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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: The wife of an ailing Cuban dissident achieves her goal of getting her husband transferred from prison to a Havana hospital, after staging a public protest in a city park. The Cuban government fires its minister of Basic Industries. Fidel Castro falls after leaving the stage at a graduation ceremony, fracturing a knee and arm.

Economy: Cuban authorities announce the closing of 118 companies, the reduction of the workday by half an hour, the halting of various production plants, and a daily six-hour blackout plan as some of the steps taken by the government to stem the island's serious electricity crisis. Cuba announces that US dollars will no longer be accepted at businesses and stores on the island.

Foreign Affairs: Spain's new envoy to Cuba criticizes the European Union's policy toward the island and says Madrid would work to thaw relations with Fidel Castro's government. The Spanish and the Dutch governments express outrage after one Spanish and two Dutch deputies were arrested and deported from Havana. Spain calls on the European Union to help Cuba negotiate entry into the Cotonou Agreement.

US-Cuba Relations: The State Department's decision to deny visas to 65 Cuban scholars seeking to attend a conference in Las Vegas draws protests from Congress and academia. The UN General Assembly votes overwhelmingly against the four-decade-old American economic, financial and commercial embargo against Cuba.



Domestic Affairs

October 4: Cuban authorities have confiscated more than 7 tons of drugs since 2003, breaking up 18 international drug trafficking operations, Granma reported. According to statistics from the Ministry of the Interior, the government seized 7.8 tons of marijuana and cocaine between January 2003 and last July. The majority had been dropped by planes, or abandoned or lost by speedboats. The ministry indicated it had stopped four maritime drug-trafficking operations, which resulted in the detainment of 13 people. (*UPI*, 4/10/04)

October 4: In Havana, Julia Cecilia Delgado, acting president of the Liberal Democratic Party of Cuba (PLDC), criticized the harassment against political prisoner and president of the PLDC Héctor Maseda by prison authorities at "La Pendiente" prison in Villa Clara. Maseda, 61, is a scientist and academic as well as a prominent journalist who was sentenced to 20 years in prison during the crackdown against dissidents in 2003. Maseda was kept in solitary confinement for 17 months before being transferred to prison with common and dangerous criminals. (*Netfor Cuba*, 4/10/04)

October 5: Wives of jailed Cuban dissidents planted themselves in a park across from Havana's Revolution Plaza to protest delays in transferring one of the women's husbands to a hospital in the capital for medical treatment. The woman, Bertha Soler Fernandez, came prepared with food, water and bedding, and said she might be there for days. Soler was joined by five other women whose husbands, brothers or sons are in jail for opposing the government of Fidel Castro. Soler said her husband, Angel Moya Acosta, is a human rights activist among the 75 who was sentenced to 20 years in jail. He is suffering from extreme back pain due to a herniated disc in his prison cell in the eastern province of Granma, she said. "I have been asking for a temporary transfer to a civilian hospital in Havana where I can help care for him," she said. Earlier, Soler delivered a handwritten letter addressed to Castro explaining her husband's situation to state offices behind a monument of Cuban independence hero Jose Marti in the Revolution Plaza. (*AP, Reuters*, 5/10/04)

October 5: Marta Beatriz Roque, a prominent dissident economist and the only woman arrested and jailed in the crackdown against dissidents in 2003, said that the protest carried out by wives and relatives of political prisoners in Havana's Revolution Square "is the right thing to do at a time like this." "It seems to me that it is time to move past reporting things, issuing letters, and move from written words to active deeds," in defense of the dissidents, who "are more and more harassed every day," Roque charged. Demonstrators have numbered fewer than 15 but "if this starts getting serious, if more dissidents come, if people start wondering why we are here, and find out, then I think there will be repressive action," Roque said. (*AFP*, 5/10/04)

October 6: The wife of a jailed Cuban dissident demanding her husband to be transferred to the capital for medical treatment refused to leave her spot in a park after an authority told her the government was working on her case. Bertha Soler Fernandez, protesting delays in the transfer, vowed to stay until she saw her husband in person. "I am going to wait patiently here," Soler said. A government official approached Soler, some 30 hours after she planted herself in a park across from Havana's Revolution Plaza. Soler then met with the official in nearby offices for nearly an hour, during which time she said he told her the request was being dealt with. "He told me they are trying to find a solution to the case," she said. Soler said her husband Angel Moya Acosta is suffering from severe back pain due to a herniated disc in his prison cell in the eastern province of Granma. On August 10, Soler said authorities told her they would grant her request to temporarily transfer her husband to a civilian hospital in Havana. But more than 55 days later, he has yet to arrive, and Soler said she would stay in the park until she sees him or authorities arrest her -- whichever comes first. (*AP*, 6/10/04)

October 7: Blanca Reyes, the wife of Cuban political prisoner and journalist, Raúl Rivero, said that her husband's jail conditions have been improved. She said to the press that jail authorities have rescheduled her visit to the jail --that was cancelled in September--, and that two criminal prisoners, who were in the same cell with Rivero, have been transferred to another cell. In a phone conversation with Reporters Without Borders, Reyes said that Rivero still needs some medication that was previously denied to him by the prison authorities. (*Europa Press*, 7/10/04)

October 7: The wife of ailing Cuban dissident Angel Moya achieved her goal of getting her husband transferred from prison to a Havana hospital, where she visited him, after staging a public protest in a city park close to the Revolution Square. "Everything was in my favor and I had the hope that the transfer would come about," Berta Soler Fernandez told the press upon her return from visiting her husband in the Carlos J. Finlay military hospital. She has said that her spouse needs urgent medical attention for a herniated disc. About 50 Cuban police forcibly removed Soler from her

protest "camp" in "Parquecito de Comunicaciones" along with several companions. She and her supporters had been there for two days. "They weren't really violent with us, there was no violence. But for just 10 people, there were 50 of them with many cars and even ambulances," one of the women told the press. Gisela Delgado, Alejandrina Garcia, Margarita Borges and Ines Guerra, relatives of some of the 75 dissidents sent to prison last year in the communist regime's harshest crackdown on peaceful protest in decades, were evicted from the park along with Soler and her sister-in-law. According to Delgado, authorities told her that "this is an act we're not going to tolerate (...) (and) they took us by force, put us in cars and drove us to the doors of our houses." (*EFE, AP, 8/10/04*)

