nation. They will be joined by pre-university and university students and also by youths who are participating in important social programs currently underway on the island. (ACN, 13/8/07)

**August 14:** The Cuban Union of Journalists (UPEC) honoured Fidel Castro with the Dignity Award in recognition of his exceptional merits and work in favour of the press and the homeland. The announcement was made during a ceremony at UPEC headquarters in Havana. UPEC's president Tubal Paez said that the Cuban president represents a synthesis of the dignity of all Cubans, the homeland and humankind. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/8/07)

**August 14:** In Havana, the Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs of Cuba expressed its satisfaction with the release of four political prisoners from prison. Jorge Luís García Pérez (Antúnez), spokesman of the CRDHC and Rapporteur for Prisons, said that although the government's repressive policies have not changed, they are very happy for the release of prisoner of conscience Francisco Pastor Chaviano González. Also released from prison in Camagüey were Raúl Hernández Loyola and Roberto Velasco Quiñones, two defenders of human rights whose sentences would not have been completed until 2008. Francisco Pacheco Espinosa was also released from prison in Camagüey. He had been accused of throwing rocks at shop windows, and was five months short of serving a five-year sentence. (*Cubamet*, 21/8/07)

**August 14:** The president of the Christian Liberation Movement in Cuba, Oswaldo Paya, has sent an open letter to the public denouncing the growing risk of death that prisoners of conscience are facing in Cuban prisons. In his letter, Paya noted that the increased risk is due to the fact that "Cuban political prisoners are confined together with common prisoners who on occasion threaten and harass them, with the encouragement of the authorities themselves." Violence and bloodshed are frequent among common prisoners and from abusive prison guards, Paya said, noting that in all the prisons of Cuba, "political prisoners have a high possibility of being assaulted and suffer great anxiety and stress, due to confinement in cruel, degrading conditions that are life-threatening." "To confine political prisoners with common ones," the letter explained, "has not been very common in Cuba's history, even during the dictatorship prior to this one, but now it has become a perverse practice on the part of authorities who are enraged with these people only because they dared to defend and promote the rights of Cubans," Paya noted. [[Denuncia del MCL](#)] (*Catholic News Agency*, 14/8/07)

**August 14:** Cuban authorities released a little-known dissident who was jailed three years ago on vague political charges, the second prisoner of conscience to be freed on the island in four days, a veteran rights activist said. Lazaro Gonzalez Adan, 37, who belonged to an independent labor movement, was freed from the prison in the eastern province of Camaguey, where he lives, said Elizardo Sanchez of the National Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. Police visited Gonzalez in October 2004 after he painted a Cuban flag and two quotes about liberty by independence hero Jose Marti on his house. Sanchez said he could not recall the exact quotes, which apparently were chosen to criticize the government. When Gonzalez refused police demands to erase the paintings, he was arrested on charges of disrespect, disobedience to authorities and resisting arrest. He later received a three-year prison sentence. (AP, 15/8/07)

**August 15:** Cuba finds the way for the October general elections through meetings to train citizens who make up grass-roots electoral commissions. Created hardly a month ago, those bodies are formed by volunteers, who as electoral

authorities have the responsibility to lead the process in municipalities and constituencies. Their main task is to prepare the assemblies to nominate candidates, as well as neighborhood meetings where neighbors, without the participation of the Communist Party, run their candidates. Those meetings will start on September 1 until the end of that month, to choose candidates as delegates for the municipal assemblies of the People's Power. According to "Granma" newspaper, there are experienced people in those commissions, who have worked responsibly in previous elections. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/8/07)

**August 15:** The number of sightless writers who are members to the amateur movement of the National Association for the Blind in Cuba has increased to nearly 800 over the last few years. The blind Cuban writers are organized in 101 workshops, where they gather to discuss and choose the works to compete in literary competitions. The leading provinces in the promotion of such cultural activities are Havana, Holguin, Cienfuegos, Santiago de Cuba and Camaguey. (*ACN*, 15/8/07)

**August 16:** Cuba's electoral process formally got under way - at a time when Cubans are increasingly beginning to wonder how permanent Fidel Castro's absence from power will be. The country's electoral process will culminate early next year in a new National Assembly, or Parliament, which in turn elects the country's president for another five-year term. Until now, the official line had been that the ailing leader would eventually return to the helm and run for re-election next year. But, in an exclusive interview with the BBC, the president of Cuba's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon was far more cautious in his latest assessment about Castro's health. Alarcon said that Fidel Castro had had to adjust to a strict regime to help his physical recovery, while remaining active in the decision-making process. "He's also doing something that probably he would have liked to have done more of in the past but didn't have time to do before his illness, which is reading a lot and writing a lot." But when asked specifically if Fidel would return to front-line politics, he was more circumspect. "I hope that he will continue recovering and I look forward to him continuing to play the leading role that he has always played in our country," he said. (*BBC*, 16/8/07)

**August 17:** The border patrol department of Punta de Coco, north of Morón, reinforced its guard forces due to an increase in illegal migration from the keys of Coco and Guillermo. Patrol operations are conducted by border officers, guards in the Military Service and specially-trained dogs. (*Cubamet*, 17/8/07)

**August 17:** In an article published by the magazine "Vital", Doctor Maria De la Luz Casas reminded doctors and students that the practice of medicine should be motivated by the desire to learn science that helps the patient, as "learning in order to have knowledge can be good (but) learning in order to serve can be better." "Perhaps it sounds strange to ask that we love our patients, perhaps it is better to say: let's be committed to their wellbeing. Only this way can we find fulfillment for them and for ourselves," she wrote in the latest edition of the magazine published by the Diocese of Pinar del Rio. In her article she also addressed the issue of euthanasia, noting that it "minimizes the value of life and leads people to act according to their economic or social utility, forgetting that a fundamental part of the reason for human life is a person's own existence." Other articles in "Vital" include, among others, an analysis by Jose Miguel Insulza on the main problems in Latin America, reflections by Chilean president Michelle Bachelet on the changes taking place in her country, and the essay "Ego versus Society" by Cuban Félix Sautié. [[Conocer y Amar, vocación médica](#)] (*CNA*, 17/8/07)

**August 17:** A little-known group of rural Cuban women said it has gathered more than 6,000 signatures petitioning lawmakers to study the possibility of a law closing the gaps in a dual economy they say hurts the island's poorest people the most. The petition asks the government to allow the use of standard Cuban pesos — the currency of state employee salaries — in upscale stores, restaurants and hotels that only accept the convertible Cuban peso, whose value is linked to the US dollar. Crowded into the tiny living room of a modest Havana apartment, a half-dozen members of the Latin American Federation of Rural Women (FLAMUR) told journalists that they launched their campaign, called "With the Same Money," a year ago and still need 4,000 more signatures to present them to the Cuban parliament,

known as the National Assembly. Activist Belinda Salas said hundreds of people around the island are gathering signatures, but authorities repeatedly seize the petitions when they find them. (*AP, El Nuevo Herald*, 18/8/07)

**August 18:** National Civil Defense General Staff declared cyclone alert for the Cuban provinces of Guantanamo, Santiago de Cuba, Granma, Holguin, Las Tunas and Camaguey, due to the possible path of Hurricane Dean. The second report of the National Civil Defense said that Dean continued moving in the Eastern Caribbean Sea after reaching category 4. Taking into account the proximity of the hurricane to the Cuban territory, its possible path, and favourable conditions for its intensification, the rest of the country's provinces and the Isle of Youth special municipality were declared on information alert. Due to the fast movement of the hurricane, measures in case of natural disasters have been established, giving priority to the Cuban southern coast and mountain regions, added the report. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/8/07)

**August 19:** Cuba concluded in the fifth spot of the medal standings of the 3rd Para-Pan American Games that concluded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with the participation of some 1300 athletes from 25 nations. The island's delegation to the event was comprised of 51 athletes who competed in only five of the ten sports disciplines included in the program: athletics, swimming, judo, weightlifting and table tennis. (*ACN*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** The president of the Provincial Electoral Commission in Havana City, Jose Pavon Cruz, said that everything is ready for the successful development of the process of nomination of candidates for municipal and provincial assemblies. Speaking to reporters, Pavon said that this process will begin on September 1st across the nation. He noted that the electoral authorities are prepared to explain how these meetings to nominate candidates should develop. He added that on this occasion there are 9,110 electoral districts in the capital, 1,403 more than in the previous electoral process, which will allow the people to nominate more candidates for the Municipal Assemblies. (*ACN*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** An independent Cuban journalist arrested on charges of public disorder was released after 15 months behind bars. Armando Betancourt Reina was released from the Ceramica Roja prison, in the central provincial capital Camaguey. He is the third dissident to be released in less than two weeks. Betancourt, a little-known journalist who contributed dispatches to the Miami-based Web site Nueva Prensa Cuba, was detained on May 23, 2006, while covering a family's eviction in Camaguey. Police told Betancourt's family that he had joined a protest against the eviction, but he denies that. (*CPJ Press Release, Cubanet*, 21/8/07)

**August 21:** Increasing his fight against corruption and mismanagement in Cuba, interim leader Raúl Castro has signed a decree requiring tough, swift and long-lasting punishment for public officials who violate labor rules. The decree, published in the Official Gazette, covers the enforcement of earlier decrees designed to counter official corruption and illegal but widespread workplace activities, including petty thievery of public supplies, 4-hour work days and hiring friends for good jobs. The decree brands as "a collaterally responsible" any official whose job is on the same level as violators but doesn't punish them or report them to authorities, saying they are guilty of a "lack of exigency" or "of being negligent" Sanctions include dismissal and a total ban on any official employment. Punishment will be meted out "directly and with immediate effect," and authorities will track violators to ensure the punishments are being observed. The decree will take effect September 1, six months after the enactment of a new resolution aimed at cracking down on some aspects of the notorious labour inefficiencies in Cuba's government-dominated economy: workers who show up late or leave early, who filch supplies from their jobs or accept bribes to help clients. (*The Miami Herald, EER*, 22/8/07)

**August 22:** Reporters Without Borders voiced dismay on learning that Alberto Santiago Du Bouchet Hernández, an independent journalist who was released in August 2006 after spending a year in prison, was given another jail term by a Havana court on 15 August for allegedly stealing a handkerchief signed by Fidel Castro from an elderly woman who was once a pro-Castro activist. "We are outraged by the way the authorities continue to persecute Du Bouchet," the

press freedom organisation said. "Imposing a heavy sentence on him for the supposed theft of a handkerchief is grotesque and disgraceful. His trial was as summary as the one in 2005, and relied on evidence that could well have been obtained under threat. We call for him to be acquitted on appeal." A municipal court in Plaza (a district of Havana) sentenced Du Bouchet on 15 August to two years in prison plus an additional two years of work in a prison environment and another two years under judicial control for "illicitly" taking a signed handkerchief which Castro gave in 1957 to María Encarnación González Guerra, an active member of the then-underground 26 of July Movement (a pro-Castro movement created four years earlier). Du Bouchet insists that González gave him the handkerchief and believes the political police pressured her to testify against him. For the time being he remains free pending the outcome of the appeal he has filed. (*RWB Press Release*, 22/8/07)

**August 23:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Fidel Castro was still recovering from his operation last year and was keeping busy, having personally instructed him on his visit to Brasilia. While attending the Forum for East Asia Latin American Cooperation (Fealac), Roque, in an interview with the press, dispelled rumours about the Castro's health taking a turn for the worse since his 81st birthday on August 13. He continues "in process of recovery," Roque said. "In particular, he keeps in constant touch with the leaders of Cuba's (Communist) Party and government," he added. Asked if Castro was still in charge of Cuban affairs, Roque said: "Exactly, he is being informed and consulted constantly and works all the time." Roque said he was in Brasilia for the Fealac forum at Castro's personal behest: "He gave me instructions to take part here in this meeting." (*AFP*, 23/8/07)

**August 24:** Maria Esther Reus, president of the National Electoral Commission, said the preparatory process of next general elections in the island is ruled by a tight program. At the end of a meeting on the process held in the island's eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, the official told the press that October 21 is the date to elect delegates to the Peoples' Power municipal assemblies in the island. The Cuban general elections were called on July 9, through a decree from the Council of State, which also specifies that there will be a second time to elect provincial delegates and deputies to the National Assembly. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/8/07)

**August 26:** Dissident Jorge Luis García Pérez, Antúnez, denounced that former political prisoner Benito Ortega Suárez was brutally beaten by two State Security agents in the city of Matanzas. Ortega was in the streets of Matanzas distributing copies of the UN Human Rights Charter when the two agents intercepted him, beat him, and offended him calling him "worm" and "traitor". The authorities confiscated all the copies of the UN HHRR Charter that Ortega had with him. (*MartiNoticias*, 26/8/07)

**August 26:** Blind Cuban lawyer Juan Carlos González Leyva, president of the illegal Cuban Foundation for Human Rights (FCDH), was detained and beaten by the police. Hospital guards prevented Gonzalez Leiva, independent journalist Luis Esteban Espinosa, and human rights activist Eisy Marrero from filming a conversation with a patient at the Amalia Simoni hospital, in Camaguey province, and then called the police. Six policemen immobilized Gonzalez Leiva against the floor and beat him when the activist refused to get into the police car. The three activists were detained for several hours. (*EER, MartiNoticias*, 28/07)

**August 26:** Fidel Castro signed a lengthy essay published in Cuban official media saluting a Cuban political figure but giving no hint of how he is feeling, even amid rampant rumours of his death. Castro's essay, the latest in dozens of "Reflections of the Commander in Chief" columns he has published several times a week since late March, was signed on August 25 and appeared in the Communist Youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. Verbose but clearly stated and easy to follow, Castro wrote of Eduardo Chibas, the president of Cuba's Orthodox Party, who was born 100 years ago this month. Chibas campaigned against corruption that plagued Cuba's government before Castro and his band of rebels toppled dictator Fulgencio Batista in January 1959. [[Remembering Chibás, 100 years after his birth](#)] (*AP*, 26/8/07)

**August 28:** The representative in Havana of the dissident Social Democratic Party (PSD), Raúl Borges Álvarez, condemned the severe prison conditions and harassment of his son, Ernesto Borges Pérez. Ernesto is serving 30 years

in the Guanajay prison, in the province of Havana, for the alleged crime of spying. The sentence was handed down on July 17, 1998 by a military court. Borges senior has expressed concern for the health and life of his son. He and other relatives have sent letters to the Communist Party and to the Council of State, with no response. The prison internal control officer threatened the prisoner with death, and told him that even if a change should happen in the country, he would not live to see it, suggesting a government plan of selective killings in the event of a crisis. (*Cubamet*, 28/8/07)

**August 28:** Havana is promoting economic changes to reach economic “invulnerability,” said the vice-minister of Economy, Julio Vázquez Roque, who also indicated this does not mean the country will “renounce the socialist model”. “We are indeed making changes: changes in the management and organizational systems to stimulate national production” as well as “to link salaries to performance results”, said Vázquez Roque at an event organized by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) in San Jose, Costa Rica. The said changes “don’t mean in any way that we are going to renounce the socialist model”. It is only a question of “changing anything that needs changing”, he added. “From an economic point of view, [Cuba] has no other option but to develop its economy so that it becomes self-sufficient and doesn’t need to depend on the outside”, he said. (*AFP*, *EER*, 29/8/07)

**August 29:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage squashed speculation that Communist Cuba is heading toward Chinese-style reforms of its economy, in a speech to state managers. Cuba will not follow the paths of other Communist-run nations, such as China and Vietnam where capitalist markets have flourished, and said Perestroika reforms failed in the former Soviet Union. “The countries that are working to build socialism today in different parts of the world, are doing so in political and economic situations very different from ours,” said Lage, who heads Cuba’s cabinet of ministers. “Their successes and failures should enrich our efforts, but the building of socialism in Cuba is only possible as a result of our own experience,” Lage said in the speech printed by the Communist Party newspaper Granma. Lage, who is 55 and viewed as a possible future president, said Cuba would follow a business management system introduced by the armed forces two decades ago to cope with the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union without resorting to private property and markets. Lage said profits, wages and productivity had increased in the 800 companies that are applying management methods known as “perfeccionamiento empresarial” or perfecting the state system of 3,000 enterprises. [[Discurso de Carlos Lage](#)] (*Reuters*, 30/8/07)

**August 29:** Four participants in a prison revolt in Santiago de Cuba province that left two military officers dead have been given sentences of 30 years to life, a human rights activist in Havana reported. Army recruit Yoelvis Delgado Arvelo, who was working as a guard, and an inmate known only as Mursuli were given life sentences, said Elizardo Sánchez, head of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation. Army recruit Irán Cabrera León and another soldier who was not identified -- both also guards -- were sentenced to 30 years of imprisonment, Sánchez told the press. The sentences were imposed by an army tribunal in June but were disclosed only recently, Sánchez added. Cuban media have not reported the sentences. The prison break allegedly took place on December 20, 2006, when three recruits on compulsory military service and one prison inmate tried to take over El Manguito Prison, 17 miles from Santiago. Details are sketchy, but Cubans on the island have said that the armed recruits seized the sentry post at the prison’s gate, cut off telephone lines and tried to flee with two prison inmates after a shootout in which two military officers were killed and one of the inmates was wounded. The slain men were Lt. Oliverio Orozco and 2nd Lt. José A. Tamayo, according to the sources. The three recruits and the other inmate were believed to have been captured within 24 hours and taken to Boniatico Prison near Santiago. (*EER*, *El Nuevo Herald*, 29/8/07)

**August 29:** Cuban authorities still have not revealed the fate of three army recruits who on May 3 attempted to hijack a plane at José Martí International Airport in Havana, an incident in which an army lieutenant colonel was killed. Cuban authorities have said the would-be hijackers shot the officer to death. The recruits are believed to be in a military prison. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/8/07)

**August 29:** Cuba won't send a boxing team to the world championships in Chicago, heeding Fidel Castro's fears about future defections after two fighters abandoned their teammates during the Pan American Games. The competition is

one of three qualifying tournaments for the 2008 Olympics. "We will not expose anew a Cuban boxing team to the abuses and provocations that in this case will be present in Chicago, American territory, the perfect location for marketers and traffickers to act freely and with the total complicity of US authorities," the Cuban Boxing Federation said. The Cuban boxing federation said "many factors" influenced its decision, but Castro's defection worries carried the most weight. "The robbery of everything that stands out in Cuban society, it doesn't matter if its an athlete, teacher, doctor, artist, scientist or anything else, has been the practice of different US governments in their permanent political aggression against our people," its statement said. In reaching its decision, the federation wrote, it "profoundly analyzed the threats of groups that with teams of negotiators serve one of the most vile interests of the United States and some of its allies, the theft of athletes." (AP, 29/8/07)

**August 30:** The potential for a massive exodus has increased in Santiago de Cuba. The prevailing political uncertainty due to Fidel Castro's health, and recent news regarding the refugees at the (US) Guantánamo Base who will be sent to a third country, have increased the desire of the population to flee the island. (Cubanet, 30/8/07)