October 8: In a public communiqué, prominent dissident, Oswaldo Payá, denounced as an "abuse" actions taken by Cuban officials against Berta Soler. "We must clarify that her request is for her husband, Angel Moya, to be taken as a patient to a civil hospital to have a surgery done", Payá says in his statement. "There was no violation of the law, nor alteration of the order, and no expressions of political content of any kind in the park. They were waiting for an answer to a request, which is their Constitutional right to do so, in a public place, a park", Payá added. "The answer, consequent with the cruel treatment that Angel Moya is being subjected to, was abuse with brute force." (*Puente Informativo, 8/10/04*)

October 11: Specialists from Germany, Brazil, Cuba and Mexico are attending the First International "Charles T. Ramsden in Memoriam" Symposium on Biological Sciences, in honour of the eminent Cuban naturalist. During the event, which takes place in the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, participants will present the latest developments in the areas of biological sciences and the environment. (*Notimex, 11/10/04*)

October 11: One of the 75 Cuban dissidents sentenced in last year's massive crackdown was injured and two police were killed in a traffic accident while on the way from a prison in Bayamo to a hospital in Havana, opposition sources said. Omar Pernet Hernandez, who is serving a 25-year sentence for "crimes against state security," sustained a fracture of his left leg and left collarbone and suffered bruises, prominent dissident Vladimiro Roca told the press. Two police officers who were traveling with Pernet were killed, and a third is hospitalized in serious condition with a skull fracture. (*EFE, 11/10/04*)

October 12: Driver negligence, traffic violations and drinking are the main causes of accidents in Cuba, according to local media. Between January and August, 603 people died and 5,126 were injured in around 6,700 car accidents. 40 percent of drivers and 25 percent of pedestrians who died were under the influence of alcohol, according to the official daily "Granma". Cyclists were also involved in many accidents (1,180) leaving 136 dead and 956 injured. (*EFE, 12/10/04*)

October 13: The Cuban Pro Human Rights Party, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation celebrated a vigil for the liberty of all political prisoners, especially for the liberty of their General Secretary René Montes de Oca. The vigil was held at the home of Modesto Leopoldo Valdivia Varela, who resides in Barrio Azul, municipality of Arroyo Naranjo. After the invocation and the National Anthem, there was a moment of silence in memory of the Cubans that have disappeared in the Florida Straights trying to get to the United States due to the communist regime. After the vigil concluded, everyone was advised that Montes de Oca is in an isolation cell at the prison La Pendiente in Santa Clara and he is not allowed to receive correspondence and cannot receive any telephone calls. (*Puente Informativo, 20/10/04*)

October 14: The Cuban government fired its minister of basic industries, citing the mismanagement of an electricity crisis and working too independently of colleagues. The announcement of Marcos Portal Leon's dismissal was made in an official statement on the front page of state-run newspapers. He will be replaced by Yadira Garcia Vera, a Communist Party leader with a chemical engineering degree. The statement first praises Portal for years of service to the island nation, particularly during hard times in the 1990s known to officialdom as "the special period." Then the minister is harshly criticized for "not being capable, as he has demonstrated in recent days, of warning the top leaders of the (Communist) Party and the State about the risks of an entirely preventable (energy) crisis." Portal was also

admonished for "strong tendencies toward self-sufficiency and underestimating the opinions of other experienced colleagues." This trait led him to commit many errors, particularly in policies dealing with the development of nickel production, the statement said. (*AP, AFP*, 14/10/04)

October 15: Volleyball great Mireya Luis of Cuba was inducted into the Volleyball Hall of Fame. Mireya Luis' plaque was installed in a ceremony in the western Massachusetts city where the game was invented in 1895. Luis led Cuba to three Olympic Gold Medals in 1992, 1996 and 2000 and was named the most valuable player in the World Cup three times. He is currently vice president of the Cuban National Commission for Athletes. (*AP*, 15/10/04)

October 15: Combined forces of the National Police and that of the State Security forced their way into the home of the peaceful opponent Lázaro González, located in Sibanicú, Camaguey, declared Juan Carlos González Leyva in a telephone conversation with Acción Democrática Cubana. Said agents accused Lázaro of civil disobedience and proceeded to brutally beat him and drag him all the way to a Jeep and threw him inside, taking him to the police station. The day before the incident, State Security agents incited his neighbors to throw rocks and to threaten the physical integrity of the opponent, and that of his wife, Marilyn Díaz Fernández, an independent journalist who was also beaten mercilessly in front of her 10 year old son who at the time of this violent beating tried to escape through the only door of the house screaming. (*Puente Informativo*, 19/10/04)

October 15: Political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez "Antúnez", was finally transferred to a prison close to his home in Santa Clara. After several protests by the prisoner and his relatives, that included a hunger strike, Antúnez was transferred from Ariza prison, in Cienfuegos, to La Pendiente, in Santa Clara. A month ago, Bertha Antúnez Pernet, the prisoner's sister, had gone into hunger strike in demand of better conditions for her brother in jail. (*Puente Informativo*, 15/10/04)

October 18: Speaking in Guadalajara, Mexico, where he was participating in the International Eucharistic Congress, Auxiliary Bishop Alfredo Petit Vergel of Havana, Cuba, said Catholics in Cuba who are being persecuted for their ideas are earning heaven. "They, and all Catholics around the world, are earning heaven because there are different types of martyrdom: some suffer a little, some suffer a lot, like in Cuba," said Bishop Petit. He also lamented the limited presence of Cuban Catholics at the Congress, but he explained that it was due more to political than religious issues. "It is not very easy for a lay Catholic in Cuba to travel out of the country to a congress or to anything. It's not because of religious issues; it's because of politics. A lay Catholic in Cuba cannot travel about freely, and for us to get here we were given a 15-day permit. It's not easy to get out of the country," Bishop Petit explained. Likewise, he stated, "The situation with Catholicism in Cuba is the same as it's always been. I don't think the situation of Catholicism has changed much. (*CNA*, 18/10/04)