**August 30:** The architect of the Varela Project pro-democracy drive asked Cuba's parliament to abolish and replace the country's electoral law and hold free, democratic general elections as soon as possible. In the letter addressed to the president of Cuba's national assembly, Oswaldo Paya also asked for a change in existing laws to guarantee citizens "freedom of expression, respect for diverse opinions existing in society and access by all citizens and opinions to mass media." A copy of the letter and an accompanying news release were hand-delivered by messenger to the press. The latest move by Paya, among Cuba's best-known dissidents, appeared aimed at reviving the long-shelved Varela Project just as communist-run Cuba gears up for municipal elections this fall. There was no immediate official reaction to the new initiative, which was announced after government offices closed for the day. [[Petición Ciudadana a la Asamblea Nacional](#)] (AP, 30/8/07)

**August 30:** Recently released political prisoner Francisco Chaviano sent journalists a letter addressed to National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, asking that the next general elections include a referendum on whether to continue with Cuba's current system. Signed by Chaviano and his wife, Ana Anguililla, the letter said such a popular referendum "is necessary, given the historical juncture implied by the end of Fidel Castro's mandate due to his health and age." Chaviano, among Cuba's most veteran dissidents, was released earlier this month after 13 years in prison. (AP, 30/8/07)

**August 31:** Cuba won its first gold medal today in the World Athletics Championship in Osaka, Japan, with Yargelis Savigne's victory in the triple jump, setting a national record of 15.28 meters. The 23-year-old Cuban Pan American champion went into the lead in the competition after her first jump, which would later win her the gold medal. Savigne, native of Guantánamo in the eastern part of the country, committed a foul in her second attempt and later jumped 14.74 meters. The victory makes Savigne a favorite for next year's Olympics in Beijing. (Granma International, AP, 31/8/07)

**August 31:** Jose Gomez Fresquet, known as Fremez, died in Havana at the age of 67 after a short but severe illness. Born in Havana in 1939, Fremez was one of the most convincing creators of Cuba's visual arts of the last half of the twentieth century. A retrospective of his work, held in 1999 in Havana's Wilfredo Lam Center, was one of the most important artistic events of last years in the Cuban capital. The same thing happened with the amazing 2005 exhibition of his work at the National Museum of Fine Arts, when he was granted the National Visual Arts Prize. He liked to define one common denominator in his vital and creative nature: "I'm a political man. I have a double blood pact with the Cuban Revolution and with art. I can't betray either one." (Granma, 31/8/07)

## Economy

**August 1:** The Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation (CVP) and Cuban CUPET started the first project for offshore exploration in Cuba. According to a press release from state-run oil holding Petróleos de Venezuela (Pdvsa), subsidiary CVP and CUPET will start exploration in six blocs of approximately 10,000 square kilometers. "Ascertaining the presence of deposits of light crude oil in volumes able to keep a high production potential is expected," said Pdvsa. The company claimed that the exploration to be made in the Cuban coasts will be "the first experience of Pdvsa in such an environment." (*El Universal*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** Deputy Minister of Commerce, Mehdi Ghazanfari, said in Tehran that Iran signed two protocols for trade with Cuba and Venezuela during recent visits of the Minister of Commerce, Masood Mir-Kazemi, and his accompanying delegation to the two countries. Ghazanfari told reporters that based on one of the contracts, Iran and Cuba would levy 15 to 30 percent preferential tariff on their capital, intermediary and consumption goods. He said Cuba would hence levy the tariff on 44 and Iran on 88 items. The official said Venezuela wants Iran to host the ALBA exhibition wherein to showcase products of Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti and Cuba. Furthermore, Iran and Venezuela study a proposal raised during the Iranian delegation's visit to Venezuela for formation of a joint shipping and insurance company. Ghazanfari said Iran's exports, including re-exports to Venezuela last year were worth 60 million dollars. (*Tehran Times*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** Sherritt International Corporation posted a record profit of \$132.4 million in the second quarter, more than doubling its \$57.2-million year-earlier earnings on strong sales and "robust" metal prices. The diversified mining company's diluted earnings per share were 72 cents, versus 33 cents in the year-earlier period. "Sherritt anticipates that nickel prices will continue to be above historical averages, despite having declined from the record levels experienced in the second quarter", the company said in a release. Sherritt operates in Canada, Cuba and elsewhere abroad but not in the United States, where the government objects to the Toronto-based company's involvement with the Cuban government led by Fidel Castro. (*Toronto Star*, 1/8/07)

**August 2:** The value of Venezuelan oil subsidies to Cuba climbed past \$3 billion in 2006 and could swell to \$4 billion this year -- almost double current estimates, according to a University of Miami report to be released. Venezuela is propping up Cuba's troubled economy with shipments of 94,103 barrels of oil a day, experts at UM's Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies (ICCAS) calculated, based on official Havana figures issued on July 27. That means Cuba last year got some \$3.3 billion in oil products from Venezuela, up from \$2.7 billion in 2005. Caracas has declined to explain the payment system, but experts believe Havana gets the energy assistance free of charge. Experts say the high subsidies are reminiscent of Cuba's dependency on the Soviet Union, which provided an estimated \$4-\$6 billion a year in subsidies until it collapsed in 1992. Cuba's economy fell apart, and widespread shortages plagued the nation for years. "Cuba is repeating chapter and verse what it did in the 70s and 80s with Russia," said ICCAS energy expert Jorge Piñón, who prepared the study. If Chávez gets hit by a truck crossing the street tomorrow, the [Venezuelan oil officials] (...) are going to say to Cuba: 'Pay for it, and pay market price.' " (*The Miami Herald, Bloomberg*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** Spanish company Girbau, for 30 years established in Cuba, will sell industrial laundry and dry cleaning equipment for 8 million euros in 2007 to the island. The report published in Havana by business monthly "Negocios en Cuba" includes statements by Vice President for Exports and representative in Cuba, Santiago Carol, who says Girbau constructs washers from 7 up to 110 kilogram-capacity and the washing tunnel type in continuous processes. Asked about plans for this year, the company's executive said sales would be in the order of 8 million euros, 2 million over last year's exports to Cuba. Girbau estimates business with Cuba can grow up to 20 percent per year. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/07)

**August 4:** Cuba is not only receiving the benefits of the UN Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) but also has become a close collaborator of that international agency in aid to other nations. Francisco Arias Milla, the FAO representative in Havana, informed Granma International that, as one example of that cooperation, there is an

agreement with the Cuban authorities giving the agency up to 200 technical personnel from the island for its diverse projects, principally in Africa, South America and the Caribbean, and that there is an interest in increasing that figure to 300. Currently, some 40 Cuban specialists are on FAO missions. "They are not only taking their technological knowledge, but also their discipline and work ethics," Arias Milla added. (*Granma Internacional*, 4/8/07)

**August 4:** Cuba's Ministry of Tourism issued a report saying that over the past few years, Cuba has become one of the most appealing venues in Latin America for holding international conferences, congresses and conventions. According to statistics from the International Congress and Conventions Association (ICCA), Cuba ranks sixth in Latin America and eighth in the Western Hemisphere. However, its capital Havana ranks fourth in Latin America and fifth in the Americas. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 4/8/07)

**August 5:** In Munich, Cuban vice-minister of Foreign Trade, Eduardo Escandell, said that business activities between Bavaria and Cuba are increasing. "It is a business matter, and business is business," he said. According to the Bavarian Ministry of Economy, exports (37.5 million Euros) and imports (9 million) totalled 46.5 million Euros in 2006. As a whole, German exports to Cuba grew from 101 million Euros in 2003 to 113 in 2004, to 259 (an increase of 259 %) in 2005, and 412 last year. (*El País*, 6/8/07)

**August 6:** Russia delivered the first of three Tupolev medium-haul jet planes to Cuba, expanding one of its main export markets for commercial aircraft, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper Granma reported. The cargo version of the TU-204 arrived in Havana the day before, and two passenger jets will be delivered before the end of the year as Cuba upgrades its aging Soviet-era fleet, the paper said. In 2006, Cuba received three Ilyushin IL-96-300s long-haul passenger jets used on routes to Europe and Latin America by Cuban carrier Cubana de Aviacion. A Russian diplomat said the sales to Cuba are one of the most important export contracts for Russia's commercial aircraft industry since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The deal was financed by Ilyushin Finance Co. Cuba last year agreed to buy \$100 million a year in civilian aircraft from Russia over the next seven years, including short-haul regional Antonov AN-148 planes. (*Reuters*, 7/8/07)

**August 10:** Cuba has planned to plant more than 135 millions trees in the last half of 2007 as a response to the United Nations-promoted international campaign entitled "Lets Plant the Planet," to encourage world reforestation. National Forestry Director Elias Linares noted that Cuba is hoping to cover 12.6 percent of the world's overall goal through a countrywide campaign that will run until December, according to a report by daily Granma Internacional. He explained that in the island, some 60,000 to 64,000 hectares are planted every year as part of the national program called "Plant your Tree." The action has led to a steady growth of forested areas on the island, covering nearly 25 percent of the national territory, said Linares. "Cuba, Uruguay, Chile and Costa Rica are among the only countries in Latin America and the Caribbean witnessing the growing of their forest," stated Linares. (*ACN*, 10/8/07)

**August 11:** The 3rd Summit of PETROCARIBE began sessions at the level of heads of State in Caracas, with an agenda focused on cooperation among country members. Participants are expected to review and assess the running of the initiative, including 11 bilateral agreements and five joint ventures and important infrastructure projects aimed to broaden the influence of PETROCARIBE in the area. Regarding financing of the oil bill, experts said countries involved in the accord have saved \$437 million in their purchase of oil. PETROCARIBE members are also expected to inform about the impact of the project on their social and economic development programs. Delegations attending the summit will also discuss steps to be taken by this cooperation mechanism promoted by Venezuela. Vice President Carlos Lage heads a Cuban delegation that includes Marta Lomas, minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation; German Sanchez, Cuba's ambassador to Venezuela, and other officials of the Basic Industry and Foreign Ministries. [[Speech by Carlos Lage](#)] (*Granma, Prensa Latina*, 11/8/07)

**August 11:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez supports constructing a natural gas pipeline beneath the Caribbean to supply neighboring islands and Cuba, and possibly extending to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Chavez called for the

Venezuela-to-Caribbean pipeline in a speech to the PetroCaribe summit, a gathering in Caracas of energy ministers and heads of state from the region. The speech was broadcast on Venezuelan state television. The proposal for what he called a "Great Trans-Caribbean Gas Pipeline" comes just two weeks after Chavez said his plan for a "Great Gas Pipeline of the South" was on hold. That \$20 billion pipeline to Argentina through the Amazon rain forest had been "frozen" by opposition in Brazil, he said July 27. At the summit, Chavez also proposed building an oil refinery in Guyana and urged the government of Dominica to accept his offer of a 10,000 barrel-a-day refinery, a project currently awaiting environmental analysis. He said Venezuela's restoration of the Cienfuegos refinery in Cuba will be completed in November. (*Bloomberg*, 11/8/07)

**August 11:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said the upgraded and enhanced Cienfuegos refinery, near the city of the same name in Cuba, will begin operations by December 2008. Chavez and Cuban Deputy President Carlos Lage announced the start-up, during the last day of the third heads of state summit of Petrocaribe, the energy cooperation scheme Venezuela is implementing with 13 Central American and Caribbean countries, where the former supplies the latter with crude and refinery products under special financial conditions. "So, Cienfuegos will be in operations by December, right?" Chavez asked Lage during a closed-circuit broadcast of the summit. "Yes, in December," Lage confirmed. The plans for Cienfuegos were first announced in late 2005. Cienfuegos was built during the Cold War by the Soviet Union in order to process Cuban crude, but the facility only saw limited operations before being completely shut down after the fall of Communism in Europe. Now, Venezuela's state oil firm PDVSA is restarting it together with Canadian construction firm SNC-Lavalin and, according to PDVSA, and its capacity is being expanded to 110,000 b/d a day from 70,000 b/d. (*Platts Commodity News*, 12/8/07)

**August 11:** Trade already underway between Venezuela and Cuba has reached more than \$1.8 billion, although accords signed and waiting to be activated boost the amount to some \$3 billion. Providing those figures was Venezuela's ambassador to the Caribbean island, Ali Rodriguez Araque, who said that Caracas and Havana signed "five agreements for the integration of mixed companies to produce food products" recently, without specifying the date. "In the agricultural category (...) five agreements have just been signed for the integration of mixed companies to produce food products both in Cuba and in Venezuela, while Venezuela will receive the benefits of important scientific and technological advances that characterize the educational and training processes of the Cuban people," Rodriguez said on state channel Venezolana de Television (VTV). (*AFP*, 13/8/07)

**August 13:** Drilling in Cuban waters in the Gulf of Mexico by a consortium of foreign oil companies will begin at the end of 2008, and not at the beginning of the year, as previously announced, according to the official financial weekly "Opciones". "Repsol-YPF (...) is getting ready for a second drilling at the end of next year," said "Opciones" quoting Rafael Tenreyro, manager of exploration for the state company Cuba Petróleo (CUPET). (*Reuters*, 14/8/07)

**August 14:** The installation of generators in 116 of Cuba's 169 municipalities allowed to eliminate blackouts in the island, according to an official source. Vicente de la O, general director of the Electricity Company at the Basic Industry Ministry, said that the capacity installed in the country, as part of the energy revolution, is higher to the maximum demand of consumption. The executive stated to the national television that if the country reported in 2005 about 248 days of blackouts more than one hour and 100 megawatts, that stage has been overcome at present. De la O noted that diesel generators have already been installed and others of fuel oil are being currently placed to work around the clock, and guarantee the stability of the National Electric Power System. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/8/07)

**August 15:** Iran's ambassador to Cuba said that, Arak Pars Wagon Company, with its major contracts in railroad industry, has a big share of trade exchanges between Iran and Cuba. "Right now, Iran-Cuba trade exchange leveled at 200 million euros, a big part of this amount belongs to the production of 750 wagons to carry passengers, cement and cargo", Mostafa Alaei said to the press in Tehran. Cuba has signed an agreement in the field of pharmaceuticals technology transfer with Iran, especially Hepatitis medicine, the envoy added. "Cuba, in the fields of construction of residential buildings, transport and oil industry, needs Iran's cooperation and Markazi province by its strong industrial

infrastructure can play an effective role in this concern”, he explained. “Iran is executing 60 projects in Cuba right now, which include power plants and dam construction, exporting bicycle, fisheries, agriculture and construction of a 70 kilometers freeway.” (*IRNA*, 15/8/07)

**August 16:** Cuba presents a favourable result in water availability, whose dams store 80 percent of their capacities, according to a report from the National Hydraulic Resources Institute (INRH) published in Havana. According to experts, such result is satisfactory, because it has a much higher average with over 671 million cubic meters of water dammed, compared with the same date of the last year. The situation is due to spring rainfalls that occurred in the country, above all in July, which increased water stored in reservoirs in over 78 million cubic meters compared with June. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/8/07)

**August 16:** The Brazilian state company of geological services (CPRM) and the Government of Cuba launched a mining cooperation plan which aims toward the transference of technology from Brazil to Cuba. “Environmental preservation, an area in which the Cuban mining industry has experienced some problems, is included in the agenda,” said a CPRM official. (*Reuters*, 16/8/07)

**August 18:** The 11 dams in the Eastern Santiago de Cuba province are at 91 percent of their capacity. Given the proximity of Hurricane Dean, authorities in that province began implementing measures to deal with the likelihood of a natural disaster. Santiago de Cuba has 628, 600, 000 cubic meters of water stored. Some dams have already begun releasing water. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/8/07)

**August 19:** Native Cuban species are nowadays the favorite targets for poachers, as well as clandestine fishermen, who flout the laws and regulations - although 1,380 fines were imposed for such activities in 2006 - the official *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper reported. Crocodiles, tortoises, turtles, coral, mollusks and other sea life, as well as parrots, hummingbirds and other birds, butterflies and assorted other insects - all part of the Caribbean island's rich native fauna - are being captured illegally for sale, the paper complained. It also said that the factors leading to furtive hunting and fishing range "from the economic conditions of the villagers to the lack of regulations, of control and even ignorance and lack of environmental education." Inspectors from the Fishing Ministry last year noted 2,219 infractions of the hunting and fishing regulations and the Forest Ranger Corps imposed 840 fines for illegal hunting and 540 for clandestine fishing, while so far in 2007 the Customs Office has tallied 80 cases of people who tried to take protected species out of the country, according to the article. (*EFE, Juventud Rebelde*, 19/8/07)

**August 20:** Strong swells provoked by the powerful Hurricane Dean passing near the southern Jamaican coast caused heavy rains and floods in eastern Cuba. The National Civil Defense called a hurricane alarm for provinces of Guantanamo, Santiago de Cuba and Granma, while Holguin, Las Tunas, Camaguey, Pinar del Rio and the Isle of Youth were on a tropical storm warning, and the rest on an informational phase. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** Sydney got the short straw in Sunwing Vacations choice of cities with direct flights to vacation spots this winter. Sydney, in Canada's Nova Scotia, provided the least amount of revenue and proved to be the toughest sell for Sunwing Airlines and will be dropped after only one season of offering direct flights from Sydney airport to Holguin, Cuba, said Bob Sime, the Atlantic Canada director of Sunwing Airlines. The airline will continue to offer its popular domestic charters to Toronto twice weekly until mid-October. “They’ve done very well, we’ve had good demand on them so we are very encouraged on that series,” Sime said. “We will be definitely looking to try to (bring) that back again next summer.” But he admitted their flights out of Sydney to Holguin was a battle. “It was not enough to discourage us, but in terms to how it compared to other gateways throughout Atlantic Canada, we found the market to be less than what we expected.” Sunwing Vacations was looking for 189 people, give or take, every week for six weeks in a row to go to Holguin. They weren’t there, Sime said. “We were getting half that.” (*The Cape Breton Post*, 20/8/07)

**August 21:** As the powerful Hurricane Dean plows in to the Yucatan Peninsula, reports from eastern Cuba came in on the damage caused by the sea that left some communities cut off by land. Sea penetration caused by four meter waves left damage at the Baconao park aquarium. Major Modesto Gutierrez, head of the Civil Defense for the municipality of Guama, said alternatives are being weighed to reestablish communication with the three communities where the road was washed out. According to government reports, the waves reached the coast with heights of three to six meters and destroyed a 500-meter stretch of the coastal road in the zone of Babujal, near Ocuja del Turquino. Similar damage occurred near Palma Mocha, blocking access to La Plata and La Magdalena and other portions of the road to Granma, such as in Cojimar, where the sea penetrated 100 meters from the coastline. A total of 40 homes were affected by coastal flooding. In the coastal town of Siboney, the sea penetrated more than 11 meters with waves between 5 and 7 meters high; damage was minimal. The rest of Santiago de Cuba province returned to normal and the approximately 150,000 persons who had been evacuated as a preventive measure began returning to their homes. (*Periódico 26, EFE, 21/8/07*)

**August 21:** Venezuelan state aluminum reducer Alcasa is looking at providing Cuba with technical assistance for downstream aluminum fabrication, an Alcasa executive told the press. "We're performing a study right now to help us determine the potential of Cuba's processing industry and to see if a downstream industry can develop," the official said. Since Cuba does not have enough power to install aluminum reduction plants, it is more likely that development will occur in metal transformation, the executive said. The Venezuelan smelter plans to support the island's aluminum industry for six months, said the executive. (*Bnamericas, 21/8/07*)

**August 22:** Russia's Ilyushin Finance leasing company concluded a memorandum of mutual understanding with Cuba, which envisions the continuation of supplies of Russian-made aviation equipment to Cuba. The document was signed within the framework of the MAKS-2007 international air show, by Ilyushin Finance director general Alexander Rubtsov and chief representative of Aviaimport, a company which engages in purchasing planes for Cuban airlines. Aviaimport plans to buy two Tu-204 planes and three An-148 aircraft in the period 2006-2011. Their aggregate cost is 150 million dollars. A number of important contracts were concluded at MAKS-2007, including a contract with Iran, which will purchase five Tu-204-120C planes in a deal worth 200 million dollars. (*ITAR-TASS, 22/8/07*)

**August 22:** A new high-density polyethylene pipe factory, now in the test phase, is part of Cuba's concerted effort to replace imports, said Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, a Communist Party Politburo member, during his visit to Holguin province. At the HolgPlast factory Machado received detailed information about the characteristics of the installation—the third of its type in Cuba—conceived primarily to supply the water pipes required by the investment program in the eastern part of the nation. Part of its production (the 900 millimeters or almost 36-inch diameter pipes) will be used in the construction of the water pipeline between Nipe and Gibara, an important in-progress investment, Water Resources provincial officials noted. (*Granma, 22/8/07*)

**August 23:** The Cuban Chamber of Commerce expanded its institutional functions and services to its associates in order to achieve higher efficiency, Raul Becerra, president of the Cuban Chamber, said. Among the new services, Becerra mentioned the organization of conferences where international experts will pass on their skills to Cuban entrepreneurs. We take advantage of the institution's links with other chambers over the world, to invite their specialists to visit Cuba and give their experience in certain topics, the Cuban Chamber official affirmed. Plans for the second semester include the organization of the Second Forum of Businesspeople of Non Aligned Countries in November, and the 25th Havana International Trade Fair. The entity also works in preparing the Cuba-Spain Bilateral Committee meeting and the upcoming China-Latin America Business Summit in which Cuba will take part in Santiago de Chile on November 28-29. (*Prensa Latina, 23/8/07*)

**August 24:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque requested from the Brazil government an extension of a line of credit to 200 million dollars. According to his Brazilian counterpart, Celso Amorim, Perez Roque also was interested in increasing Brazil's investments in the island. The request was made during a meeting between the two Foreign

Ministers in Brasilia. "Havana is interested in obtaining financing in order to buy agricultural products", Amorim said to journalists. He also said that Cubans have paid "in time". Amorim explained that a previous line of credit extended by Brazil to the island two years ago reached a total of 90 million dollars, of which only 20 have been used. The Cuban government is asking now for a line of credit of 200 million. Amorim seemed to be in favour of extending the credit. "It is a matter of finding a good formula", he said. According to Amorim, Perez Roque expressed the interest of the Cuban government in increasing Brazilian investments in areas such as transportation, oil, nickel and tourism in Cuba. Pérez Roque thinks "it is absurd to have so many investments from Spain, France, or Europe and relatively so little or almost none from Brazil", Amorim said. (*AP*, 24/8/07)

**August 25:** Cuba has applied anti-erosive measures in over one million hectares of land and a half to stop and counteract the deterioration of soils and revitalize agricultural production. The use of green fertilizers, drainage and fitting-out lands are among tasks of the National Program for Soils Improvement and Conservation, in the nation's 14 provinces. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/8/07)

**August 27:** Cuba's program of Urban Agriculture has generated nearly 50,000 jobs across the island over the last few years. This number is expected to increase with the progressive incorporation of more land into this activity of production. According to reports by the Cuban Ministry of Agriculture, some 35,000 hectares are currently devoted to urban agriculture in the 169 municipalities across the country. Farmers are paid according to their efficiency, which encourages hard work and contributes to the increase of productivity. The greatest challenges to the Urban Agriculture program are found in the Cuban eastern provinces where the soil has been affected by salinity and erosion. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 27/8/07)

**August 28:** Cuba began the 2007-2008 coffee harvest hoping to overcome last year's 8,200 tons of semi-processed beans. According to a local radio station in Santiago de Cuba, agriculture officials in Santiago de Cuba province, which produced a third of last year's harvest, said that this season they are expecting a production growth of a 10%. Other eastern provinces, accountable for 85 % of the total Cuban coffee production, forecasted similar increases. Rubén Martínez, an official in charge of coffee production at the Ministry of Agriculture said that this year the 2006-2007 harvest produced almost 8,200 tons, some 3,200 tons more than the previous one. (*Reuters*, 28/8/07)

**August 29:** The protection and recuperation of species endangered either by overexploitation or with demographic problems is occupying Cuban specialists in several provinces. One such project, undertaken by the Flora and Fauna enterprise in Pinar del Rio is the protection of the "Palma Petate" with habitat only in the western region of Cuba. Specialist Lidia Luifriu told the press this project aims to protect over 300 species of *Coccothrinax crinita*, distributed between Las Pozas and Rio Viejo, Bahia Honda, a species reduced by overexploitation. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/8/07)

## **Exile Community**

**August 1:** Ignoring official warnings and counsel from colleagues, Cuban news photographer Cristóbal Herrera Ulashkevich showed the world embarrassing photos of Fidel Castro out of professional pride, he said. As a freelance photographer for The Associated Press in Havana, Herrera captured two crucial images of Castro's health slide: his fainting spell while making a speech in 2001 and his dramatic fall after another speech in October 2004. The two sets of photos appeared in media around the world, boosting Herrera's professional standing but also putting him on the road to forced exile in Costa Rica -- because security forces did not like his images. "I am condemned to forced exile," Herrera, 36, told the press. "The Cuban government barred me from returning to my country, without explanations." "We had no other option left," he said. "This is the price for doing photojournalism in Cuba." Herrera, his wife and 2-year-old daughter left Costa Rica this spring and crossed the Mexico-US border. They arrived in Miami in May, looking for a better life. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** Cuban exiles in Miami say their one-year campaign to encourage civil resistance on the island has been a success. "The campaign has taken off," said Orlando Gutiérrez, national secretary of the 200-member *Directorio Democrático Cubano*, or Cuban Democracy Directory, in a news conference. "The struggle increasingly has public support." Last year, 10 Miami-based exile groups came together to start broadcasting television, radio and online ads featuring well-known Cuban exile artists to the island. Fliers and bumper stickers were distributed. Short ads starring artists such as Jon Secada and -- most recently -- singer Amaury Gutiérrez and TV personality Boncó Quiñongo were aired. The objective: To get Cubans to stop cooperating with their government, Gutiérrez said. The groups provided dozens of examples, many from independent journalists inside Cuba, of civic resistance in the past year. Another indicator of success, Gutiérrez said, is Raúl Castro's speech on July 26, in which he chided "social indiscipline" stemming from wage protests. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/8/07)

**August 1:** The serious limitations to free trade unions in Cuba, and the arbitrary detention of independent trade unionists, were exposed before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the OAS at the request of the Cuban Democratic Directorate. The OAS entity also heard a report on political prisoner Francisco Chaviano, confined in the Combinado del Este prison for more than 15 years. (*Martí Noticias*, 1/8/07)

**August 3:** Cuban-American business leaders called for the creation of a 300 million dollar fund to help build private enterprise in Cuba once the communist-run state adopts what they called "inevitable" reforms. The proposal, presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for the Studies on Cuban Economy (ASCE) in Miami, is based on the Enterprise Funds that invested US grants in small and medium sized corporations in eastern European countries when they emerged from communism in the 1990s. The Cuba Study Group, an organization made up of Cuban-American business and community leaders, suggested that the US government, the European Union and private companies should each provide 100 million dollars for the "Cuban Enterprise Fund." The group made it clear the money would only be available once Cuba adopts reforms. US laws currently would not allow for the funds to be sent to the island, and Cuban legislation prohibits such private investments. (*AFP*, 3/8/07)

**August 4:** Dozens of opponents and leaders from 45 organizations from the expatriate community took to the streets of south Florida to mark the 'Day for Non Cooperation in Cuba Campaign'. The campaign calls for non cooperation with the regime both "inside and out of the island". (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/8/07)

**August 5:** Jose Miguel Battle Sr., former godfather of the Cuban mob, died in federal custody at a dialysis facility in South Carolina, his attorney confirmed to the press. He was 77. Battle, who had been suffering from liver failure, diabetes and cardiac problems, was awaiting a spot in federal prison to serve out his 20-year sentence on racketeering charges, attorney Jack Blumenfeld said. Battle was the reputed leader of "The Corporation," a Cuban organized-crime group that made millions from decades of illegal bookmaking, "bolita" lotteries and drug trafficking. Known as "El Padrino," or Godfather, Battle directed the large organization with ties from New York to Latin America. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/8/07)

**August 8:** Members of the Democracy Movement gathered in front of a federal Government building in support of the 44 Cubans on a hunger strike on the Naval Base at Guantánamo. The strikers are demanding to be sent to the United States or a third country. (*EFE*, 8/8/07)

**August 15:** A decade after the Castro government shot down two airplanes belonging to the Cuban-exile group Brothers to the Rescue, the niece of one of the victims is bringing her uncle's story to the big screen in the documentary "Shoot Down." Cristina Khuly, a 37-year-old sculptress, watched for years as her mother led a civil suit against the Cuban government on behalf of Khuly's slain uncle and other victims' relatives. Khuly decided to make the film to find out what really happened to her uncle, Vietnam veteran Armando Alejandro Jr., as his plane was shot out of the sky over the Florida Straits. She also hopes understanding that piece of history will help both the US and Cuba in the future as they negotiate relations in a post-Fidel Castro era. "I wanted to tell the story, essentially have a record of what really

occurred and have it be a window into our relationship with Cuba , and hopefully we can learn from mistakes that we've made," Khuly said. (*The Boston Globe*, 15/8/07)

**August 16:** Max Lesnick, a Cuban-born journalist who lives in the United States, received the 'Felix Elmuza' distinction granted by the Cuban Journalists Union (UPEC) for his work in the defense and spreading of Cuba's reality. Ricardo Alarcon, President of the Cuban Parliament, praised the courage of Lesnick in supporting the Cuban Revolution and against the US financial, commercial and trade blockade against the island. He added that this work, done from Miami, has more than once put the life of this journalist in danger. Alarcón highly commended the constant work of Lesnick in the campaign for the release of Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino and Rene Gonzalez, the five Cuban heroes who remain imprisoned in the United States. For his part, Lesnick thanked the Cuban Journalists Union and ratified his commitment to the cause of the Cuban Revolution and his homeland. (*ACN*, 16/8/07)

**August 17:** When it came time to discuss the male anatomy, the professor excused his female students from the class. It was 1940s Cuba, and Isabel Diaz, a student at the University of Havana Medical School, wasn't budging from her seat. By 1943, she had her medical degree and began a pediatric career that spanned two countries and a revolution. At 90, the Plantation resident who has treated two generations of patients in Florida will receive the Latina Pioneer Award at the sixth annual Hispanic Women of Distinction charity celebration. "I don't know why they're giving it to me," Diaz said recently with a laugh, never having thought of herself as a trailblazer. "In this country it's a simple formula: You work hard, you're organized, and you're disciplined. If you don't reach your goals, then you didn't want to in the first place." Humanitarian missions took Diaz to Honduras with doctors operating on children with cleft lip. She also dedicated her time to low-income children in Broward County, volunteering 15 years at Light of the World Clinic. She left her practice in 1992, but continued treating children at outpatient facilities of the North Broward Hospital District. A case of macular degeneration forced her to retire in 1999 at 82, four years after losing her son to cancer and her husband to heart failure within months of each other. (*Sun Sentinel*, 17/8/07)

**August 19:** He sits diligently at a wooden work-bench by the door, his hands busy, his eyes content. In front of him is the day's work so far -- small bundles of more than 50 Robustos, Churchills, Coronas and double Coronas. Alberto Hernandez reaches into a bag to pull out a moist brown leaf of Nicaraguan tobacco. He stretches and kneads the pliable frond, cutting off sections he doesn't need with a small, half-moon shaped blade called a chavetta. "I brought this with me from Cuba," Hernandez, 65, said at the Cigar Factory Outlet on Hanford Place, where he's taken center stage. "I've had it for ten years." For 45 years, Hernandez worked as a roller at the Partagas factory in Havana, which he left 14 years ago, and at a factory in the Dominican Republic, where he remained until six months ago when he immigrated to New York City. (*The Advocate*, 19/8/07)

**August 22:** Cuba's latest ballet phenomenon joined Miami City Ballet as a leading dancer. Rolando Sarabia, known as the "Cuban Nijinsky" at the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, made international news when he defected two years ago by walking across the border from Mexico to the United States. The wunderkind, who turned 25, became a principal dancer just a year after he joined the Ballet Nacional at age 16. Sarabia joined the Houston Ballet (where another Cuban ballet star, Carlos Acosta, also danced), but wasn't happy there. He got a taste of Miami audiences in performances with Pedro Pablo Peña's International Ballet Festival and recently launched troupe Ballet Classico Cubano. In spring, with the help of friend and fellow Cuban Luis Serrano, who recently retired from MCB, Sarabia auditioned in Miami. Now he's rehearsing dances by Balanchine and Tharp, happy at the prospect of performing for Cubans and to be with family -- he's got two aunts and four uncles here. "None of them are dancers -- they're all fat," Sarabia said during a rehearsal break. Not true of his younger brother and roommate Daniel, who defected in 2004 and has also joined MCB as a soloist. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/8/07)

**August 24:** In the year since the Cuban government announced Castro had ceded power to brother Raúl following intestinal surgery, rumors he's on his deathbed keep boiling over and dying down, creating a roller coaster of emotion

for exiles and islanders. In Miami, tearful callers told Niniska Pérez of Radio Mambí they were sure this was it, and Pérez, as usual, said, "The moment will come, but this is not the moment." At Aaction Home Health in Hialeah, office workers were abuzz because one heard that people in Havana were taking to the streets in anticipation of the news. At the University of Miami, media relations officers worked the phones in search of confirmation. The rumors reached fever pitch last weekend. Calls flooded Miami Mayor Manny Diaz's office. UM's Cuba experts were on high alert. "When the rumors started again, my phone rang off the hook," says Andy Gomez, senior fellow at UM's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies. "It was everybody. Friends, family, the State Department. People went nuts." The older generation in particular is coping, says Radio Mambí's Armando Perez Roura, a longtime Cuban radio personality who has been poised to break the news of Castro's demise for decades. "This is definitely the calm before the storm," Perez Roura says. "Both in Cuba and in exile, you can breathe a very tense calm," says Ramon Colas, who helped start "Bibliotecas Independientes" (Independent Libraries) in Cuba and left the island in 2001. Oscar Haza, host of WJAN-America TeVe Channel 41's popular "A Mano Limpia" (The Gloves Are Off) hears the anxiety in the voices of viewers who call in to check on the rumors. Knowing how desperate the Cuban exile community is for confirmation of Castro's death, Haza has tried to find a way to calm folks people whenever new rumors get them riled. "I say, 'Don't pay attention to all the rumors. When you tune in and you hear me say 'Ya,' you will know that means 'Ya.'" (*The Miami Herald*, 25/8/07)

**August 25:** Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama criticized President Bush's Cuba policy to rousing applause at the same Little Havana auditorium where Republican Ronald Reagan once campaigned. Across the streets from the auditorium about 35 protesters held signs condemning Obama's stance on lifting travel restriction to Cuba. The group of mostly older Cuban-Americans, one woman in a kerchief and curlers, another carrying a puppet ghost, were mostly members of the extreme and marginal exile group Vigilia Mambisa. Laura Vianello, a member of the group, said Obama's proposed policies toward Cuba were a huge mistake. She said families have always been able to send humanitarian aid but should not be allowed to visit family on the island more frequently. "If they stayed there then maybe they were communists," she said of the relatives of Cuban-Americans who remain on the island. Meanwhile in front of the auditorium, about 20 young Cuban American students waved placards in support of Obama. Among them was Giancarlo Sopo, 24. The Miami native, now a student at Harvard University, said his entire family had come to hear Obama's speech, and it was the first time his grandmother and his parents were considering voting for a Democrat. "We've been engaged in a failed policy with Cuba for the last 50 years. And we need to change it," he said. (*WFTV.Com, AP*, 25/8/07)

**August 26:** In a morning rife with rumors about Fidel Castro's demise, Gloria Estefan gave the first live performances of songs from her new CD, "90 Millas", on a pier behind the Westin Key West Resort, two blocks from the famed 90-miles-from-Cuba marker. One of the songs, the poignant "Esperando (Cuando Cuba Sea Libre)" (Waiting -- For Cuba To Be Free), drew tears from some of the older Cuban-American fans who had joined their idol. Dressed in a white pants ensemble and her hands adorned with multicolored beads, Estefan acknowledged Cuba's African traditions -- signified by all-white clothes and beads. "We are Catholic," the Miami diva said, "but we still put out a glass full of water, just in case," a reference to the island's -- and Miami's -- Santería practices. "Let me play the congas," a raucous fan yelled from the back of the crowd of fans that served as a backdrop for the singer. "I just came in on a raft yesterday!" (*The Miami Herald*, 26/8/07)

**August 28:** A Cuban exile who admitted to storage over 1,500 guns and other weapons in his house as a plan to overthrow Fidel Castro, received a five-year in prison sentence. Robert Ferro, 64, was also fined with 75,000 dollars in a trial presided by federal judge Virginia A. Phillips. During the proceedings, Ferro said that the Florida based organization Alpha 66 Brigade knew about the weapons. A representative of Alpha 66, a paramilitary group that for decades has planned Castro's overthrow, denied that Ferro was a member of the group. (*AP*, 28/8/07)

**August 31:** There were many doubters of the Corrieri della Sera report about Raúl Castro's visit to Italy. "This story is absurd," said Max Lesnik, a Miami anti-embargo activist with close ties to Havana. "It seems to me to be a fantasy."