October 19: Cuban classical pianist Gabriel Urgell Reyes played chords on an old upright piano in his native Havana. Now, the young talent will play on a brand-new Bluthner grand worth tens of thousands of dollars, in Paris. Urgell, 28, was one of six pianists and the only Latin American granted entry to this year's perfection course at France's prestigious Conservatoire National Supérieur de Danse et Musique in Paris. "He is brilliant, and could likely be someone very famous in the future," said Herve Billaut, in charge of piano pedagogy at the conservatory. Of the six pianists chosen for the course, two received unanimous votes from the jury — Urgell and a Russian woman. Of those two, Urgell received the top honor — the Bluthner piano, which he will play for two years in France then bring back with him to Cuba. (*AP*, 19/10/04)

October 19: The Ibero American Craftsmanship Fair, Iberoarte 2004 that began in Havana, gathered the best of five-country Craftmanships. Sources of the event organizing committee confirmed to the press that 171 designers are attending the fair exhibiting shoes, textile, ceramic, metal, cloth, carving, toys, and fiber works. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/10/04)

October 19: The Cuban political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet went on a hunger strike to call attention to “the abuses against him and two other inmates”, reported his relatives who have appealed to the international community to “save his life”. Last September 30, Biscet’s 70 year-old mother handed a letter to the Council of State addressed to Fidel Castro, “detailing all the abuses committed against her son” and requesting permission to contact her son, but has received no reply yet. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 20/10/04)

October 20: Fidel Castro delivered the main address to more than 3200 graduating instructors of the arts in Santa Clara. The Cuban leader noted that this was the first graduating class and recalled that four years ago, an ambitious cultural program was initiated with the establishment of 15 schools of the arts. With the goal of graduating 30,000 instructors over the first ten years, Fidel Castro said there are now a total of 16,168 students registered at the schools located across the island. Finishing four years of study, the newly graduated instructors will teach dance, music, theater, painting and sculpture. [[Speech by Fidel Castro](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 22/10/04)

October 20: Fidel Castro tripped and fell after leaving the stage at a graduation ceremony, fracturing a knee and arm but later returning to say that he was "all in one piece." Castro's off-camera tumble after a night speech in the central city of Santa Clara was certain to launch a new round of speculation about the 78-year-old communist leader's health after 45 years of rule. A medical examination confirmed that Castro suffered a broken left knee and a hairline fracture in his upper right arm, said an official notice read on state television. Castro asked that the note be made public, the statement said. (*AP*, 22/10/04)

October 22: Most Cubans did not see Fidel Castro fall after a televised speech, but street corners, living rooms and workplaces were filled with hushed chatter. "Did you hear?" Cubans asked each other. "That's all anybody is talking about," a retired professor in Havana told the press in a telephone interview. "There is a lot of uneasiness over this." Although TV cameras and photographers on the stage recorded the spill, Cuban television did not broadcast the fall. "The Cuban population was not shown the fall," the professor recounted. "What we saw was the audience. Some people in the front row were running. There were a few moments of silence. Then we saw Castro sitting and talking. He looked very bad. He was sweating and obviously bothered." (*The Miami Herald*, 29/10/04)

October 22: Fidel Castro will likely be off his feet for several weeks recovering from a fractured knee and arm, but experts said they don't expect the 78-year-old Cuban ruler to delegate any authority beyond ceremonial duties. Castro's determination to remain in control became abundantly clear in a lengthy letter he sent to "compatriots" and was read by radio and TV broadcasters and published in state-controlled newspapers. "From the moment of the fall, I have not stopped attending to the most important tasks that I am responsible for, in coordination with the other comrades," he wrote. "I'm recovering well and will not lose contact with you." (*The Miami Herald*, 22/10/04)

October 22: Rosa Elena Simeón, Cuba's minister of science, technology and environment, has died, state television reported. She was 61. Simeon died after a "grave and prolonged illness," state TV reported. She had suffered from cancer for several years. Simeon was a ranking member of Cuba's political elite, serving on the Communist Party's ruling Central Committee and on the Council of State, the island government's executive body. She also was a deputy in Cuba's National Assembly and sat on the national committee of the Federation of Cuban Women. Holding doctorates in medicine and veterinary sciences, Simeón had served as Cuba's Minister of Science, Technology and Environment since the cabinet post was created in 1994. Before that, she'd headed Cuba's Academy of Sciences since 1985. (*AP*, 23/10/04)

October 23: Shipwrecked Cuban boy Elian Gonzalez, who reached US shores and triggered an international custody battle, wished Fidel Castro a speedy recovery from a broken knee. "Dear Commander," as Castro is known, "I want you to get well and to take care of your sick knee," wrote Elian, now 10. "I liked your message to the people and my family (...) and we were happy to know that you are better," said the boy's letter, which appeared in the official Cuban

Communist Party newspaper Granma. "Get better soon. We love you very much." Elian and Castro have become something of a duo, celebrating birthdays and other events together. (*AFP*, 23/10/04)

October 25: An earthquake of 3.2 on the Richter scale was registered in Cuba's eastern region, 25 kilometers deep into the earth's crust. Experts from the Central Station of the National Seismography Service in Santiago de Cuba located the epicenter of the quake 74.40 degrees of West longitude and 20.13 of North latitude. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/10/04)

October 25: Fidel Castro threatened to imprison those who travel to Cuba carrying funds for the dissidents. "It could well be that one day they would be arrested here and sent to trial", said Castro during a long speech broadcast on Cuban radio and television about the new measures to end the circulation of US dollars on the island and to replace it with the Cuban "convertible peso". Castro said that the new measures would hold back money transfers for dissidents, whom the Cuban government calls "mercenaries paid by the United States". (*EFE*, 25/10/04)

October 25: Nestor Baguer, a state spy who posed as an independent journalist to gather information about the island's opponents for the Communist government, died at 83. Mr. Baguer gained international attention last year when the Cuban government revealed that he had been a state security agent who had long gathered information that helped put 75 dissidents -- many of them independent journalists -- behind bars. (*The Globe and Mail*, *AP*, 28/10/04)

October 28: The curtains of Havana's Gran Teatro went up as the 19th International Ballet Festival got underway in the Cuban capital as well as in other cities. The opening gala paid various tributes: from great 19th century romantic ballerina Maria Taglione, to renowned Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, to the 100th anniversary of the premier in Cuba of the ballet Coppelia with its famous pas de deux, and to great choreographer George Balanchine. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/10/04)