Raúl Castro, he added, “can travel, but does it seem logical that a person (...) who is in charge of a nation would go on vacation to play golf -- never mind that his brother is sick in the hospital. Raúl Castro has never played golf in his life.” Lesnik stressed that Mariela Castro and her Italian husband, Paolo, live in Havana, so there would be no reason for the grandchildren to be living in Italy, as the newspaper reported. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/9/07)

## **Foreign Affairs**

**August 1:** Getting feedback on Cuban reality and giving support are the main objectives of the 60 members of Canada's Che Guevara Brigade currently on a visit to the island. Through August 13, their program includes working together with university students on the refinishing of a school in the central province of Ciego de Avila which is meant to open for blind and visually impaired children on September. The brigade leader, Nino Plagliccia, told the press that their aim is to back up Cuba's social programs because it is one of the few countries where human beings are the top priority for the state. He considers it their duty to raise their flags against Washington's blockade of the island and promote the release of the five Cuban antiterrorist fighters unjustly kept in US jails. The Che Guevara Brigade was created 15 years ago by young people from Vancouver, but it has steadily moved on to other cities such as Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Kingston. (*ACN*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** The president of Cuba's parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, said Cuba and Venezuela will review the development of their fruitful relationship during the third inter-parliamentary meeting, which begins on August 2, in Caracas. The leader of the Cuban parliament, who is heading the island's delegation to the meeting, told the local press that the meeting's goal is to analyze the situation of their respective countries and that of Latin America so as to plan common actions to take in international forums in which both countries will take part. The Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA) is another issue on the meeting's agenda, as the two parliaments seek to encourage the development of the integration initiative, which provides benefits not only to Cuba and Venezuela, but to other nations in the region as well. Alarcon said ALBA's scope goes beyond its member countries and lends assistance to several governments in the region, as well as to social movements in various nations. (*ACN*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** With the purpose of laying the foundations for a new Social Contract, one that opposes the current criminal world order, the 6th Social Summit for Latin American and Caribbean Unity is taking place in Caracas with the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) as the main focus of discussion. More than 200 intellectuals, prominent figures and activists from 26 countries are participating in this event, and are expected to establish guidelines for a so-called New Social Contract that would ensure a stronger ALBA in every sense. Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of People's power, is leading Cuba's delegation. (*Granma International*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** The United States should follow the example of Fidel Castro, who sends troops to save lives, and not to exterminate them, said Bolivian president, Evo Morales, at the end of a visit to Peru. Speaking to a group of trade union representatives, farmers, and members of political parties from the extreme left, Morales said that those helping “generously” in the region “are the socialism of Venezuela and of Cuba”. (*AP*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** State companies of Cuba and Venezuela intervened in the nationalization of hydrocarbons in Bolivia by taking part in the drafting of one of the most important documents of the process, according to investigations by Bolivian prosecutor Aláin Canedo. The lawyer explained that confrontations between former officials with Bolivian state oil firm YPFB showed that Cuban officials drafted the so-called Schedule D. The investigation was initiated after denunciations made by opposition senators. (*AP*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** The Mexican navy detained 83 Cubans who were traveling in makeshift boats off the country's Caribbean coast and believed to be heading to the United States. The navy said in a news release the migrants were traveling in

four separate boats, one of which was adrift when it was found. They were handed over to immigration authorities. Cuban migrants are usually released from such centers after 90 days. More than 9,000 Cuban migrants have arrived in the United States from Mexico since last October, as the route becomes increasingly more popular than crossing the Florida Straits. Authorities say relatives in the US pay thousands of dollars to organized crime networks that take the migrants to Mexico, where they head north over land. (*AP*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** Ricardo Alarcon, President of the Cuban Parliament, said in Caracas that the transformation of Latin America in the Caribbean is no longer a project, but rather has become a reality thanks to pro-integration efforts. Addressing deputies of the National Assembly of Venezuela, Alarcon said that the slogan "A Better World is Possible" is materializing and the key is to consolidate a true integration among the peoples. He noted that "a new world is being built in Latin America, which proves that was more than an ideal; we are proving that is an attainable goal." The best indication of this is the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), which moved from the phase of resistance to the advanced construction of a true integration alternative, a new model of union. "It would be inexcusable to obviate that most of this cherished change is owed to the transforming effect of the Bolivarian Revolution led by President Hugo Chavez," allowing to become a future reference in the struggle for social and popular justice. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** The bodies of three people suspected of smuggling Cubans to the United States through Mexico were found gagged and blindfolded in a natural sinkhole near Cancún. The killings were the latest in a series of incidents related to the smuggling of Cubans into Mexico, where authorities have observed a marked increase in such attempts in recent months. At least four people linked to smuggling allegations have been killed this week in Cancún, which has become a popular landing spot for boats sneaking Cubans into the country. Police were led to the three most recent victims -- Jesús Aguilar, Edwin Park and a woman whose name was not given, all of whom are Mexican -- by red arrows painted on a highway leading to the sinkhole. Three days earlier, police found the bullet-riddled body of Luis Lázaro Lara Morejón, a Cuban American suspected of smuggling, on a roadside near Cancún. The woman found was Lara's girlfriend. "We believe these people were executed by those who are part of a Cuban-American mafia," Bello Melchor Rodríguez, attorney general of Quintana Roo state, told the press. (*EFE, The Miami Herald*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** Two Cuban boxers who disappeared during last month's Pan American Games were found at a resort near Rio where police say they partied and ran up an exorbitant tab. Now, a police inspector says, they want to go back to Cuba. Two-time Olympic boxing champion Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara were found at an inn in the coastal resort city Cabo Frio. "We still have to clear up the reason why they abandoned their delegation and now want to return," federal police inspector Felicio Laterca said. "Right now, they are only saying they are very dear athletes in their country and that's why they want to return." Laterca said the two boxers were staying at a hotel and remained free, but were being monitored by police. Police have contacted the Cuban embassy to secure passports for the two men. No one at the Cuban embassy was immediately available to comment. The 25-year-old Rigondeaux failed to attend the weigh-in for his bantamweight bout against Carlos Cuadras of Mexico. Lara, 24, did not show for his welterweight bout against Ricardo Smith of Jamaica. (*EER, AP*, 3/8/07)

**August 3:** Two Cuban boxers, who absconded from their team during the Pan-American Games last month, will be sent home, the Brazilian authorities said. Erislandy Lara, 24, and 25-year-old Guillermo Rigondeaux were arrested by Brazilian police. A Brazilian Federal Police spokeswoman said the two Cuban boxers likely will be deported by the end of next week. "As soon as their passports arrive, the two boxers will be deported to their home country," Luciana Oliveira said by telephone. "It will likely take a few days for their passports to arrive so I expect they will remain in Rio for at least a week." "They informed the authorities that they wished to return to Cuba," a police statement said. "They have not committed any crime. They were arrested because they didn't have papers." The two boxers said they had been contacted by a German businessman, and they gave their uniforms and passports to him. Last month, German boxing promoters Arena said it had signed Lara and Rigondeaux to five-year contracts. Details of that deal are not clear. Police said the pair had declined representation from lawyers apparently sent by the German businessman. Fidel

Castro blamed American money for their defection, saying the boxers were "knocked down with a blow straight to the chin, paid up with US bills." (*AFP, AP, 3/8/07*)

**August 3:** Fidel Castro said that consumerism in the United States, the perennial enemy of his communist government, is threatening humanity's very existence. Castro used the latest of his "Reflections of the Commander in Chief" columns to lambast American capitalism, quoting a former Russian defense official who says the world must stand up to the United States and its money-grubbing ways. "Commercial advertising and consumerism are incompatible with the survival of the species," Castro wrote in the essay titled "Hard and Obvious Realities" and published in Cuba's two leading state-controlled newspapers. He devoted 12 paragraphs to quoting retired Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, the former head of the Russian defense ministry's international military cooperation department. Ivashov accuses the United States of bullying other countries and refusing to compromise on international debates about anti-missile defense and Iran. Castro noted Ivashov's call for Russia and its regional allies, along with China, India and nations in the Middle East and Latin America, to form an "alliance of civilizations" to oppose U.S. dominance and values. [[A Reflection on Hard and Obvious Realities](#)] (*AP, Prensa Latina, 4/8/07*)

**August 3:** The Jamaica/Cuba Eyecare Programme is to specially target children who are affected with Strabismus or what is commonly referred to as 'cast eye', through an extensive outreach exercise. This is according to Claudetta Williams-Yearde, Co-ordinator of the Jamaica/Cuba Eyecare Project, who told the press that although the condition was among the four that were currently being treated under the programme, there were still many children across the island with the problem who could be assisted. Both Jamaican and Cuban medical personnel have been very instrumental. They work together as well as in the post operative evaluations and screening of patients. We are very satisfied about the partnership and for the assistance from both sides," she said. In August 2005, the Governments of the Republic of Cuba, Venezuela and Jamaica together with Caribbean partners, Dominica, Guyana, St. Lucia and Suriname, signed the historic Bilateral Agreement, 'Mission Operation', for their nationals to receive medical attention in the field of ophthalmology in Cuba. (*JIS News, 3/8/07*)

**August 5:** Over 85,000 friends of Cuba from the five continents have given their voluntary contribution to the island's agriculture in the last 35 years. Nearly 100 people from 30 nations have visited Cuba this year to give examples of the increasing solidarity existing in the world to the island. The 14th Latin American and Caribbean Voluntary Work Brigade, made up of 250 people, are in the country, expressing their unconditional support to the island's Revolution. (*Prensa Latina, 5/8/07*)

**August 5:** Fidel Castro cancelled his activities to watch and "take notes" from the weekly radio and television program of president Hugo Chávez, said Cuban vice-president Carlos Lage in a phone call to the Venezuelan president. "We were hoping to speak with Fidel. It will not be possible today, it will be another time", said the Venezuelan president to Lage. The Cuban vice-president said that Castro followed the reading that Chávez requested Alarcón to do of an article that the Cuban leader published in the Cuban official press. (*EER, 6/8/07*)

**August 5:** Two boxers deported by Brazil were back in Cuba after they disappeared during the Pan American Games last month and were arrested at a resort where officials said they partied and ran up an exorbitant bill. Convalescing leader Fidel Castro said in comments published in *Juventud Rebelde* that the boxers would be confined to guest houses upon their return, although he promised not to harshly punish them. Guillermo Rigondeaux, Cuba's top boxer and a two-time Olympic bantamweight champion, and Erislandy Lara, an amateur welterweight world champion, arrived in Cuba after being deported from Brazil. Cuban state radio and TV reported without offering any specifics. Castro wrote in his essay "Politics and Sports" that after the boxers return to Cuba, they "will be transferred provisionally to a guest house and they will be given access to their families. The press will also be able to contact them if it so desires." He added that they would later be "offered decent tasks in sports according to their knowledge and experience." [[Politics and Sports](#)] (*AP, BBC, 5/8/07*)

**August 5:** The president of the House of Representatives of Chile, Patricio Walker, announced that he has suspended a projected official visit to Cuba. Walker planned to travel to Cuba accompanied by a pro-government MP and an opposition MP to promote the renewal of an economic agreement and to meet the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Payá, as well as to visit political prisoners. Cuba asked if Walker intended to meet with Cuban dissidents. Cuban authorities never confirmed whether or not they would grant the entry visas to the parliamentarians. (*AP*, 5/8/07)

**August 5:** Three members of the European Parliament met in Havana with members of the Ladies in White, a group comprising relatives of political prisoners. Matyas Eörsi of Hungary, Erik Jurgens of the Netherlands and Estonia's Andres Herkel said they chatted with more than 30 of the Ladies in White after services at a Catholic Church in Havana. The lawmakers said they expressed their solidarity with the women's demands for the release of Cuba's more than 200 political prisoners. The European legislators, who arrived in Havana on July 31 as tourists, said that their translator, the Hungarian citizen Gabor Beszterczey, was arrested by Cuban authorities and will probably be deported. Since their arrival in Cuba, the European parliamentarians have met with Laura Pollan, a member of the Ladies in White, and with dissident and former political prisoner Marta Beatriz Roque of the outlawed Assembly for Promoting Civil Society. Eörsi told the press that the Cuban authorities spoke with him and his colleagues on August 4 and told them "they were aware" of their meetings, "that they didn't like them, that these activities were illegal and had to end" and that "they should go to the beach." (*EFE, MTI*, 6/8/07)

**August 5:** Nicaraguan Ambassador to Havana, Luis Cabrera, highlighted the determination of Nicaraguan youngsters, on their 6th year of medical studies at the Latin American School of Medicine, to treat their humble country fellows. You are the new men and women Nicaragua needs, said the diplomat on Saturday during a flag hand-over ceremony of the 1st "Vilma Espin" Nicaraguan Medical Brigade. He noted that these young medical students, a fruit of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), will serve in the Nicaraguan Atlantic coast, the country's most neglected and humble area, home to several indigenous communities. You are the children of our people and are returning to them, said Cabrera, who urged them to honor with their work the figure of late revolutionary Vilma Espin, after whom the health brigade was named. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/8/07)

**August 5:** Perry King, 44, has completed four and a half years of a 15-year sentence after being convicted in Cuba of having sex with two girls, aged 15 and 16. King has maintained his innocence. In a recent phone interview, he again claimed the girls' mother lodged a complaint only because he turned down her request for financial aid. "I told her no. It turned out later she found money under her daughter's bed. That's when she named me -- said I had given it to her daughter." According to friends, family and co-workers, King had led an exemplary, trouble-free life. He studied computer technology and petroleum engineering at NAIT, then went to the oilpatch, working in Canada, India, Mexico and Cuba. Steve Courchene's first inkling his co-worker and friend was in trouble came in May 2003 when King met Courchene and his wife at the Havana airport and drove them to Varadero. "They wouldn't give him his passport and he didn't know why." Courchene was baffled by the transcript from the first trial, which said Cuban police had initially been told the man who had sex with the two girls was bald and six feet tall. The transcript also said the man drove a red car. "Perry drove a white one," Courchene says. "And he's five-foot-six or five-foot-seven and has longer dark hair." (*Edmonton Journal*, 5/8/07)

**August 7:** World Serve's Vice President of Latin American Ministries, Darryl Wright said their team is reaping a harvest of revival amongst the evangelical church in Cuba. "It began to accelerate into a house church movement. There were about 1100 churches and house churches in 1990, and today, they're drawing close to 17,000 churches and house churches. That's revival." This year, WorldServe and the American Bible Society teamed up to deliver a landmark gift to the growing church. "It's not just the largest shipment of children's Bibles. It's the largest shipment of Bibles, period, in the history of Cuba--more than twice the previous largest shipment. Other groups have sent in large sums of Bibles, but 200,000 Bibles in one year is the largest shipment in the history of the island." (*Mission Network News*, 7/8/07)

**August 7:** Secretary General of Amnesty International, Irene Khan, said that organization is "very interested" in starting a "constructive dialogue" on the political rights situation with the Cuban government, now that Raúl Castro heads it. The Cuban regime has denied Khan entry to the island since 1988. (*EER*, 8/8/07)

**August 8:** Brazil's minister of Justice, Tarsus Genro, said that handball player Rafael DaCosta Capote, who escaped from the Cuban delegation during the recent Pan-American Games, will receive refugee status "when he requests it". DaCosta Capote and gymnastics coach Lázaro Lamelas are the two Cuban sportsmen who remain in Brazil after the deportation of boxers Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara. (*EER*, 9/8/07)

**August 8:** Brazil's Federal police are investigating whether two Cuban boxers disappeared during last month's Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro after being drugged, a police spokesman said. "There are indications that the two Cubans left the Pan American village under the influence of some kind of drug," a federal police spokesman said by telephone. "An investigation is being conducted and we have identified some suspects, but it is still too early to provide any more details." The spokesman declined to be identified in line with departmental regulations. Bantamweight Guillermo Rigondeaux, the 2000 and 2004 Olympic champion, and 2005 welterweight amateur world champion Erislandy Lara left the athletes' village on July 22 and failed to appear for their weigh-ins. Police arrested them 11 days later for overstaying their visas in the coastal resort city of Cabo Frio, near Rio de Janeiro, where authorities said they partied extravagantly. "They told us they loved their country and they wanted to go home," he added. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** An international human-rights group is criticizing the expatriation of two Cuban boxers who abandoned the Pan American Games, saying that police spirited the pair out of Brazil under suspicious circumstances. The speed with which the boxers bantamweight champion Guillermo Rigondeaux, 26, and welterweight world champion Erislandy Lara, 24, left the country and their public silence while under police watch have raised suspicions about what really happened, said José Miguel Vivanco, the director of the Americas division of Human Rights Watch. Vivanco called for Brazil's government to conduct a "full and fair" investigation. Before the boxers left, they spoke only to the police and declined comment when a reporter approached them outside a federal police station in the city of Niteroi. The Brazilian Justice Ministry said the two had been informed of their right to request political asylum in Brazil but that they had chosen not to do so. Brazil's government "should have made sure the full process was fully transparent and not just handled by the police," Vivanco said. "To resolve this behind closed doors, in the middle of the night, in a summary process where there's only one side of the story, it raises questions." (*The Miami Herald*, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** Brazilian legislators said they suspected that President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had worked out an agreement with Castro to return two Cuban boxers who abandoned the Pan American Games. The Brazilian Senate's international relations committee has asked the justice and foreign ministers to publicly explain the Cubans' departure. Two-time Olympic bantamweight champion Guillermo Rigondeaux, 26, and welterweight world champion Erislandy Lara, 24, were taken into police custody on a resort beach near Rio after disappearing two weeks earlier. Brazilian Sen. Eduardo Suplicy, of the Workers' Party, said he had talked by telephone Wednesday to Lara's wife in Cuba, who said the boxer had not been harmed. "I would like to have seen an interview [in Cuba] with Lara himself, because that would help calm many of my worries," Suplicy said. "I want to see this matter clarified in the quickest manner possible." New details about the case have cast doubt on the account that the boxers gave Brazilian police. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** The Cuban Foreign Ministry (MINREX) issued a statement noting its steadfast rejection of any actions by the authorities of Taiwan to divide Chinese territory and join the United Nations. The Cuban Foreign Ministry repeated its inalterable one-China stance, the statement reads. Since early 2007, Taiwanese authorities have launched actions aimed at separating from the rest of China, against the interests of the Chinese people and turning a deaf ear to the will of the international community, said the Cuban Foreign Ministry. "The Taiwanese authorities are now trying to

organize a so-called 'referendum on joining the United Nations' under the name of Taiwan and submitting a resolution on the issue to the international organization," said MINREX. [[Declaración del MINREX](#)] (ACN, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** Mexican president Felipe Calderón sent the proposal for PAN-affiliated Gabriel Jiménez Remus to be designated ambassador of Mexico to Cuba to the Permanent Commission (of Mexico's Congress). Jiménez Remus recently concluded a six-year term as head of the (Mexican) diplomatic mission in Spain. The Cuban government has signalled its satisfaction with the appointment since its proposal in mid July. (*Milenio*, 9/8/07)

**August 10:** Officers of the Mexican Federal Preventative Police and other law enforcement institutions of the state of Chiapas intervened to contain a protest by Cubans detained at the Tapachula migrant station. The head of the centre, Rafael Pretelín Pouchulén, said that 60 % of the Cuban detainees in Tapachula are awaiting a response from Mexican judicial authorities about remaining in Mexico as exiles, and they may not be expelled from the country until their migratory status has been resolved. The official explained that the Cubans who have not yet appeared before a judge thought they would be repatriated and began to protest. (*Notimex*, 10/8/07)

**August 10:** The Central African Republic (CAR) and Cuba restored diplomatic relations after 26 years of misunderstanding. The new Cuban ambassador, Bruno Desouza, addressed a news conference shortly after his arrival. Desouza reiterated his country's decision to cooperate with CAR not only at the diplomatic level but also in several other areas. "Faced with the various development challenges, it would be urgent to focus on improving the living standards of the populations in order to get closer to the Millennium goals set by the international community," said the Cuban diplomat who was greeted on arrival by the Central African Foreign Minister, Com Zoumarra Bellet. (*African Press Agency*, 10/8/07)

**August 11:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez used the PETROCARIBE summit, held in Caracas, to support his ally Cuba, saying the island is regularly excluded from other summits. Blaming the US, he recalled a 2005 gathering in Argentina and said: "How is it that we accept Cuba not going to that meeting?" "I swear by my mother (...) if there is another one of those summits and Cuba doesn't go, Venezuela won't go to that summit either because it doesn't seem fair," Chavez said. "I know most of you talk with the US government, the majority of our friends in the Caribbean, except Cuba and us," Chavez added. "But I hope someday we can all sit down at the same table, as equals and with respect, with the president of the United States, whoever it is." (*AP*, 11/8/07)

**August 11:** Peruvian Foreign Minister Jose Garcia Belaunde thanked Cuba for the donation of five tons of medicine for victims of a cold spell that recently hit the Andean region of that nation. He spoke at a ceremony held at the national stadium in Lima. The Cuban ambassador to Peru, Luis Delfin Perez, explained that these newly made, high quality Cuban-made medicines are useful for treating respiratory problems and have a long working life. Delfin Perez also referred to Cuba's solidarity with the rest of the world, specifically with Peru, and recalled the assistance provided after the devastating earthquake that shook the Andean nation in 1970. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 11/8/07)

**August 12:** The Attorney General of the state of Quintana Roo, in the Mexican Caribbean, detained a group of 17 undocumented Cubans hiding in a house in the outskirts of Cancun. The Cubans stated that they arrived in Cancun by boats, and a person was bringing them supplies regularly. (*EFE*, 13/8/07)

**August 12:** Perry King, now 44, has always maintained his innocence on two 2003 convictions for corrupting minors, for which he was sentenced to 25 years in prison in Cuba. All possible appeals reduced the sentence to 15 years, and the pleas of his family finally convinced him to apply for a transfer to Canada to serve out the rest of his time at an institution here, said King. That application was denied in mid-June by Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day because "the offender was convicted of sexual offences involving children," according to a letter sent to the family. "Based on the nature of these offences, there is concern the offender's return to Canada would constitute a threat to the security of Canada." "He was totally, totally shocked when he got denied his transfer, because he was fighting to clear his name,

that's why he took so long, and he said he didn't care anymore," said King's mother, Pearl. "I don't think the minister was fully informed of the circumstances," said King's Edmonton lawyer Sid Tarrabain, who travelled to Cuba to be part of King's legal team during the original trial. King's "safety and security" are not guaranteed at the prison, which is overpopulated and dirty, and where a suspected attack of hepatitis that made him very ill was ignored, Tarrabain wrote in a letter to Day after the original denial. (*Toronto Star*, 12/8/07)

**August 13:** The number of Cubans living in Spain had risen to 82,596 in January 1, 2007, according to information from Spain's National Institute of Statistics (INE). Almost 42,000 Cubans have arrived in Spain since 2000, doubling the original population of Cuban residents. Madrid expects an avalanche of migration requests from the consulates of Havana and Santiago de Cuba when the law granting nationality to grandchildren of Spanish citizens passes in 2008. (*EER*, 13/8/07)

**August 13:** A student body representing Guyanese on scholarship in Cuba met with concerned parents and raised concerns about their stipend and also disclosed plans for a magazine and a web page. The students highlighted the positive aspects of their lives and their intentions. They pointed out that Guyanese students in Cuba have the highest grade point average. Additionally they are planning to have a student magazine to showcase the talents and life of the Guyanese students in Cuba. The student body also touched briefly on some of the problems they are experiencing and parents were able to raise their concerns at the meeting. The students informed the parents that the government stipend they receive is too small and they experience problems with the boxes which are posted to them. They added that one major problem is communication - it is difficult for parents to call and get in contact with them over the telephone. They stated that the preferred medium of communication is e-mail and that keeps them in touch with their parents on a daily basis. Another problem which the students encounter is that packages often arrive late and there is a weight limit. (*Stabroek News*, 20/8/07)

**August 14:** Cuban boxers Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara, who disappeared during the Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro, had requested entry visas to Germany before they were apprehended and deported to Cuba, according to the German consulate. An officer from the German consulate said that both boxers requested the visas, but they were neither interviewed nor received legal counselling. (*AP*, 15/8/07)

**August 14:** The two Cuban boxers who abandoned their national team at the Pan American Games are not being subjected to reprisals from their government, according to the Cuba ambassador in Brazil. Pedro Nunez Mosquera told Brazilian Bar Association president Cezar Britto that the boxers and their families are living free in Cuba, without any restrictions on what they can do. Britto said the association wanted to make sure the boxers were not at risk. "I asked how (the boxers) were and he guaranteed to me that they were free, with their families, and that there were no threats to arrest them," Britto said, adding that the bar association received a request from Cuban dissidents to check on their countrymen. (*AP*, 14/8/07)

**August 15:** Members of the Canadian "Che Guevara" brigade in solidarity with Cuba paid tribute to the legendary guerrilla as they laid a floral wreath at a monument in his memory in central Villa Clara province. The visitors stopped at the museum and the memorial where the mortal remains of Che Guevara and his comrades rest and also toured places linked to the history and deeds of the heroic guerrilla fighter. Nino Pagliccia, who heads the solidarity group on this occasion, said that this is the 15th contingent of the Canadian brigade, which every year is made up of people who want to learn more about the Cuban reality. (*ACN*, 5/8/07)

**August 15:** Seven Cuban migrants who arrived in a small craft were detained in the Mexican Caribbean island of Cozumel, officials said. The Cubans were treated for dehydration at a Cozumel clinic and taken to the facilities of the INM immigration agency. Spokesmen at the public safety office in Cozumel told the press that the Cubans, all men ranging in age from 20 to 40, were found walking in Punta Molas, in the extreme northeast of the island, after getting off their boat. The Cubans told reporters that they left their homeland on August 10 and were heading for the Mexican

resort city of Cancun, but the current carried them to Cozumel instead. Unconfirmed reports said the group left Cuba accompanied by another vessel carrying about 20 people, including women and children, whose whereabouts are unknown. So far this year, more than 300 Cuban migrants have been detained after landing in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, mainly in Cozumel and Isla Mujeres. (*EFE*, 15/8/07)

**August 16:** The deputy-head of the Islamic Coalition Party, Hamid Reza Taraqqi, told the Young Journalists Club that while Iran's relations with Europe and other states "are not at the level of a crisis, the government intends to regulate its ties with countries to ensure it does not face problems in case of possible sanctions. In line with these policies, the ninth government has moved to expand ties with Latin American and African countries that have less of a risk for investment." He said Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua were acting "in step with Iran" for their own anti-American policies. Taraqqi referred to the increased pressure from the 5+1 states and the two Security Council resolutions issued on Iran and welcomed Iran's greater risk [or risk taking] in expanding economic ties with other states. (*Aftab-e Yazd online, BBC Monitoring*, 16,20/8/07)

**August 16:** A consultation of coca leaves by Aymara Indian shamans presages the recovery of Fidel Castro, according to Cuba's ambassador to Bolivia. "The Comandante is enjoying a recovery," Rafael Dausá, the ambassador, told Bolivia's state news agency after attending the ceremony in El Alto, the heavily indigenous city near the capital, La Paz. Pointing to Cuba's warming ties to Bolivia, as the leftist president, Evo Morales, settles into his second year in power, Mr. Dausá said, "Being in Bolivia today means being in the leading trench in the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America." (*The New York Times*, 16/8/07)

**August 18:** Argentine aboriginal youths of the Toba community, in this northwestern province, thanked Cuba for giving them the chance to study in the Caribbean island, as part of a scholarship program. "I feel deeply touched and thankful for the Cuban people, because youths like me can make their dream of being doctors come true and can devote ourselves to preserving health in our communities," Fernando Gonzalez said. The indigenous young man from El Chaco, who studies medicine in Cuba, along with 1,000 Argentines, expressed his gratitude during a ceremony to welcome Cuban Ambassador to Argentina Aramis Fuente Hernandez. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/8/07)

**August 19:** Cuba sent to Peru two planes with two campaign hospitals and medical staff to aid the victims of the earthquake. Cuban Ambassador to Peru Luis Delfin Perez said in Pisco that both hospitals will run on autonomous energy due to the power cut affecting the area. The 42-member team includes specialists in general medicine, in orthopedics and traumatology, surgeons, intensive care, anesthesiologists, gynecologists, radiologists and epidemiologists, plus nurses and technicians. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/8/07)

**August 19:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said Fidel Castro is "writing, and producing," denying rumours circulating on the Internet that the Cuban leader had died. Chavez, a close ally of Castro, has frequently provided information about the health of the ailing Communist leader who temporarily stepped aside after undergoing emergency abdominal surgery a year ago. "On the Internet rumours are circulating that Fidel Castro has died," Chavez said during his weekly Sunday broadcast. "Fidel is producing, he is writing." Chavez said he had spoken to Castro on his 81st birthday. Rumours had surfaced that Castro had died from complications resulting from his surgery. (*Reuters*, 19/8/07)

**August 20:** Germany's human rights commissioner has urged German tourists to be more discerning and vocal during vacation in countries with poor human rights. The German government's commissioner for human rights made a sudden appeal to German tourists to be more critical of social and political conditions when they jet off to far-flung destinations with dubious human rights records. At a press conference in Berlin, Günter Nooke singled out countries such as Cuba, Mexico, Egypt, Thailand, Turkey, Kenya, the Dominican Republic and Indonesia for deficits in human rights. He urged German tourists not to be "taken in by glossy appearances" and to "look over the fence of their holiday

resort." "Away from beaches and palm trees, there are people living there whose human rights are trampled upon." (*Deutsche Welle*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** Didier Operti, general secretary of the Latin American Association for Integration (ALADI), termed as "very active and responsible" Cuba's work within that organization. Operti praised as very positive the Cuban contributions to the ALADI, considering it the only country member not located on continental territory and whose economy is operated differently from other nations. "When I was a foreign minister of two previous governments, I was in favor of Cuba's entry into that entity, because I understood its presence in regional organizations," he said, "and I have confirmed that opinion in the two years heading the ALADI." The organization has a permanent headquarters in Montevideo and is made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and Uruguay, where it emerged on August 12, 1980 in virtue of the Montevideo Treaty. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** Mexico wants to improve relations with Cuba, which have been deteriorating over the past 10 years and led to both countries recalling their ambassadors in 2005. The Mexican government underlined this change by putting up the newly-appointed Mexican ambassador to Cuba, Gabriel Jiménez Remus, to discuss priorities with the standing committee of Mexico's congress. Jiménez said that Mexico wanted to boost business with Cuba. There was no mention of Cuba's human rights situation, which is the main basis for criticism of Cuba by the US and its allies. (*Latin News Daily, Reforma*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** Canadian Choice Medical Services, which refers to itself as a "medical tourism company," has signed agreements with Cuba's ministries of tourism and health, said company founder Daren Jorgenson. Patients pay a fee to Choice Medical based on the treatment and the company arranges hospital stays in Cuba. Officially starting up at the beginning of August, Choice Medical Services has worked with about 200 test patients on a trial basis during the past year. Patients have made use of the service for eye, knee and shoulder surgeries as well as drug rehabilitation and the goal of the company is to provide an "effective and affordable service," said Jorgenson. (*The Winnipeg Sun*, 20/8/07)

**August 22:** Part of the Cuban delegation that will participate in an international meeting to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the World Festivals of Youth and Students traveled to Venezuela, where the event will take place until next August 27. This group, formed by pre-university and university students and also by youths who are participating in important social programs currently underway on the island will join members of the Cuban internationalist contingent that is currently making their contribution in the South American nation to complete the island's delegation to the meeting. The inauguration of the event is to take place at the Teresa Carreño Theater in Caracas with the presence of some 2,000 delegates from 70 countries. (*ACN*, 22/8/07)

**August 22:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque is in Brazil for the Third Forum for East Asia Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) meeting from August 22 to 23. The event in Brasilia will debate common challenges facing Latin American and Asian nations as well as projects for interregional cooperation that contribute to greater understanding and interaction. During the opening session, Perez Roque said that Cuba advocates a wide process of cooperation to eradicate illiteracy. The island's top diplomat stressed that this effort against illiteracy is in accordance with the acknowledgement included in the Action Plan of Manila, which states that "education is one of the best tools to promote sustainable development among our peoples." At the conclusion of the two-day FEALAC gathering, Perez Roque will also meet with top Brazilian authorities to discuss matters of bilateral and multilateral interest. (*Granma, ACN*, 23/8/07)

**August 22:** Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso called on Cuba to improve its human rights records. In a meeting in Brasilia with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque, Aso said efforts should be made to avert international condemnation over a crackdown against dissidents. Perez said every country has human rights issues and that they should not be politicized. Regarding Cuba's debts to Japan, Aso said the issue should be handled at the Paris Club of

government creditors, not bilaterally. Perez said that a settlement in the Paris Club needs assistance from the International Monetary Fund, but it is difficult to receive the help due to interference by the United States. (*Jiji Press*, 22/8/07)

**August 22:** Cuba branded Hungary an "imperial accomplice" of Washington for agreeing to grant political asylum to 29 Cubans who were held at Guantanamo Bay US naval base. Those given Hungarian visas were among 44 Cubans picked up at sea by the US Coast Guard. Because authorities deemed them at risk of persecution if repatriated, the group was held at the base while officials sought a third country to take them. Many were dissidents, and some were at the base more than two years. The Cubans at the Guantanamo base included 17 who staged a hunger strike to protest conditions, but it ended August 17 when Hungary announced it would take 29 migrants. A third country was expected to take seven more and five others were approved to go to the United States. One chose to return to Cuba for family reasons, and the status of a couple who were offered Hungarian visas but apparently refused them, was unclear. Cuba's Foreign Ministry issued a statement that "the government of Hungary acts as an accomplice to the empire," and said it would be later rewarded by the US government. Cuba also criticized Hungarian Foreign Minister Kinga Góncz for meeting with the anti-Castro "Mafia" in Miami and inviting exiled groups to Budapest. [[Declaración Oficial del MINREX](#)] (*AP, Canada.Com*, 22/8/07)

**August 23:** Hungary rejected a Cuban statement accusing it of being a "lackey" of the United States for offering political asylum to Cuban emigres held at the US base at Guantanamo Bay. "The Foreign Ministry categorically rejects the Cuban charges addressed to Hungary and the unworthy tone of the statement issued in Havana," it said on its Web page. The ministry said it took the Cubans mainly for humanitarian reasons and did not want to meddle in Cuba's internal affairs, although it embraced the European Union's policy of encouraging democratization in the Latin American country. (*The New York Times*, 23/8/07)

**August 23:** With Libya at the helm, and Iran, Cuba and Pakistan among the 20 nations participating, a United Nations-convened meeting in Geneva will begin to lay the groundwork for a global conference on racism in 2009. A preparatory bureau set up under the UN's Human Rights Council will "formulate a concrete plan" for the 2009 conference, which aims to review the implementation of a program of action drawn up at the UN's last big racism gathering in 2001 -- the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. (*CNSNews.com*, 23/8/07)

**August 23:** Two Cuban boxers who abandoned the Pan American Games were deported from Brazil because of problems with their visas and not political pressure from Cuba, Brazil's justice minister said. Justice Minister Tarso Genro said that police tracked down boxers Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara after the Cuban delegation made a formal complaint that the two had disappeared during the games last month, the government news agency Agencia Brasil said. But he said the Cubans were deported according to the law because of visa irregularities. "They were effectively (in Brazil) for a predetermined period, and, as they disappeared from the delegation, there was a distortion of the (diplomatic) visa, and they were registered as missing," Genro said. "That is all within the law." Genro also affirmed that the two Cuban athletes were taken to Cuba in a Venezuelan plane chartered by the Cuban government. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, in Brazil for a meeting of the Latin American-East Asian Cooperation Forum, denied that Cuba asked Brazil to return the boxers. "The Cuban government didn't ask for anything," Perez Roque told Folha de Sao Paulo news agency, retracting a previous statement to the contrary. (*EFE, AP*, 24/8/07)

**August 23:** A group of young Canadians that support Cuba promised to double their efforts in support of the Cuban Five, jailed in the United States since 1998. Noah Fine, coordinator of the Vancouver Committee to Free the Cuban Five, told the press that the organization holds a monthly protest in front of the US consulate in Vancouver demanding the release of the five Cubans. "We are currently developing a campaign informing people on the irregularities committed at the trial of Fernando Gonzalez, Rene Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero y Ramon Labañino," Fine said. (*Granma*, 24/8/07)

**August 23:** At the Forum for Latin American and East Asian Cooperation (FEALAC) Cuba proposed an extensive process of cooperation expected to substantially contribute to the eradication of illiteracy. The proposal was presented by Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque in his speech to the 3rd FEALAC meeting of foreign ministers which was held in Brasilia. (*Granma Internacional*, 24/8/07)

**August 24:** A Cuban delegation headed by Chancellor Felipe Perez Roque was received by Brazilian president Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, and met with various ministers. In the third ministerial meeting of the Forum for East Asia Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC), Perez Roque took part in working meetings with the foreign ministers of Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Paraguay and Panama, as well as meeting with New Zealand's environment minister and China's Vice Chancellor. He also took part in a private meeting between chancellors and heads of delegations, where problems affecting commerce in the two regions were discussed. Perez Roque and the Cuban delegation concluded their visit staying on in Brazil a further day to take part in bilateral talks with Brazilian dignitaries, including working sessions with Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorín. (*Granma, Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/8/07)

**August 23:** The International Society for Human Rights based in Germany demanded to Cuban authorities the release of the independent librarian Gustavo Colas Castillo. Colas Castillo has been kept under detention for over three months without charges. (*MartiNoticias*, 23/8/07)