October 29: Cubans have been joining long queues to hand in their US dollars before a deadline making them officially worthless in two weeks' time. Banks and exchange kiosks were jammed as Cubans sought to sell their dollars, which have been legal tender there for more than a decade, for Cuban pesos. Some in the queues backed Fidel Castro's decision. Others said they were sorry to be giving up a hard currency. (*BBC*, 29/10/04)

October 29: The 12th World Congress of Comparative Education concluded in Havana with the participation of more than 1000 delegates from 85 countries. During the final day of the event, Randy Alonso, a member of the National Bureau of Cuba's Young Communist League (UJC), read a message sent by Fidel Castro to the participants in the meeting. "Only education can save the human race," wrote the Cuban leader in his message. "Educating means (...) if we don't become human beings in the most comprehensive sense of the word, our species will not survive," added the Cuban president. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/10/04)

Economy

October 1: A major Cuban government hotel chain temporarily closed at least 16 hotels across the island under measures to combat severe problems in the country's electrical system. The hotels will reopen in November, said Maria de los Angeles Font, lawyer for the Hotel Riviera, one among four hotels affected in the capital. "We are one of the highest consumers (of energy)," Font said in a telephone interview. "To not affect other sectors, this hotel is closing down." Guests were being moved to other hotels. The other Havana hotels that closed are the Neptuno, St. John's and Villa Los Pinos, according to information sent to travel operators by the Gran Caribe hotel chain. In Varadero, the Puntarena, Villa Cuba, Laurel-Tortuga and Cabañas del Sol hotels are closed for the month. A half-dozen other hotels in Varadero will operate at limited capacity. Hotels in Cayo Largo del Sur, Las Tunas, Trinidad and Santiago de Cuba are also affected, according to the information. (*Canadian Press*, 4/10/04)

October 3: Cuban authorities announced a daily six-hour blackout plan for Havana as one of the steps to be taken by the government to stem the island's serious electric crisis. Under the plan published in Juventud Rebelde official newspaper, the lights will go out in the capital at the same time every day, Monday through Friday. But blackout hours will be rotated among groups of Havana municipalities on weekends. The plan's objective is "to contribute to the organization of production, services and the family life of our people," the announcement said. The cuts are one of a set of measures announced by Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage to meet the island's serious power deficit following a breakdown at the island's largest thermoelectric plant in May that has caused unintended blackouts of up to 11 hours. Other government measures include the closing of 118 companies, the reduction of the workday by half an hour and the halting of various production plants. (*EFE*, 3/10/04)

October 4: The Cuban government has denied it owes US\$30 million to Indonesia because of a rice purchase in 1993 as reported by the State Logistics Agency (Bulog) to the House of Representatives (DPR). Cuban Ambassador to Indonesia Miguel Ramirez Ramos refuted the Bulog report at a meeting with the House leadership represented by Deputy Speaker AM Fatwa. The Bulog had reported to the House it was investigating the rice sale transaction with Cuba because there was no clarity about the payment, the House said in a statement. There were differences between the date and information possessed by the House and those by the Cuban government about the transaction, it said. (*Asia Pulse*, 4/10/04)

October 4: An energy crisis, hurricanes, increased controls on state businesses and a tighter U.S. embargo are taking a toll on the Cuban economy after a strong first semester, foreign and domestic experts said. "There had already been a noticeable decline in business activity by mid-year as managers balked at making decisions or waited for authorization from above. The energy crunch just makes matters worse," a foreign banker said. "The steel, mechanical, food processing and light industries are the sectors most affected," said a Cuban economist, who asked his name not be used. "Nickel plants are operating normally, the sugar harvest will not begin until January, and October is a very slow month for tourism when many hotels, for example the entire Cayo Largo resort, are closed anyway," he said. Tourism, up 10 percent through August, has suffered from an extremely active hurricane season and the bad publicity it has brought. High oil prices are also forcing tourists to reconsider travel plans and increasing the price of airline tickets, industry sources said. (*Reuters*, 4/10/04)

October 6: Spanish oil and gas company Repsol (YPF) will likely start offshore drilling in Cuba in a second exploratory well in 2006, despite finding non commercial deposits early this year, said a company executive. "We are going to collect seismic data and will likely commence drilling a second well in 2006", said Repsol Manager in Venezuela, Valentín Alvarez, to reporters. (*La Nueva Cuba*, 7/10/04)

October 10: The weekly Tribuna de La Habana reported that during the past week there were more power cuts than had been planned. "This was due to power generation shortages caused by some plants which went out of service unexpectedly, but the problems have now been resolved and the plan should be followed next week", said Tribuna de La Habana. (*AFP*, 10/10/04)

October 10: The daily Juventud Rebelde reported that during the first quarter of next year construction of the first power generation plant using wood chips will begin on the Isla de la Juventud. The news was released during the recently concluded Third Cuban Forestry Congress. According to Rolando Padrón, a specialist with the Cuba Forestry Research Institute, the plant will have a generation capacity between 3 and 5 megawatts, and the project is part of a comprehensive study in conjunction with the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). (*Cubanet*, 12/10/04)

October 12: Officials from Venezuelan aluminum reducer Venalum, a subsidiary of state heavy industry holding CVG, have met with representatives from Cuba's government to analyze a project to manufacture aluminum profiles on the island, Venezuela's government web site reported. Delegates from both governments also evaluated the possibility

of developing a coal-fuelled thermoelectric plant in Cuba. Venezuela would export the coal to Cuba in exchange for nickel. Another proposed project that came out of the meeting was building a stainless steel plant in Venezuela that would work with raw material from Cuba and be financed by Chinese investors. (*Business News*, 12/10/04)

October 12: Ernest Hemingway's favorite bars in Havana are under new management in a drive by Cuba's Communist government to increase control over its main cash cow, the tourist trade. The Tourism Ministry has directly taken over restaurants and other night-life spots, including Havana's famed Tropicana cabaret, that had been managed autonomously by state-run hotel groups, industry sources said. The move is part of a massive shake-up of Cuba's tourism companies aimed at wiping out middle-management corruption and maximizing income from the \$2 billion-a-year tourist trade for Fidel Castro's financially strapped government. "The Tourism Ministry is stripping hotel groups of their extra-hotel businesses and centralizing them under its own direction," said a Havana tourism official, who asked his name not be used. This follows centralization of retail stores and transport and car rental services, and the restructuring and merger of hotel groups begun in March. (*Reuters*, 12/10/04)