**August 23:** Katahiro Yokomichi, vice president of the Japanese House of Representatives, arrived in Cuba on an official visit to expand congressional and economic relations between Cuba and Japan. Yokomichi is in Havana at the invitation of Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada. Alarcon told the local press that this is a special moment for Japan to deepen ties with Cuba, when Japanese relations between Central America and the Caribbean are growing. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/8/07)

**August 24:** Indonesia affirmed its support for Cuba as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)'s chair and its belief that under Cuba's leadership the movement will be able to promote the interests of developing countries, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. Indonesia has also asked Cuba to encourage other NAM member countries to implement the commitment agreed on at the 14th NAM Summit in Havana, particularly for the promotion of developing countries "capacity," Desra Percaya, the ministry's director of international security, said in Brazil. He was commenting on a meeting between Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda and his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez, on the sidelines of the third ministerial meeting of the Forum for East Asia and Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC). (*Antara News*, 24/8/07)

**August 24:** The Government of the Republic of Cuba provided a Sanitary Brigade composed of ten Cuban technicians, along with thirty units of spray equipment to support the relief efforts of the Government of Belize after the pass of Hurricane Dean. A plane chartered by the Government of Cuba arrived in Belize and since then, the Cuban Sanitary Brigade has been working in hurricane-affected areas in northern Belize. So far seven hundred and fifty houses of the Villages of Caledonia, Xaibe, Chan Chen and Patchakan have benefited by the Cuban technicians and personnel of the Ministry of Health of Belize. The Cuban Sanitary Brigade will stay in the country for two weeks. After their return, the equipments will be donated by Cuba to the Ministry of Health of Belize for further use in the local programs of epidemiologic control. (*LoveFM. Com*, 27/8/07)

**August 24:** The Cuban medical staff, which will be in charge of providing services at two field hospitals donated by Cuba to Nicaragua, arrived in Managua. They were received by Maritza Cuan, the Nicaraguan Health Minister. The Augusto Cesar Sandino brigade, made up by 85 medical doctors and nurses of different areas of medicine, will be working in the Muelle de los Bueyes and Waspam municipalities located in the Autonomous Regions of the North and South Atlantic respectively. The coordinator of the Cuban medical brigades in Nicaragua, Luis Carlos Avila explained

that both centers will be providing services in the areas of orthopedics, integrated general practitioners medicine, gynecology-obstetrics, pediatrics, general surgery, radiology and ophthalmology. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/8/07)

**August 25:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, speaking at a public event, denied persistent rumors that his close ally Cuban leader Fidel Castro had died. Chavez was reacting to talk among Cuban exiles and echoed by foreign news outlets, especially in Florida, that the ailing Castro, 81, had passed away. "We are not going to be denying one rumour after another", Chavez said. "Those who want him to die will be frustrated, because Fidel Castro will never die," said Chavez, one of the few who visited the revolutionary leader at his sickbed. Chavez said that Castro "will always live among the people that fight for a better destiny. He will always live in the people of Cuba, of Venezuela, and of America." (*AP, The Times of India*, 25/8/07)

**August 25:** The Mexican Autonomous University of Puebla and the Cuban University of Camaguey have signed an agreement seeking to boost the scientific and academic exchange established between the two countries over the last 15 years. The accord was signed by Enrique Aguera and Carlos Diaz, rectors of the Mexican and Cuban higher education institutions respectively. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/8/07)

**August 27:** Venezuelan youth organizations have requested the Orden Libertador, the highest distinction bestowed by the Venezuelan government, to be awarded to the five Cubans imprisoned in the US. During her speech at the closing ceremony of an event commemorating the 60 anniversary of the creation of the World Festival of Youth and Students, Irma Gonzalez Salanueva --daughter of Rene Gonzalez, one of the Five-- thanked the youngsters from all the continents gathered in Caracas, Venezuela, for their support for the cause of the Cuban Five. (*ACN*, 27/8/07)

**August 27:** Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg discussed the situation in Cuba with a group of members of the US Congress who promote the democratization of Cuba at a meeting in Prague. At a meeting with Czech ambassadors, Schwarzenberg said that an emphasis on human rights protection was a priority of Czech diplomacy. Schwarzenberg expressed support for the opponents of the Cuban regime before he became Czech foreign minister. In May 2005 he was deported from Cuba after he arrived in this country to meet Cuban dissidents. In 2006, the Cuban embassy in Prague protested against the Czech Republic's position on the Cuban regime in a note to the Czech Foreign Ministry. In the spring of 2006, Havana even deported other Czech diplomats. The US congressmen headed by Congressman Albio Sires also met Czech Ambassador to Cuba Vit Korselt. They will visit the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The congressmen also plan to visit Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Prague. They will also visit Hungary and Poland. (*CTK*, 27/8/07)

**August 28:** Maverick German leftwing politician Oskar Lafontaine has begun a three-day working visit to Cuba, the Left Party announced in Berlin. Lafontaine, who is chairman of the party, was to meet the president of the Cuban parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, and Foreign Minister Felipe Peres Roque during the trip, the party said. He was also to meet representatives of German companies in Cuba. The former German finance minister is being accompanied by Left Party deputy chairman Klaus Ernst. (*DPA*, 28/8/07)

**August 28:** The General Secretary of the Ibero-American Conference, Enrique Iglesias, began an official visit to Cuba on the invitation of the Cuban government. During his stay on the island, Enrique Iglesias is scheduled to meet with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and other top government officials. This is the second visit to Cuba by the Ibero-American General Secretary. (*ACN*, 28/8/07)

**August 29:** Enrique Iglesias, Ibero-American Secretary General, said in Havana that the regional project he conducts is a wonderful adventure that needs to be nourished with something more than statements and rhetoric. We need to land in concrete things like cooperation and co-participation in the solution of common problems, indicated Iglesias during a meeting with Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque. Iglesias thanked Cuba's head diplomat for the "opportunity to exchange for a couple of days on the big issues which concern us at the Ibero-American Secretariat for the

November summit in Santiago de Chile." The Secretariat, he added, has "always had the support of the Cuban government" to revitalize the objectives defined by the Heads of State and Government in their annual meetings. He recalled that the main topic for this year's summit is social cohesion, which he considers is a new way to look to development beyond income statistics and all it entails. After confirming Cuba's support to the 16 summits held to date, Perez Roque informed Iglesias on what the country is doing for social cohesion, the central topic of the next Ibero-American meeting. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/8/07)

**August 30:** The acting president of communist Cuba, General Raul Castro, visited a luxurious golf resort in central Italy early this month, the son of the facility's owner said. News of Castro's visit to the Argentario Golf Resort in Tuscany was published by several local media outlets and corroborated by Augusto Orsini at the state-run news agency Ansa. Orsini said that the club was informed about Castro's arrival "just the day before," although the Cuban leader's office had announced the possibility of the trip "in the month of July." Castro, 76, arrived in a helicopter from which he observed from the air, for about an hour, the layout of the 18-hole golf course which, Orsini said, is the "best" of those built in recent years in Italy. Afterwards, the helicopter landed on a hill with a view of nearby Lake Orbetello, where Castro met with the top officials of the center. *Corriere della Sera* said that the visit allowed Castro to study the possible construction of a golf course in Cuba with similar characteristics. The daily added that, after the visit, Castro went to a "secret location to the south, probably in Sicily," since his son-in-law Paolo, the husband of his daughter Mariela, was there. (*EFE, El Nuevo Herald*, 30/8/07)

**August 30:** A group of 120 Cubans remain under detention in the migration station of Tapachula, after entering without documents in Mexico. The group, which arrived in Mexico by rafts and speedboats, is still waiting for decisions by the National Migration Institute, the regional representative in Chiapas, Rafael Pretelín, said. (*Notimex*, 30/8/07)

**August 30:** Cuba's vice president of the Council of Ministers met with the Ibero-American General Secretary Enrique Valentin Iglesias, who is on an official visit in Cuba. Lage told the Ibero-American official about the Cuban initiatives, efforts and achievements in economic and social matters. He also mentioned the entrepreneurial improvement efficiency system that is being implemented in the country seeking an increase in the quality of production according to international standards. Accompanying Lage at the meeting was Cuban foreign minister Felipe Perez Roque, who had previously met the Uruguayan economist heading the Iberian American General Secretary Board (SEGIB), with headquarters in Madrid. Also present at the meeting was Fernando García Casas, deputy chief of SEGIB. (*ACN*, 30/8/07)

**August 30:** The co-president of the German Left party, Oskar Lafontaine, sent his best wishes and his hopes for a speedy recovery to Fidel Castro during a press conference in Havana. Lafontaine, who concluded a three-day visit to the island, met with several Cuban high-ranking officials such as Vice President Carlos Lage, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party. During the press conference, the visitor noted that there has been a stable political development on the island in the last months. He said he was impressed by several aspects of Cuban foreign policy such as its solidarity with the countries of the South, particularly with those of Latin America and the Caribbean, and added that, "the European Union should pay more attention to this part of the world."

The German Left party leader said that he talked with Cuban officials about human rights without mentioning specific cases. "Human rights are central to the European left's politics", he said. The German politician met with Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party. (*ACN, EFE*, 31/8/07)

**August 30:** Cuban authorities invited UN Rapporteur on the right to food Jean Ziegler to visit the island. Ziegler will stay in Cuba from October 28 to November 6. "This visit sets a precedent. Cubans will not be able to reject the visit of other UN rapporteurs", the Swiss sociologist said. (*AFP*, 30/8/07)

**August 31:** Cuba's ambassador to the UN, Juan Antonio Fernández Palacios said that the country is ready to resume co-operation with the UN on human rights, given the changes that have taken place in the organisation. Speaking to the press, Fernandez stressed the importance of the new Human Rights Council created in 2006, as well as the withdrawal of the UN Special Envoy to Cuba, Christine Chanet, last June. The council is a body that will allow us to explore new paths for progress, outside the boundaries of the old human rights commission," said Fernandez, adding that the changes have opened the door to Cuba's participation in the UN's human rights mechanisms. As a first step, the Cuban government has invited Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, to visit the island to report to the council on Cuba's current situation and the measures taken by the government to improve it. This is not however the first time Cuba has collaborated with the UN on human rights. In 1999, Special Rapporteurs on violence against women and on the use of mercenaries were invited to the island. (*Ahora, EFE, 31/8/07*)

**August 31:** Authorities from the Dominican Republic detained a group of fourteen Cubans –including three children— together with four Dominican citizens. According to officials from the Dominican Navy, the group was trying to reach Puerto Rico. (*EFE, 31/8/07*)

## Security

**August 1:** The Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) reiterated its friendship and cooperation ties with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in a ceremony to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the PLA foundation. The ceremony, held at the Universal Hall of the Armed Forces Ministry in Havana, was presided over by Corps General Alvaro López Miera, head of the FAR's Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Evidence of our friendship and cooperation is the exchange of visits," said Division General Leonardo Andollo Valdés recalling the visit to Beijing of Cuban First Vice President and Army General Raúl Castro in April 2005 and the visit to Havana last May of his Chinese counterpart Colonel-General Cao Ganchuan. Andollo praised the achievements of the Chinese people in the economic sector and in strengthening the socialist ideology and also praised the role of the PLA not only in guaranteeing the defense of the homeland but also in the country's social and economic development. For his part, Sun Yi Fan, military attaché of the Chinese embassy in Havana, referred to the close links of comradeship and brotherhood that exist between the military of both countries and made a call to further develop them. (*ACN, Granma, 2/8/07*)

**August 27:** Cuba has been upgrading its military arsenal since Fidel Castro fell ill 13 months ago, to defend itself against a possible US invasion, senior officers told Trabajadores weekly. "In the irregular combat we would face in Cuba in case of an invasion, the engineering, infantry and artillery systems we produce and repair here are of vital importance, because they're designed for the aggressor's direct assault," said Lieutenant Colonel Pascual Machado, chief coordinator of Cuba's Military Industrial Firm (EMI). EMI director, Colonel Arturo Torres, told the weekly the facilities he runs "have increased their production level since 1998 more than four-fold." Weapon systems that have been upgraded in precision targeting and destructive capabilities include munitions, grenades, land mines and anti-tank rockets, Trabajadores said. As an example, the weekly said a laser-guided targeting system called VILMA, has boosted the AK-M automatic rifle's precision by 80-90 percent, regardless of the shooter's skill level. (*AFP, 27/8/07*)

## Terrorism

**August 7:** Britain asked the United States to release five British residents from Guantanamo Bay in a change of policy that may signal Prime Minister Gordon Brown is taking a more independent stance from Washington. Foreign Secretary David Miliband sent a formal request to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the release of the five men, who were legally resident in Britain before their detention but are not British nationals. The decision marks a shift

from the policy of former prime minister Tony Blair's government, which secured the release of all nine British citizens held at the US prison camp in Cuba but maintained it was not responsible for detainees of other nationalities who had simply lived in Britain. (*The New York Times*, 7/8/07)

**August 8:** The US has cut the population of the Guantanamo Bay detention center to nearly half its peak in 2003 but is struggling to empty it further. Faced with rising international pressure to close the military prison in Cuba, the US has identified dozens of detainees who can be released or transferred to other countries. However, that was only the first step in a process so difficult it has slowed releases to a trickle. Before it puts detainees on a plane, the US must find a country to accept them. It also must obtain assurances the prisoners will be prevented from attacking the United States or its allies, and will not be tortured or face other treatment that violates international law. Britain's new Prime Minister Gordon Brown asked for the transfer of five British residents held at Guantanamo -- a change in policy that was welcomed by the Bush administration. Under his predecessor, Tony Blair, the British government would not accept the detainees since they are not citizens. A senior US defense official warned that officials will have to discuss appropriate security measures before the five sought by Britain can be transferred. "These are extremely dangerous individuals and if they are sent back to the United Kingdom they could pose a risk if they are out on the street," said Sandra Hodgkinson, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Detainee Affairs in an interview with the press. (*The New York Times*, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** Reluctance by other countries to take custody of terrorism suspects held at Guantanamo Bay is delaying Washington's shutting of the widely criticized prison, President George W. Bush said. "I did say it should be a goal of the nation to shut down Guantanamo," Bush told reporters. "I also made it clear that part of the delay was the reluctance of some nations to take back some of the people being held there." Washington has faced fierce criticism worldwide for the detention without charge -- often for years -- of suspected al Qaeda and Taliban members at the prison on a US naval base in Cuba. The United States holds 355 detainees at the Guantanamo Bay detention center, set up to handle prisoners captured by the United States after the September 11 attacks in 2001. (*Reuters*, 9/8/07)

**August 21:** In Havana, the Government of Colombia and the guerrillas of the National Liberation Army (ELN) began a new round of talks being held in Cuba since December, 2005. The high commissioner for peace, Luis Carlos Restrepo, heads the Colombian Government's delegation and Pablo Beltrán, member of the guerrilla Central Command, heads the guerrilla delegation. Representatives of the Colombian National Council for Peace will also attend. (*El País*, 21/8/07)

**August 21:** The founder and maximum leader of Colombia's largest guerrilla group refused to travel to Cuba for peace talks mediated by Fidel Castro because he feared the United States would try to intercept his plane and capture him, an aide to former Colombian President Andres Pastrana said. Camilo Gomez told Radio Caracol that in the course of the ultimately fruitless peace process, FARC chief Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda was urged to travel to Havana for consultations with Castro. "It was proposed to Marulanda that he travel to Cuba, but he said he wouldn't do it because the gringos would intercept the plane and take him to the United States," Gomez recalled. "If Marulanda had gone at that time, he would have taken a very important step," the erstwhile peace commissioner said. Castro "offered Marulanda a Cuban aircraft with a Cuban crew to allay any misgivings he might have, and I told Marulanda I would go with him on the flight," Gomez said. (*EFE*, 21/8/07)

## **US-Cuba Relations**

**August 1:** North Dakota will ship 100 tons of seed potatoes to Cuba, marking the first time the communist country has bought US seed potatoes in decades. The deal calls for the seed potatoes to be sent to the island in time for farmers

there to plant this year, North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson said. "It's a very small amount - only about \$15,000 worth - but it is significant in testing the waters," Johnson said. (*Buffalo News*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** The Cuban government newspaper Granma slammed US broadcasters Radio Marti and TV Marti for hostile programs that have cost millions of US dollars, but is of no interest to the islanders. Under the headline "the radio that no one listens to and the TV channel that no one watches," Granma said the two Miami-based Marti stations have wasted 520 million dollars since 1985. The United States spends more than 20 million dollars on the anti-Cuba broadcast each year, and that does not include one-off costs like the 2006 purchase of a rebroadcasting aircraft for 10 million dollars. Citing a report by the Associated Press, Granma said Cubans who had recently arrived in Miami told the US news agency that the TV channel was considered boring on the island and that they preferred the commercial channels from Miami via contraband satellite dishes. (*Xinhua*, 2/8/07)

**August 1:** A hunger strike by Cuban migrants detained at the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay entered its third day though one participant was hospitalized with pneumonia, according to an exile group monitoring the protest. The Miami-based group, Democracy Movement, said 22 Cuban men were on hunger strike at the Migrant Operation Center at the base in southeast Cuba. A US official said, however, that there were 17 strikers. The hospitalized man remains on strike, said Ramon Saul Sanchez, president of Democracy Movement. The protesters are among 44 Cubans who were captured at sea by the US Coast Guard but could not be returned to Cuba because authorities determined they had a credible fear of persecution. They have been detained at Guantanamo -- some for more than two years -- while the US seeks to settle them in a third country. Sanchez said they began the strike to protest their conditions and the length of their confinement. He and other exiles want them settled immediately in the United States, where some have relatives. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman Barbara Gonzalez said all the hunger strikers are monitored by military doctors and in stable condition. (*AP*, 1/8/07)

**August 1:** The vast majority of Cubans sneaking off the island now enter the United States through Mexico after US relatives pay thousands of dollars (euros) to organized crime networks that scoop them off Cuba 's westernmost tip in souped-up speedboats. The Mexico route is more dangerous than a direct, 90-mile voyage (145-kilometer) from Cuba to Florida, but there is less chance the US Coast Guard will intervene. Nearly 90 percent of all undocumented Cubans who make it to America now come overland rather than reaching US shores by boat, according to US Customs and Border Protection. From the Mexican coast, Cubans then travel up to the US border, where unlike other undocumented migrants, they are welcomed in under US law. (*AP*, 1/8/07)

**August 2:** A dozen Saint Leo University faculty members will leave for a 10-day research trip to Cuba. But as of July 2006, state lawmakers banned Florida 's public universities from spending money on travel to any nation labelled by the State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism, Cuba included. "I'm really jealous that they're going," said Noel Smith, curator of Latin American and Caribbean art at the University of South Florida 's Graphicstudio. She is organizing a fall sculpture exhibition with a Cuban curator via e-mail since she can't travel to Cuba. One of several co-plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit challenging the ban that is set for trial in December, Smith applauds Saint Leo's trip: "They're very lucky that they're able to do this -- and very smart." Saint Leo spokeswoman Susan Shoulet said the professors are tapping privately funded faculty development money for the trip: "They were very careful that they had taken a look at all the regulations, to the letter of the law." The group, including university President Arthur F. Kirk Jr., will arrive in Havana on August 11 for nine days of meetings with a broad range of Cuban officials and professors. They will also meet with Catholic Church officials and Mariela Castro Espin, daughter of acting President Raul Castro and the director of Cuba 's National Center for Sexual Education. (*Tampa Tribune*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** Michael Moore has been served with a subpoena by the US government over his controversial trip to Cuba for his latest documentary Sicko. Moore brought men and women who had assisted in the clean-up of lower Manhattan following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to Cuba to receive free medical treatment for the ailments they have

developed over the past five years. He claims they have not received adequate medical care in the US. Moore maintains he is exempt from the travel ban because he visited Cuba as a journalist. (*Ireland On-Line*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, issued a press release informing that "eighty-one Cuban migrants interdicted in five events were repatriated by the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Chandeleur to Bahia de Cabanas, Cuba". The information also said that, "13 Cuban migrants interdicted July 23 were repatriated on July 1 by the crew of Coast Guard Cutter Kodiak Island". (*US Fed News*, 2/8/07)

**August 2:** Representatives of the Cuban dissident movement took part in a videoconference with US members of Congress in Washington from Havana. The exchange took place in the United States Interests Section in the Cuban capital. Participants from Washington included senators Mel Martínez and Bob Menéndez, and representatives Ileana Ros Lehtinen, Lincoln Díaz Balart and Mario Díaz Balart, all of Cuban origin. Attending the videoconference were dissidents Marta Beatriz Roque, Vladimiro Roca, Elizardo Sánchez, Félix Bonne, Héctor Palacios and Roberto de Miranda, among others, as well as Gisela Delgado and Laura Pollán, of the ladies in White. (*Martí Noticias*, 3/8/07)

**August 6:** Exile activists in Miami and family members of Cubans detained at the U.S. Navy base in Guantánamo Bay said that 22 Cubans held at the base were continuing their hunger strike for the 10th day to protest what one former detainee calls "cruel" treatment. Exile organizations are planning a protest in downtown Miami to show support for the Cuban migrants, who complain that they are being treated as common prisoners, with surprise searches, head counts and limited capacity to move around the facility and make phone calls. Several more migrants are expected to join the strike. "Those people are very cruel with the Cubans," said Mariela Despaigne Agramonte, 39, who said she spent three months at the Guantánamo base last year and now lives in Connecticut. "The Cubans in Guantánamo call me every day, desperate." Exile activist Ramón Saúl Sánchez placed blame on The GEO Group, the private company that runs the Migrant Operations Center at Guantánamo under a US government contract. GEO Group officials could not be reached for comment, but the company's website notes that the Cubans at the center are not "incarcerated or detained." But Dionelo Reyes Morales, the father of detainee Duniel Reyes Betancourt, says his son feels like a political prisoner. Reyes Betancourt, 23, fled Cuba on a raft in May and was picked up by the US Coast Guard, said Reyes Morales, 58. Reyes Morales said his son had a visa to come to the United States and had served time as a political prisoner in Cuba, accused of associating to commit delinquency. "He is being treated like a political prisoner," Reyes Morales said. "He left Cuba because he didn't want to be treated that way any more. They search him whenever they want to. They don't let him communicate with his family sometimes." (*The Miami Herald*, 8/8/07)

**August 7:** Cuba's Granma newspaper refers to an August 5 New York Times article on the five Cubans incarcerated in the US -- stressing that this constitutes a crack in the wall of silence on the case of the anti-terrorist fighters. Granma points out that this is undoubtedly important for the case as it informs the American people about the truth of the Cuban Five, who have been arbitrarily detained in US prisons since September 12th, 1998. Entitled "Cracks in the Wall of Silence," the daily newspaper comments that despite having published an article on March 3rd, 2004 -- which was paid by the international solidarity movement -- this New York Times article is good news because the readers have an opportunity to learn about the case. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/8/07)

**August 7:** The defense attorney of five Cubans imprisoned in United States will denounce political manipulations of the case at a hearing scheduled for the Atlanta Appeal Court. Interviewed by the National Committee to Release the Cuban Five, attorney Leonard Weinglass talked of three new important issues for the Cuban 5 appeal on August 20. Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez were detained in September 1998 in United States for protecting Cuban and US citizens from terrorism. "We have an incredible number of topics to present before judges, but the most important ones are if Cause No. 3 against Gerardo Hernandez proceed or not, US attorney John Kastrenakes' bad behavior in his final allegation of the case, and sentences by Hernandez, Guerrero and Labanino, condemned to double life imprisonments," noted Weinglass. "If we win these three issues," the

defense attorney stressed, "it will be a fair way so the Cuban Five can return home with their relatives and compatriots in Cuba." (*Prensa Latina*, 7/8/07)

**August 7:** John Parke Wright IV said he believes Cuba and the United States would both have much to gain if the 40-year-old trade embargo were lifted to allow free commerce between the two countries. A rancher from Naples who has shipped about 1,200 head of cattle to the island country during the past five years, Wright said if the embargo were lifted the United States would see "at least a doubling of business, and more than that from Florida, I'm sure". "Two-way trade would clearly be good for the farmers in Cuba," Wright said. "It's not fair that they have to buy from us, but they can't sell anything back. I'd love to get the contract to import mangoes for Port Manatee, Cuban coffee for Miami, Cuban cigars. Florida's economy was built on agriculture and tourism. For almost the last 50 years, Cuba was closed down." (*The Bradenton Herald*, 7/8/07)

**August 8:** Cuba's Foreign Ministry said it had formally protested the US State Department's acknowledgment it will not meet this fiscal year's minimum quota of 20,000 visas for Cubans wanting to live in the US. It accused Washington of violating accords aimed at ensuring safe and orderly migration, while US officials blamed Cuban restrictions for the problem. Dagoberto Rodriguez, chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, said in a statement distributed via e-mail that his office sent a diplomatic note to State Department officials. "It now corresponds to the United States government to end with the manipulation of the migratory issue in its relations with Cuba," Rodriguez said. The visa quota flap erupted in mid-July, when Havana warned that the US Interests Section, the American mission here, was not on track to grant at least 20,000 emigration visas before the end of the US government fiscal year ending September 30. US officials confirmed that they would not fill the quota and blamed the Cuban government, saying it had blocked necessary materials and American personnel from entering the country. "We categorically reject that accusation," Rodriguez said. "The United States authorities deliberately lie." [[MINREX's Statement](#)] (*The New York Times*, 9/8/07)

**August 8:** Two Cuban migrants held at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay quit a hunger strike after being hospitalized with health problems, a Miami-based exile group said. Twenty other migrants were keeping up the strike that began July 29 to protest their conditions and Washington's refusal to let them settle in the United States, said Ramon Saul Sanchez, president of the Miami-based exile group Democracy Movement. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/8/07)

**August 9:** The Emergency Coalition to Defend Educational Travel (ECDET) announced that it will appeal Judge Huvelle's July 30 decision to grant the government's motion to dismiss ECDET's litigation. Comprising almost 500 academics, ECDET held that restrictions imposed by the Office of Foreign Assets Control on courses in Cuba violated academic freedoms by dictating who could teach the courses, who could take them, the duration of the courses, and where they might be held. Judge Huvelle held that what she gratuitously referred to as "the so-called academic freedom doctrine" applies only to academic speech. ECDET chairman Wayne Smith is an adjunct professor who has taught at Johns Hopkins for twenty-plus years, is one of the country's leading experts on Cuba, and for years has taught short-term courses in Cuba. But since 2004 he, and other part-time faculty members, has been prohibited from doing so. (*PRNewswire*, 9/8/07)

**August 10:** Details of the state's case against a father seeking to take his daughter back to Cuba emerged for the first time in a Miami courtroom, where the fate of the 4-year-old in the middle of an international custody dispute will be decided. Blue-eyed, redheaded and precocious, the little girl came to Miami with her pre-teen half brother in 2005 after their mother won the right to emigrate. By that December, the children had been sheltered by the Department of Children & Families when the mother tried to commit suicide. The children have been living with foster parents, a wealthy Cuban-American family in Coral Gables, for more than a year. The foster parents are fighting to maintain custody of a little girl they say has become a part of their family. In a petition filed in Miami's juvenile court -- the details of which were disclosed in the court hearing -- DCF is arguing that the girl's birth father, a farmer in Cuba, failed to protect her by not devising a "safety plan" to protect the little girl in the United States if her mother became incapacitated or ill. The DCF petition also says the little girl would be harmed if forced to leave her older brother, now

12, who protected and cared for her when their mother was neglectful. A lawyer for the girl's foster parents, who have adopted her brother, is asking Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen to allow the sibling to participate in the court case. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/8/07)

**August 10:** After three months of getting to know each other in Internet chatrooms, Alex Menéndez, a Miami resident, was finally face to face with Yaditza López, 22, a Havana computer-programming student who was one of 52 Cuban migrants who landed on Key Biscayne in what US Border Patrol agents call a smuggling operation. López and the group were taken to the US Customs and Border Patrol Processing Station in Pembroke Pines. The Border Patrol learned that the group arrived with the aid of smugglers traveling in a series of speedboats. "This was a normal smuggling-type effort that took 15 to 18 hours," said Border Patrol agent Walter Harris. "The large number of them were from Pinar del Río." Harris said the investigation was ongoing and could not specify how much each migrant paid the smugglers, though in other cases the price tag ranges from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per person. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/8/07)

**August 12:** A prominent Cuban dissident who was released after 13 years behind bars said he hopes to go to the United States for surgery, then return to Cuba to resume his human rights activism. "My future is in the struggle" for improved rights on the island, Francisco Chaviano said in an interview at the western Havana home he shares with his wife. The 54-year-old mathematician said, however, he first wants to see about his health. Chaviano said a small tumor was recently discovered in one of his lungs, and that he developed heart problems while behind bars. Although he could have the tumor removed in Cuba, Chaviano said he would feel more comfortable undergoing major surgery in a country where the government doesn't consider him an enemy. Chaviano would need an American visa and an exit permit from the Cuban government to make the trip. He said he will not know until he meets with a judge whether the conditions of his parole would affect an attempt to leave the island. "For good or bad, I'll come back" to Cuba, he said, even though all three of the couple's children now live in Orlando, Florida. "Why would I leave Cuba for good now if I didn't leave before?" Chaviano said. (*AP*, 12/8/07)

**August 13:** Canadian Mary McCarthy lives in the same mansion she and her millionaire husband moved into 62 years ago in the once-posh Country Club area of Havana. Her real jewelry and the small fortune she inherited when she was widowed in 1951 have been frozen in a Boston bank since the United States placed Cuba under sanctions after Fidel Castro's leftist revolution in 1959. That's because she lived in Cuba and did not leave with most of her wealthy Cuban neighbours who fled to Miami when Castro nationalized businesses and steered the Caribbean nation toward Soviet communism. The Cuban government confiscated her properties and her husband's leather factory, assets valued at \$4 million, and she was left only with "Villa Mary," a dilapidated mansion in need of repairs where she lives in virtual poverty. Since January this year the US government has let her withdraw a \$96 a month allowance from her US bank after Canadian diplomats interceded on her behalf. McCarthy is asking US President George W. Bush to free her money so that she can live her remaining days with dignity. She would also like to have her family's "trinkets" released. "They said they couldn't give it to me because I live in Cuba. That's the only money that I have left. It is in Boston, but I live in Cuba, that's the great terrible, terrible thing," she said. (*Reuters*, 13/8/07)

**August 13:** Signalling she may have no choice but to return a 4-year-old girl to Cuba, a Miami judge ordered that the girl's birth father be permitted overnight visits, despite concerns of therapists and the girl's foster parents, who claim a weekend sleepover "terrified" her. Miguel Firpi, the girl's court-appointed psychologist, testified that the girl cried herself to sleep during an overnight visit with her father, who came to the United States from Cuba two months ago to fight for custody. "The child told me she cried a lot. She told me she does not want to go back," Firpi told Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen. "She's anxious and concerned." Though Cohen expressed dismay that the long custody battle is traumatizing the girl, she told lawyers for the state Department of Children & Families and the Guardian ad Litem Program that the birth father has "fundamental rights" to raise the daughter unless he is proved to be an unfit parent. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/8/07)

**August 14:** Senator Mel Martinez said that he is aware of the growing human smuggling problem in our area and that help is on the way to protect Southwest Florida's shores. Martinez is a Cuban-American and some say he is the face of the immigration debate in Washington. He admitted that many times the Coast Guard doesn't have the man power to keep up with smugglers. "It is important that their boats, their vessels be as fast as the smugglers," said Martinez, a Republican serving his first term in the US Senate. The 33 foot "go fast" boat that was just given to the Coast Guard Station on Fort Myers Beach will help with that issue. He does admit, however, that Cubans will continue to attempt to make it to America if one thing doesn't change. "The overall big answer to that problem would be if we can get the situation in Cuba to be one where people's human rights were respected," said Martinez. He even went one step further, blaming the Cuban government for the human smuggling problem. "The Cuban government is complicit in this human smuggling business. In my opinion I believe they are," said the senator. That is the first time we have heard a politician point a finger at the Cuban government and say the smuggling problem is its fault. (*NBC2 News*, 14/8/07)

**August 14:** Travelocity was fined nearly \$183,000 for booking roughly 1,400 Cuba trips between 1998 and 2004, apparently the first time Washington has cracked down on a major online travel provider for violating the 1963 embargo on the communist nation. Travelocity blamed the 1,458 violations on technical issues that were corrected years ago. "In no way did the company intend to sell trips to Cuba," the spokeswoman, Ashley Johnson, wrote in an e-mail. "The trips to Cuba (...) were unintentionally booked online because of a technical issue several years ago and it's just now being settled." (*The Miami Herald*, 14/8/07)

**August 15:** Cuba's two leading newspapers published an article dated August 14 attributed to Fidel Castro on the history of US-Cuban relations, which he dedicates to "future generations" of Cubans. "Cuban history over the past 140 years has been the struggle to preserve national identity and independence," wrote Castro. The United States, meanwhile, which Castro refers to as "the empire," has a long history of scheming to take over the island. Castro also writes about what he says are "the horrendous methods that (the United States) uses today to maintain its domination over the world." The article, published in the government dailies "Granma" and "Juventud Rebelde", was announced earlier as part of a series that will run to the end of the week. [[El imperio y la isla independiente](#)] (*AFP*, 15/8/07)

**August 15:** The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, denounced the "immorality" of the US judicial system in regards to the case of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. During the presentation of the 162nd issue of the Tricontinental magazine at the venue of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin American in Havana, Alarcon noted that the case of Rene Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino and Fernando Gonzalez - internationally known as the Cuban Five - is irrefutable evidence that Washington's war in Iraq is a farce that has been carried out in the name of anti-terrorism while they manipulate and violate their own laws in the case of the Cuban patriots. (*CAN*, 16/8/07)

**August 16:** For the second time this year, the attorney for a Cuban man seeking custody of his 4-year-old daughter, who is living in the home of a Coral Gables foster family, is seeking to oust the Miami judge who is presiding over the dispute. During a brief court hearing, attorney Ira Kurzban told Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen he will argue that she does not have authority to hear the case because it involves parents and a sibling who are foreign nationals. As foreign citizens, he said, they should be allowed to resolve the dispute in Cuban courts. "We believe this court no longer has jurisdiction," Kurzban said. "The child is a foreign national. Both parents are foreign nationals, and the parents wish to dispense of this matter in foreign courts." A few months ago, Kurzban asked Cohen to recuse herself from the case because he said she had held private conversations about the case with an attorney who represents the Cuban-American couple that is caring for the girl and wishes to adopt her. The couple already has adopted her 12-year-old half-brother. Cohen denied the recusal request. Kurzban has yet to make his second request formally. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/8/07)

**August 16:** The president of the Cuban parliament reiterated his country's desire to talk to the United States and "solve our differences". Ricardo Alarcon, who has been named by some analysts as a potential successor to sick Cuban

president Fidel Castro, said the Latin American nation wanted to meet with its American neighbours on a level-playing field. Speaking on the Today programme, Mr Alarcon said Cuba had always been willing to talk to the US. "Raul was reiterating a position of principle," he said. "We have always been in favour of negotiations and discussions to solve our differences, on one condition: that those negotiations have to take place on the basis of mutual respect for our respective independence and sovereignty." (*IntheNewsCo.UK*, 16/8/07)

**August 17:** The United States pays Cuba \$4,085 (US) a month in rent for the controversial Guantanamo naval base, but Cuba has only once cashed a cheque in almost half a century and then only by mistake, Fidel Castro wrote in an essay published in Cuban official media. The ailing Cuban leader said he had refused to cash the cheques to protest the "illegal" US occupation of the land, which he said was now used for "dirty work." "The base is needed to humiliate and to do the dirty work that occurs there," he said of the detention camp where some 355 terrorism suspects are still being held with no legal rights despite international criticism. Castro said the US cheques are made out to the "Treasurer General of the Republic," a position that ceased to exist after Cuba's 1959 revolution. He said only one US cheque was ever cashed – in 1959 due to "confusion" in the heady early days of the leftist revolution. In a television interview years ago, he showed the cheques stuffed into a desk drawer in his office. [[The Empire and the Independent Island](#)] (*Reuters*, *AFP*, 17/8/07)

**August 17:** Cubans held at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay ended their hunger strike after learning that they would receive visas to go to either the US, Hungary or a third country, a Miami-based exile group said. The 17 hunger-strikers were entering their 20th day of fasting to protest their conditions and Washington's refusal to let them settle in the United States, said Ramon Saul Sanchez, head of the group Democracy Movement. The hunger strikers are among 44 Cubans picked up by US Coast Guard officials at sea. But because US authorities deemed the migrants at risk of persecution if they returned to Cuba, they were held at the base while officials sought a third country to take them. Many were dissidents and some had been there for more than two years. Five of the Cubans already held US visas and were given the green light to go to the United States, Sanchez said. Another 29 were accepted by Hungary, and seven others were still awaiting word that a third country would accept them. One man decided to return to Cuba on his own for family reasons, Sanchez said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 17/8/07)

**August 18:** No dinners or family reunions were held for Fernando González's 44th birthday – his ninth behind the walls of a US penitentiary for spying on Miami's right-wing Cuban community. In Cuba, the images of González and four colleagues convicted and imprisoned in the United States for being unregistered foreign agents have become as commonplace as those of revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara. They are known simply as "The Five." Their faces are plastered on walls and billboards throughout the island, their illegal deeds routinely justified as necessary to protect their country from anti-communist terrorists. Prosecutors insisted the spy ring obtained no US secrets. Court papers chronicled the men's unsuccessful attempts to gather intelligence on the US military's Southern Command in Miami and the Naval Air Station in Key West. However, evidence showed ring members infiltrated the anti-Castro groups Brothers to the Rescue and Movimiento Democrático. The information they fed to the Cuban government was believed to have resulted in the 1996 downing of two planes in the Florida Straits, and the death of four Brothers to the Rescue pilots. The five were among 10 Cuban immigrants arrested in September 1998 and accused of belonging to a spy ring known as the Wasp Network. Five pleaded guilty. Four others were indicted but never apprehended. (*Sun Sentinel*, 19/8/07)