October 13: The Cuban socialist government, many experts say, is not corrupt, as President Bush alleged in a campaign speech. In fact, it's seen as the fifth most honest government in the Americas, behind Canada, the United States, Chile and Uruguay, according to Transparency International, a nongovernmental group that monitors corruption worldwide. But employee theft in Cuba is rampant, say many workers, whose average monthly wage is \$12. Pilfering is especially common at cafeterias, refreshment stands and other spots selling basic necessities, workers say. So the government requires employees to inventory those products twice a day. "It's a lot of work," said Pavel Bermudez, who was busy counting candies at the thatched-roof stand where he works east of Havana. "But we have no choice." Government officials declined to comment. They have said employee theft is an isolated, yet growing problem. And they have severely punished officials caught enriching themselves. (*The Dallas Morning News*, 13/10/04)

October 15: Cuba's Sugar Ministry postponed September's final crop estimate through the end of October as drought continued in key sugar-producing provinces, industry sources said. "There is so little cane and it is so stunted and thin that they decided to wait a month in hopes rain would improve the estimate a bit," an industry source said. The estimate is used to plan the harvest and exports. An initial estimate in August came in at less than two million tonnes of raw sugar, according to industry sources. "Cuban sugar traders have been told to expect no more than 1.5 million tonnes to sell," a Cuban economist, who wished to remain anonymous, said. "The drought worsened in September," the official daily Granma reported. "September precipitation was well below normal levels in the central and eastern regions." Granma reported key sugar-producing provinces such as Matanzas, Las Tunas, Villa Clara and Camaguey received 51 percent, 45 percent, 46 percent and 59 percent of normal rainfall, respectively, on the heel of a year or more of exceptionally dry weather. From April 2003 through May 2004 rainfall in parts of central and eastern Cuba was 400 millimeters (16 inches) short of the norm, the government said. (*Reuters*, 15/10/04)

October 15: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage convoked the heads of food state markets in the capital and called them to improve food supplies for the population, in view of the deficient supply of agricultural products. Cuban newspaper Granma published a note saying Lage met the presidents of the Popular Councils (local government bodies), managers of state agricultural markets and provincial officials to analyze the situation in the sector. "We are in a difficult period, but we exhort you to stop hearing justifications and demand supply in the markets," Lage stated. Granma said the causes alleged for bad supply were controlled prices, compared to those based on supply and demand, and the delay of supplies. The offer situation was particularly tense in the month of September, after the course of Hurricane Charley, so it was necessary to establish weekly meetings among municipal authorities and market managers. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/10/04)

October 18: Cuba's Agriculture Ministry (MINAGRI) will, this year, invest over 71 million Cuban pesos and adopt measures to improve the environment. Specialists explained that the measures consist of purchasing ecologically safe technology and fertilizers for coffee and tobacco plantations. Other measures include expanding forests from the

current 23.4 percent to 25 percent of the national territory. The Agriculture Ministry also plans to work out definitive solutions for the treatment of the saline soils in eastern Guantanamo province. In addition, some MINAGRI institutions are adapting environmentally safe procedures like 36 coffee grain processors that consume one liter of water per kilogram of processed grain, while planning to train specialized personnel. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/10/04)

October 18: The Cuban government will guarantee jobs for young people, particularly those who perform military service, are handicapped or are coming out of jail, state-run media reported. "In a society like ours it is inconceivable that there is even a single young person not studying or working," Alfredo Morales Cartaya, the socialist government's labor and social security minister, said. The announcement to strengthen the job market comes the same month officials halted new licenses for some types of self-employment, from magician to masseur to restaurateur, as the government steadily reasserts control over the economy. (*AP*, 19/10/04)

October 24: The Cuban government announced that it will keep in place the energy conservation measures it recently adopted despite the fact that the generator whose major breakdown provoked an energy crisis last May has come back on line after repairs. Union Electrica said in a statement that the Guiteras plant is still in its "testing and adjustment phase," but the firm emphasized that it is essential that some industries that had to be halted return to their activities again. However, the company said "that makes it necessary to maintain a blackout program" that establishes during which 30 hours of the week residential electrical service will be curtailed. The program announced for next week includes blackouts of up to five hours a day in Havana, spread over morning, afternoon and evening hours. However, Union Electric said that in the coming weeks it will continue to halt a group of generating units in a staggered fashion, so that regular maintenance work can be done on them to assure that, in the future, electrical services will run smoothly at all plants. (*AFP*, 25/10/04)

October 24: The Mexican National Chamber of Manufacturers (CANACINTRA) has announced it will open an office in Havana to promote the business activities of Mexican entrepreneurs in Cuba. The President of the Mexico Chapter of the Mexico-Cuba Bilateral Business Forum, Yeidckol Polevnsky, said that the offices will be inaugurated during the XXII International Havana Trade Fair. She also indicated that at the Fair Mexican businessmen as well as members of the Legislature and state governors are expected to participate to further business opportunities in Cuba. (*Notimex*, 24/10/04)

October 25: Cuba announced that US dollars will no longer be accepted at businesses and stores on the communist island starting next month, in a move that will radically change the way cash transactions have been done over the past decade. Cuba's national currency, the peso, cannot be used with international partners. "Beginning on November 8, the convertible peso will begin to circulate in substitution of the dollar throughout the national territory," Fidel Castro said in a written message read by his chief aide, Carlos Valenciaga. In the message, Castro asked Cubans to tell relatives living abroad to send them money in other foreign currencies such as euros, British pounds, Canadian dollars, or Swiss francs. The move announced was likely to hurt mostly Cubans who receive American dollars from relatives in the United States. Cubans and others on the island can still hold dollars in unlimited quantities and can change them into pesos before the new policy takes effect. But they will have to pay a 10 per cent charge to exchange dollars after November 8. (*AP*, 25/10/04)