**August 19:** Hungary has granted political asylum to 29 Cubans who are currently being held at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba, the MTI news agency reported, citing a high-level Hungarian official. Senior State Secretary Marta Feksz Horvath told the press that a Hungarian delegation that included immigration officials met with the Cubans at the US base and discussed the possibility of asylum with them. The officials determined which of the 44 Cubans, many of them opponents of Fidel Castro's government, qualified for asylum. The group was intercepted on the high seas by the Coast Guard, which instead of returning them to Cuba took them to the US enclave on the southeastern tip of the

communist-ruled island. Many of the Cuban migrants had gone on a hunger strike to protest the poor conditions at the base and Washington's refusal to allow them to go to the United States. (*EFE*, 19/8/07)

**August 19:** Twenty-seven Cuban migrants landed on a Key West beach, authorities said. Key West authorities said the 17 men, eight women and two boys were dropped off by a smuggler's speedboat on Smathers Beach. The migrants told police they came through rough weather after leaving Cuba at about 2 a.m. A few were dehydrated, but police said the group was generally in good health. The Cubans were taken into custody by immigration authorities. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** A US federal appeals court in Atlanta is due to reconsider whether there are grounds for a retrial of five Cubans convicted of spying for Havana. They were arrested in 1998 and found guilty in a Miami court on charges including using false identities and conspiracy to commit espionage. Three were given life terms, the other two 15 and 19 years in jail. Cuba's government says the trial was political and accuses the US of double standards in the fight against terror. They are considered national heroes and figure prominently on billboards all over the country and are the subject of regular rallies and demonstrations. One of Cuba's most celebrated spies was born in a flat along Chicago's bustling Ashland Avenue in 1956. Back then, Rene Gonzalez, now in a Florida prison cell, was just like any other kid on the North Side, enjoying outings at the lake, Lincoln Park Zoo and the bygone Riverview amusement park. But after his parents returned home to Cuba in 1961 to join Fidel Castro's young communist nation, Gonzalez grew up to become a Cuban agent. He eventually worked in an intelligence ring called the Wasp Network, which US authorities accused of entering the US and spying on an American naval base in Key West and militant anti-Castro groups in Miami -- with deadly results. Prosecutors accused Rene Gonzalez of faking defection back to the US in 1990, reclaiming his US citizenship, and then working as a pilot for two exile groups, including one called Brothers to the Rescue. He is serving a 15-year sentence in a Marianna, Florida, prison. One of the five agents held a civilian job at the Boca Chica Naval Air Station in Key West, but the defendants contended they did not gather secret US defense information, only public data. Prosecutors dispute that claim. (*BBC, Chicago Tribune*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** The politically charged case of five men convicted of spying for communist Cuba came before a federal appeals court for the third time, with defense attorneys alleging that prosecutors overemphasized Fidel Castro and committed other misconduct to win unjust convictions. Defense attorneys seeking a new trial claim the government wrongly used "Castro's evil" to push for convictions on what they say are overblown charges of conspiracy to commit espionage and murder. Federal prosecutor Caroline Heck Miller dismissed what she called a defense "parade of horrors" and argued the trial was won by hard evidence, not anti-Castro sentiment. "Red baiting. Communism. Your Honor, that was not the record of this case," Miller said. "It was a soberly tried case." Dozens of people lined up outside the Atlanta courthouse more than two hours before the arguments began to watch the latest chapter of the decade-long saga unfold. The "Cuban Five" have been lionized as heroes in Cuba, while exile groups say they were justly punished. (*The Charlotte Observer*, 20/8/07)

**August 20:** A week before she is to preside over one of the most controversial child-custody trials held at Miami's juvenile court, the judge at the center of the dispute vehemently defended herself against allegations she might be susceptible to political pressure. Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen, who has been on the bench since 1992 -- mostly in dependency court -- will decide whether a 4-year-old girl will return to Cuba to live with her birth father or be raised in the Coral Gables home of the foster parents who have cared for her the past 16 months. Reacting to an e-mail sent to the attorney for the girl's birth father, the judge insisted in a hearing that she would hear the case impartially, and would rebound and find a new legal challenge if the outcome of the case proved unpopular. Cohen is up for reelection in 2008. "I am not worried about reelection; I am worried about doing the right thing for everybody involved," Cohen said. "Anyone who thinks I would make a decision based on an election doesn't know me." (*The Miami Herald*, 21/8/07)

**August 21:** A recent report by the US International Trade Commission showed that a lift on the Cuban trade embargo would allow American farmers to supply up to 50 percent of Cuba's agricultural products and provide Americans with Cuban imports such as Cuban cigars. The report was requested by the Senate Finance Committee to draw support for a new proposal that would ease restrictions on trade and travel to Cuba. "When the Cuban embargo ends we will be aggressively serving our cigar customers through the great connections that we have made," said BestCigarPrices.com General Manager David Cagan. "Until the Cuban embargo ends and BestCigarPrices.com can legally sell Cuban cigars in the United States, we will continue to offer the best cigars the world has to offer." (*Market Wire*, 21/8/07)

**August 21:** Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama called the Bush administration's decision to tighten restrictions on relatives of Cubans who want to visit the island or send money home strategic blunders and promised to reverse the measures if elected. The Illinois senator leapt into the long-running and often bruising debate over US-Cuba policy with an op-ed piece titled "Our Main Goal: Freedom in Cuba", published in *The Miami Herald*. "The primary means we have of encouraging positive change in Cuba today is to help the Cuban people become less dependent on the Castro regime in fundamental ways," Obama wrote. "Unfortunately, the Bush administration has made grand gestures to that end while strategically blundering when it comes to actually advancing the cause of freedom and democracy in Cuba," he added. He said that was true of the travel and money restrictions imposed in 2004, adding that the move isolated those on the island from "the transformative message carried there by Cuban Americans." He promised to grant Cuban exiles unrestricted rights to visit their families and to send remittances home. While the US embargo has limited who can travel to the communist island and what can be sent there since the early 1960s, Bush's restrictions made visiting and shipping gifts to Cuba more difficult. "We must not lose sight of our fundamental goal: freedom in Cuba. At the same time, we should be pragmatic in our approach and clear-sighted about the effects of our policies". "We all know the power of the freedom and opportunity that America at its best has both embodied and advanced. If deployed wisely, those ideals will have as transformative effect on Cubans today as they did on my father more than 50 years ago". (*The Miami Herald*, 21/8/07)

**August 21:** Barack Obama's desire to ease US-Cuba travel restrictions stands in contrast to the stances of Democratic presidential rival Hillary Rodham Clinton and most of the Republican contenders. Clinton, the New York senator and Democratic front-runner, issued a statement reiterating her support for the current policy toward Cuba, adding, "Until it is clear what type of policies might come with a new government, we cannot talk about changes in the US policies toward Cuba." Among other Democratic candidates, Senator Joe Biden also supports the status quo. Former Senator John Edwards staked out the middle ground, calling for an end to the family travel restrictions but saying he would not immediately change the remittance limits. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson has also called for an end to the travel and money restrictions for Cuban-Americans, while Senator Chris Dodd has said he would lift all travel restrictions. US Representative Dennis Kucinich supports scrapping the embargo. Republicans criticized Obama's proposal. "We're in a very critical moment where many of us are hoping that we will see a transition as opposed to a transfer of power. Frankly I think his comments are ill-timed," said Florida Senator Mel Martinez, chairman of the Republican National Committee. "It shows that he either didn't think it through very well or simply hasn't had enough experience on these tough foreign policy problems." Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the leading GOP presidential candidates, both said easing sanctions would only help the Castro government. "We must not weaken our policy on Cuba until the Castro regime is dismantled, all political prisoners are freed and Cuba transitions to free and fair elections," Romney said. (*AP, CNN*, 21/8/07)

**August 21:** Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama is calling for "unrestricted rights" for Cuban Americans to visit and send money to family in Cuba, just days before his first pilgrimage to Little Havana as a presidential candidate. Obama is expected to repeat his message on August 25 at Miami-Dade County Auditorium. About 1,100 tickets have been sold so far to Obama's speech, with the proceeds going to the Miami-Dade Democratic Party. The \$30 entry fee is a fraction of the \$2,300 donation typical of presidential fundraisers. "This speech has so much symbolism and value, coming in the heart of the Cuban-American community," said the local party's chairman, Joe

Garcia. ``Senator Obama has come to the conclusion that the majority of Cuban Americans have come to, which is that more travel is good for freedom and good for democracy." (*The Miami Herald*, 21/8/07)

**August 22:** Cuba's foreign minister said he welcomed a call by US Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama to ease the US embargo on the communist-ruled island. "These declarations appear to express the sentiment of the majority of the United States," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said when asked to comment on Obama's proposal. Measures by the Bush administration to tighten the decades-old blockade were barbaric and an effort to "try to force our people to surrender through hunger and illness," Roque told reporters at the III Foreign Ministers' meeting of the Forum for East Asia - Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) in Brazil's capital. "The blockade has to be dismantled and the rights of Cuba respected," Roque said. (*Reuters*, 22/8/07)

**August 22:** The Cuban Foreign Ministry (MINREX) published a declaration denouncing the most recent US violation of the bilateral migratory accords. The note, dated August 21, cites a recent piece of news published by Reuters news agency in which it announced that "Hungary granted political asylum to 29 Cubans held at the US naval base in Guantánamo (...) The US forces held 44 Cubans caught at sea and 17 of them held a three-week hunger strike to protest the conditions of their detention and to demand admission to the United States (...) The United States had been trying to find other countries that would accept them (...) Hungary granted political asylum to 29 of them while the United States would pay for rent, winter clothes and language courses for a year for the 29 (...) Five others would receive US visas and some are waiting for a third country to admit them (...) Many of those detained were opposition figures and would be persecuted if they were sent back to Cuba," the press report said. [[Declaración Oficial del MINREX](#)] (*ACN*, 22/8/07)

**August 22:** A recent decision by federal immigration authorities will make it much easier for people born outside Cuba to obtain a US green card if at least one of their parents was born in Cuba. Under the decision, US Citizenship and Immigration Services will no longer require that those born outside Cuba file documents specifically saying they are Cuban citizens. Cuban consular papers saying they are children of at least one Cuban parent will be enough to prove Cuban citizenship. The July 31 decision is likely to benefit thousands of foreign nationals born abroad of Cuban parents -- particularly Venezuelans whose parents fled Cuba shortly after Fidel Castro seized power in 1959. The Cuban expatriate community in Venezuela, numbering between 25,000 and 50,000 people, is one of the largest after the one in Miami. The new green card decision is based on a Miami case in which the application of a Venezuelan born of Cuban parents was rejected by US Citizenship and Immigration Services in May 2006 on the grounds he could not conclusively prove he was a Cuban citizen. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/8/07)

**August 22:** The crew of the US Coast Guard Cutter Edisto repatriated 22 Cuban migrants to Bahia de Cabanas, Cuba. The repatriated migrants were interdicted when the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Key Biscayne located and proceeded to intercept a go-fast vessel 38 miles south of Marquesas, Florida. (*US Fed News*, 22/8/07)

**August 23:** Two men, one a Coral Gables businessman, the other a farmer from central Cuba, squared off publicly for the first time to make their case why each should be the one to raise a 4-year-old girl. On one side: Joe Cubas, 46, a nationally known sports agent, investor and real estate developer who is the girl's foster father. On the other: Rafael Izquierdo, 32, a malanga and plantain farmer and sometime fisherman who is the girl's birth father. Outside Miami-Dade's juvenile courthouse, Izquierdo said he was eager to bring his daughter back to Cabaiguán, the small village he calls home. "Children belong with their parents, and parents belong with their children," said Izquierdo, whose current wife brought their 6-year-old daughter to the United States for the custody proceedings. Cubas is equally determined that the girl should remain with him. "There are two children who have been through thick and thin together, who have been through the most difficult times together," Cubas said. ``They are in a safe, nurturing, loving home. They spend all their time together, and now they are faced with the possibility of separation." Cubas refers to the girl and her 13-year-old half-brother -- whom he has adopted -- as "my children." Cubas' involvement in the dispute became widely known for the first time when he spoke openly with reporters. Though he says he no longer represents sports figures, Cubas

earned admirers -- and some critics -- when he helped some of Cuba's finest baseball players defect to the United States. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/8/07)

**August 24:** Private exporters reported the sale of 100,000 tonnes of US hard red winter wheat to Cuba for delivery this marketing year, said US Agriculture Department. The 2007/08 marketing year for wheat opened on June 1. (*Reuters*, 24/8/07)

**August 25:** Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama criticized President Bush's Cuba policy to rousing applause at the same Little Havana auditorium where Republican Ronald Reagan once campaigned. "Just 90 miles from here there is a country where justice and freedom are out of reach. That's why my policy toward Cuba will be guided by one word: Liberty," Obama said, adding that freedom in Cuba begins with the release of political prisoners. He said there are no better ambassadors for change on the communist island than the Cuban Americans who send money to relatives. "It can help make their families less dependent on Fidel Castro. That's the way to bring about real change in Cuba," Obama said. "It's time we had a president who realized that." Obama said he wouldn't lift the trade embargo, and said the offer to normalize relations in a post-Castro Cuba would be made after the country opened up to democratic change. "Until there's justice in Cuba, there's no justice anywhere," Obama said. "We will talk to our enemies as well as our friends and both to our enemies and to our friends, we will tell them the truth and tell them what we stand for." (*AP*, 26/8/07)

**August 26:** As Detroit Public School students affected by school closings try and figure out the best routes to new destinations, two former DPS attendees are getting ready for a much longer trip on their first day of class. Chinere Knight and Ese Agari, both Cass Technical High School graduates, were recently accepted to the free scholarship program at the world renowned Latin American School of Medicine (LASM) in Havana, Cuba. Knight and Agari will join about 16 other students from around the country who will receive a medical degree without submitting to the enormous debt most med school graduates incur in the United States. (*The Michigan Citizen*, 26/8/07)

**August 27:** The United States suggested that the latest round of rumours of ailing Fidel Castro's death might have been started by the government. "I would say that the Cuban government has always been very good at stirring the nest whenever they felt the need to," said Gonzo Gallegos, a State Department spokesman. "I can't say whether or not this is them or something else that is happening," he said when commenting on talk among Cuban exiles and echoed by foreign news outlets, especially in Florida, that the ailing Castro, 81, had died. When asked by reporters whether he was suggesting that Havana was circulating rumours that Castro was dead, Gonzo replied, "All I was saying was that the Cuban government takes the opportunity when it sees fit to take care of itself." Gallegos said he did not believe Castro was dead. "I don't have any reason to believe he is dead." (*AFP*, 27/8/07)

**August 27:** A child welfare judge threw out a key piece of the state's case against a Cuban father seeking to regain custody of his 4-year-old daughter: the claim that his desire to raise her constitutes child abuse because she has "bonded" with a foster family. Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen, a 16-year veteran of the bench, tossed out the allegation against Rafael Izquierdo, the father of the auburn-haired youngster at the center of a contentious custody dispute spanning the Florida Straits. "'We often have situations like that. A parent says, 'I understand there may be some bonding, but I want my child. I love my child. I will fight for my child.' That's basically what you're [saying]: If a father does that, or a mother, it constitutes prospective abuse,'" the judge said. "'I've never seen anything like this in all my years of doing dependency.'" The judge's decision leaves two claims remaining in the state's dependency petition against Izquierdo, and the judge left little doubt she is not impressed by one of those -- that Izquierdo abandoned his daughter by allowing her to move to the United States and not sending her birthday cards or money after she arrived. "With everything you have, even if you pull a rabbit out of a hat, I just don't see how" the state can prove Izquierdo intended to abandon his daughter, the judge told Department of Children and Families attorney Rebecca Kapusta. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/8/07)

**August 28:** A new essay signed by Fidel Castro criticized US presidents and aspirants for that office for "submission" to exile-influenced politics that call for democratic change on the island. Candidates for the US presidential election in 2008 "are totally absorbed by the Florida adventure," read the column entitled "Submission to Imperial Politics." It was published in the Communist Party newspaper Granma and other official media. Mentioning a possible Democratic ticket of Hillary Clinton for president and Barack Obama as vice president, Castro wrote that "both feel the sacred duty to demand 'a democratic government in Cuba.' They aren't making policy, they are playing cards on a Sunday afternoon." [[Submission to Imperial Politics](#)] (AP, 28/8/07)

**August 29:** ABC News's Rick Klein reported on the network's "Political Radar" Web site that when an Iowa resident asked former senator John Edwards whether the United States should follow the Cuban healthcare model, the 2004 vice presidential contender deflected the question by saying he didn't know enough to answer the question. "I'm going to be honest with you - I don't know a lot about Cuba's healthcare system," Edwards (Democrat-North Carolina), said at an event in Oskaloosa, Iowa. "Is it a government-run system?" (*News Busters*, 29/8/07)

**August 30:** A group of three Cuban-American US congressmen urged Hungary and other former communist states to play a greater role in advocating for democratic changes in Cuba. The lawmakers said the transition of these countries from totalitarian regimes to democracy gave them credibility in the issue and a better grasp of Cuban reality. "A country that has gone through the experience (Hungary) has gone through can play a major role in assistance and providing support for democracy in Cuba," said US Representative Albio Sires, a Democrat from New Jersey. Sires and the rest of the delegation said Hungary and the European Union could assist the changes in Cuba by finding ways to help Cuban dissidents and insisting that free elections be held on the island after Fidel Castro's death. The congressmen also were critical of Spain's position toward Cuba, especially of investments in Cuba made by Spanish companies, and said the Eastern European countries needed to be more determined in efforts to lead the European Union's position on Cuba. The three congressmen met with Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany, Foreign Minister Kinga Góncz and opposition leaders during their stay, part of a trip which also includes stops in Poland and the Czech Republic. (AP, 30/8/07)

**August 31:** After beating back efforts to ease US sanctions on Cuba in Congress, Cuban-American lawmakers are embarking on a major push to isolate the Castro government on the international stage. Miami Republican Representatives Lincoln and Mario Díaz-Balart and New Jersey Democrat Albio Sires are wrapping up a three-day trip to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The trip will be followed by another to Latin America in the coming weeks, according to members of the delegation. The trip's organizers say the idea is to raise the international profile of dissidents on the island, call on countries to settle for nothing less than free elections in Cuba after Fidel Castro dies and present a united front of major dissident and exile groups before the world community. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/8/07)