October 26: Fidel Castro's move to discourage the dollar's use could make travel to Cuba, and trade with it, a lot trickier. But Canadian tour operators said wider use of the loonie could eventually make travel to Cuba simpler, if the Canadian dollar gains acceptance. "In the beginning, it's going to be cumbersome because people aren't used to it," said Arnold August, president of Montreal-based Voyage Culture Cuba, which sent nearly 1,400 Canadians to Cuba on educational trips last winter. "But once [Cubans] get use to exchanging Canadian dollars, it will be much better." Mr. August said Cuban tourism officials have assured him Canadian dollars will soon be readily convertible into pesos at most banks and hotels. André Lemay, a spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa, predicted the decision would have little impact for Canadian tourists, but said the 10-per-cent commission

could make doing business more expensive. Canadian embassy officials plan to meet representatives of Cuba's central bank in Havana to discuss how the new regime will affect financial dealings with Canada. Officials of Toronto-based Sherritt International Corp., one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba, said they believe the new rules will have little or no impact on the company's energy and mining businesses. (*The Globe and Mail*, 26/10/04)

October 26: The Minister President of the Cuban Central Bank BCC, Francisco Soberón, said the country does not expect adverse responses, if the reaction of the 17 executives of foreign banks working in Cuba is taken into account, after they learned about the new measures about business transactions in US dollars. Soberón explained that the decree 80/2004 approved by the BCC and announced by Fidel Castro will be positive for tourism growth. The Europeans will not have to worry about changing their currency into US dollars anymore; they will be able to change it into Cuban Convertible Pesos, the currency that will be circulating in Cuba when the new law comes into effect in two weeks, as dollars will no longer be accepted in shops and businesses. The minister said this initiative will guarantee a major financial sovereignty to the country as the island will be able to control the monetary flow and will have better possibilities to plan the money issued. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/10/04)

October 27: Fidel Castro said widespread use of the currency of US dollars would be halted to guarantee Cuba's economic independence. However, the move will also have an impact on many Canadians who spend their winter vacations on Cuba's white, sandy beaches. Although euros are accepted in a few resorts, the US dollar has been the primary currency demanded at hotels and other tourist installations. Vancouver-based travel agent Philip Beck of Carlson Wagonlit said he's counselling his Cuba-bound clients to avoid taking US dollars to the Caribbean country. "US dollars used to be on par with Cuba's convertible peso, but now I would encourage British Columbia travellers to take Canadian dollars. "It's as simple as that. There's no extra fee that way." (*The Province*, 27/10/04)

October 27: Cuban authorities were considering wider use of the European Union's euro as Cuba began rebuilding the hard currency base built mostly on US dollars for more than a decade. Foreign tourists were advised to leave American money at home and bring other foreign currencies instead. Since the government decided to replace the US dollar with the local Cuban convertible peso beginning November 8, authorities "have been studying coordinating with Cuba's Central Bank to extend the acceptance of the euro in other areas of the country," Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said. "It is recommended that after that date that visitors to the country don't carry United States dollars," Marrero told a news conference. He said visitors could exchange euros, Canadian dollars, British sterling pounds or Swiss francs into convertible pesos after arriving in Cuba. The euro is accepted already at several coastal resorts on this Caribbean island. (*AP*, 28/10/04)

October 27: Canadian PEBERCAN Inc. announced an intensification of its oil exploration and development project within Bloc 7, a concession located between Havana and Matanzas on the north coast of the Republic of Cuba. At present, three drilling rigs are active in this zone and will remain active until the end of 2004. PEBERCAN Inc. is involved in the exploration, development and operation of oil reserves in the Republic of Cuba. Its mining domain includes five concessions covering 6,155 km², including Block 7, the only concession operated to date. PEBERCAN sells all of its production to the Cuban government. (*Canada News Wire*, 27/10/04)

October 28: President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva promised to help Fidel Castro to handle a series of crises in electrical energy supply that have been affecting the economy and causing long blackouts in Cuba. The help was confirmed by Brazilian Mines and Energy minister, Dilma Rousseff, who will present a proposal to that end at a meeting in Venezuela with other energy ministers of the Southern Hemisphere. Rousseff said that the request was made by the Cuban government, but there still is no project defined for the help. (*Gazeta Mercantil Online*, 28/10/04)

October 28: Cuban Minister of Industry Javier Leon said in Havana that Cuba is keen on expansion of cooperation between Tehran and Havana in all industrial fields. In a meeting with the Iranian ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrissian, Leon said that a Cuban delegation will visit the electricity facilities of Iran soon. He added that exchange of

expert delegations is beneficial for identifying capacities for further bilateral cooperation. An Iranian delegation will also visit Havana for cooperation in engineering and technical knowhow in the oil industry. Edrissian also met the head of Cuban Radio and TV network Ernesto Lopez. (*BBC*, 28/10/04)

Exile Community

October 7: A Cuban exile who helped lead a group that tried for decades to overthrow Cuban President Fidel Castro has died. He was 88. Andres Nazario Sargen, who helped lead the paramilitary group Alpha 66, died of colon cancer, said his daughter, Olguita Nazario. During the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, Andres Nazario worked with guerrillas against Batista's dictatorship operating independently of Castro's rebel movement. When Castro came to power on January 1, 1959, Nazario and other guerrilla leaders had faced execution. They left for Miami in 1961 and joined with other Cuban exiles to form Alpha 66 - named for its 66 original members. The group is the oldest anti-Castro group in Miami and claims to have staged clandestine operations in Cuba to overthrow Castro. It still advocates an armed civil uprising in Cuba. Nazario was born in the town of Zaza del Medio in central Cuba. In the 40's, he and his brother also helped found the Orthodox Party, a reformist party that fought corruption. (*AP, The Globe and Mail*, 7/10/04)

October 10: At a special meeting of the Executive Council of Alpha 66, former political prisoner Ernesto Díaz Rodríguez was elected as new Secretary General and Osiel González as Deputy Secretary General. (*MUCD Press Release*, 12/10/04)

Foreign Affairs

October 1: Cuban political activist, Reynaldo García Llerena, denounced that two Cuban political activists held at the Nassau Refugee Detention Center, in Bahamas, were harshly beaten by prison guards. René Mendoza and Jorge Luis Conde, two Cuban refugees held at the Center, were threatened by two prison guards, who removed their pistols, aiming at their heads and shouting, "We are going to kill you!" After brutally beating them in front of other refugees, they were taken into isolation. When asked what was their reason for beating those refugees, they replied that, "Here the guards do not need a reason to beat up refugees", added García Llerena. Citizens Against Human Rights Abuse (CAHRA) denounced these abuses and requested all Cuban American organizations do the same. (*Puente Informativo*, 4/10/04)

October 2: Fidel Castro led celebrations in Havana for the 55th anniversary of the creation of the People's Republic of China, in a gala attended by the Chinese Ambassador and top Cuban officials and personalities. The Vice President of the Cuban Council of State Esteban Lazo Hernández opened the ceremony, held in a downtown Havana theatre, declaring that "Cuba and China will remain united under the flag of socialism." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/10/04)

October 2: More than 800 tonnes of construction materials, machinery and heavy equipment were sent to Cuba from Venezuela as donation in the wake of the damages caused by hurricanes Charley and Ivan on the island. The aid came aboard the "Los Llanos 64" vessel, which had been seen off the "La Guaira" port by Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez. (*AFP*, 2/10/04)

October 2: Fidel Castro has called for Latin American unity as a way for the region to defend itself and guarantee its independence. "If Europe has united after four or five centuries of fighting and speaking very different languages, what can the Latin American and Caribbean peoples do? Remain in pieces, in the midst of huge powers, in the midst of huge

communities?" Castro asked. "Unite. And that is the idea of the process being carried out today by the Bolivarian people in the broadest and most modern sense of the word, and that is something that is humane, political and intelligent," Castro said as he received Venezuelan humanitarian aid that arrived in Cuba for victims of the recent hurricanes. (*EFE*, 2/10/04)

October 5: The chairman of Slovakia's parliament sent a protest letter to Cuba's ambassador, voicing concern over the treatment of a Cuban political prisoner. In his letter, Pavol Hrusovsky called on Cuban officials to provide better and more decent treatment to Luis Enrique Ferrer Garcia, whom he said was brutally beaten, psychologically tortured and went on a hunger strike last week. "I voice my serious concern," Hrusovsky said. He said his knowledge of the case came from dissident, Oswaldo Paya, and was contrary to Cuba's statements to the international community that it adheres to global human rights conventions. [[Urgent appeal by Payá Sardiñas](#)] (*AP*, 5/10/04)

October 5: Cuba is still investigating what to do with a major Colombian drug lord arrested on this Caribbean island while traveling on a false passport this summer, Cuba's top anti-drug official said. Authorities have determined, however, that the drug lord was "in transit" in Cuba and didn't have any intention of developing a local drug market here, General Jesus Becerra, chief of Cuba's anti-narcotics agency, told reporters. Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante, an alleged leader of Colombia's Norte del Valle drug cartel, was arrested in Havana in July. He simply "chose (Cuba) as a country to pass through," Becerra said. "He is detained, he has a defense lawyer, he enjoys the rights provided by our constitution," Becerra added. "We are working (on the case)." (*AP*, 5/10/04)

October 5: Dissident leader Oswaldo Payá, awarded by the Andrei Sajarov Foundation in 2002, requested from the European Union not to change its position towards Cuba. Payá said that to change the Common Position on human rights adopted by the EU towards the island means to "abandon" the Cuban people. "The Common Position should be strengthened, if the Europeans want to be coherent with the values they defend for their continent", added Payá. (*AFP*, 5/10/04)

October 5: Venezuela will cooperate with Cuba and Spain to provide humanitarian aid for the people of the Western Sahara, where a separatist movement is seeking independence from Morocco, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jesus Perez said. He told the press the assistance would form part of a cooperation agreement signed in Caracas between Venezuela's government and a delegation of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, or SADR, created in 1976. "Venezuela and Cuba will join forces to give humanitarian aid to the Saharan Republic (...) Spain, too," Perez said. (*Reuters*, 5/10/04)

October 6: EU Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner-designate Louis Michel urged Cuban authorities to make "gestures" toward resuming the political dialogue with the European Union. "The whole world knows that I'm in favor of keeping open terms for a political dialogue. That's why I think it would be useful and desirable for Cuba to make some moves to allow this dialogue to reopen," Michel told the press following a presentation before the EU development committee. (*EFE*, 6/10/04)

October 6: During a telephone conversation with Havana, organized by the Madrid based Platform "Cuba Democracia Ya", Cuban dissidents expressed their concern about the Spanish government attempts to change the European Union's position on Cuba. Juan Carlos González Leiva, Cuban oppositionist currently under home arrest, said that many lives could be at risk if Europe lifts diplomatic sanctions against Havana. Leiva expressed his doubts on the potential release of all political prisoners by the Cuban government, as a response to a request by the Spanish government. Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Movimiento Cristiano Liberación and main promoter of the Varela Project, expressed the same concerns in a public letter issued in Havana. (*Europa Press*, 6/10/04)

October 6: Eduardo Zaplana, Spokesperson of the Popular Parliamentary Group in the Spanish Congress, urged the Government to reject the "blackmail" from Fidel Castro's government and to invite Cuban dissidents to the National

Day celebrations at the Spanish Embassy in Havana on October 12. Otherwise, representatives of the Popular Party would visit Cuba to meet the dissidents, said Zaplana in Congress. Zaplana accused Foreign Minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, of attempting to change the European Union common position "unilaterally". (*Europa Press*, 6/10/04)

October 6: The latest round of talks between the heads of departments of the foreign ministries of Ukraine and Cuba wound up in Havana. While discussing Ukrainian Cuban relations, representatives from both nations praised the ongoing dialogue between the countries and the gradual development of trade and economic cooperation, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's press service has reported. (*Interfax*, 6/10/04)

October 7: Re-establishing bilateral relations in all areas is the objective of the official visit to Bulgaria by Vice-President of the Cuban National Assembly of the People's Power, Jaime Crombet. Our mission is not only to find common interests to enhance commercial relations, but to increase relations in all possible areas including social issues, culture, sports, health and education," said Crombet to the press. (*EFE*, 7/10/04)

October 7: Palestinian Vice-President, Tassyr Quba, arrived in Cuba on an official visit during which he'll relay a message from Palestinian Leader, Yasser Arafat, to Fidel Castro, reported the official daily "Granma". The message explains the current political situation in Palestine, and Israel's "genocide" against the Palestinian people with backing from the U.S., said Quba to Granma. (*AFP*, 7/10/04)

October 7: Seychelles Foreign Minister Emile Patrick Jeremie Bonnelame said that his country opposes Washington's blockade against Cuba. The African leader, who is on an official visit to the island, said that he is in Cuba at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Pérez Roque. Cooperation between Cuba and Seychelles began in 1980. Over 230 students from Seychelles have graduated from Cuba and the island has sent over 80 people to work in areas like health and sports in that country. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/10/04)

October 7: Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jesús Arnaldo Pérez announced in Havana that his country and Cuba are slated to sign cooperation agreements in the fight against drug trafficking. The Venezuelan official told the press that different projects have shown improvements, such as the granting of visas and the treatment of prisoners from both countries. He added that new agreements will be signed during a meeting between foreign ministries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/10/04)

October 8: The Spanish First Vice-President, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, said that members of the dissidence would be invited to attend a reception hosted by the Spanish Embassy in Havana on the occasion of Spain's National Day on October 12. Fernández de la Vega also indicated the need to look for alternatives to the EU's common position on Cuba since the current policy is not effective. (*EFE*, 8/10/04)

October 9: Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Jesús Arnaldo Pérez, concluded an official visit to the island after meeting with Fidel Castro. "We talked about the situation in our country, international issues, new cooperation projects, the *Milagros Mission*, the contributions of the Cuban government, people and doctors, and the progress of the Cuba-Venezuela cooperation agreement", said the diplomat. (*EFE*, 9/10/04)

October 11: Cuba's Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, began a visit to the People's Republic of China. The Cuban official will meet local authorities and participate in the Seventh Annual Ministers Meeting of the International Cultural Policies Network. The gathering will focus on strategies for the preservation of the cultural diversity of mankind and participants will propose and analyze initiatives aimed at protecting and developing traditional cultures. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/10/04)

October 11: Lawmakers from Mexico's ruling conservative National Action Party invited leading Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya to address Congress about his "Varela Project," a bid to democratize the Communist-ruled island. Payá,

head of the Christian Liberation Movement and winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for human rights, said he had received the invitation from a group of Mexican lawmakers who attended a meeting about Cuba held in Prague in mid-September. "I accept that invitation, but it is the Cuban government who must say whether it will let me go or not (...) though it is my right," Paya said in a phone call to Mexican reporters. Paya said that if he is allowed to visit the Mexican lower house, he will speak about his campaign for a peaceful change toward democracy in Cuba through initiatives like the Varela Project. (*EFE*, 11/10/04)

October 12: Cuba lamented the passing of prominent Haitian intellectual and politician Gerard Pierre-Charles, who died of heart failure in Havana over the weekend. The Communist Party daily *Granma* called Pierre-Charles "a tenacious fighter" for the well-being of his Haitian countrymen and a "defender of the most just causes of the Latin American and Caribbean people." With his death, the region loses "one of the most relevant intellectual and political figures" and Cuba loses a "loyal friend," *Granma* said. (*CNN*, 12/10/04)

October 12: Cuisine Canada's successful Northern Bounty VI Conference ended with the formal announcement of the first Cooks' Tour of Cuba, in which Canadian culinary professionals will visit the farms, markets and cities of Cuba to meet local farmers and chefs. They will learn traditional Cuban cuisines first hand and will gain an understanding about how Cuba has managed to attain "an abundant supply of fresh, local, high quality, and sustainably produced foods for both rural and urban populations". This will be followed by an exchange visit of Cuban chefs to Canada, hosted by Cuisine Canada members throughout the country. (*Press Release*, 12/10/04)

October 12: Spain's new envoy to Cuba has criticized the European Union's policy toward the island and said Madrid would work to thaw relations with President Fidel Castro's Communist government. Ambassador Carlos Alonso Zaldivar indicated that Spain would not break with the EU's common position on Cuba, which is based on human rights concerns. "Unfortunately, the current situation of relations between Cuba and Spain, and between Cuba and the European Union, is profoundly unsatisfactory," Zaldivar said in a speech at a diplomatic reception celebrating Spain's national day. "We want to overcome the present situation, but we want to do that in agreement with the rest of the EU," he said. (*Reuters*, 12/10/04)

October 12: The Cuban dissidents who attended the diplomatic reception at the Spanish embassy in Havana were very upset with the Ambassador's speech during the event. At the diplomatic reception celebrating Spain's national day, Carlos Alonso Zaldivar said Spain was working to improve relations with Cuba's government. About 20 dissidents and relatives of political prisoners attended the event. After the Spanish Ambassador's comments, many of them said they respected Spain's position but that they hoped the European Union would continue to unwaveringly support the island's opposition. Elizardo Sanchez, an activist at the event who heads the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation, said the Spaniards face "an arduous task" ahead, as the Cuban government is not likely to be receptive to their requests, he said. Dissidents Martha Beatriz Roque and Oswaldo Paya left the event after the Spanish Ambassador said his country would thaw relations with Fidel Castro's communist government. Paya told the press it was a gesture to show his displeasure about the Spanish position. Vladimiro Roca, who also attended the event, issued a letter addressed to the president of the Spanish government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, requesting from Spain to abstain from reestablishing normal relations with Havana while political prisoners remain in jail. (*Reuters, AP, Netfor Cuba, VOA*, 13/10/04).

October 12: The Cuban dentistry scheme is just one element of the deepening social, economic and political bilateral relationship between the governments of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez. More than 17,000 Cuban medics, plus thousands of literacy teachers, sports trainers and security advisers are operating in Venezuela, the largest overseas deployment of Cuban professionals since the country's Angola expedition in the 1970s. For the more paranoid opponents of Mr Chávez, such activities are alarming evidence that the militaristic populist is bent on imposing the Cuban communist revolutionary blueprint on democratic Venezuela. In contrast to the Cuban-backed insurgency that was quashed in the 1960s, today aircraft-loads of Cubans receive red-carpet treatment as they disembark at Caracas

international airport at the presidential exit. The depth of the relationship is evident. Cuba's ambassador to Caracas, Germán Sánchez Otero, is dubbed "el vice-presidente" by other diplomats because of his political activism. (*Financial Times*, 12/10/04)

October 13: Vladimiro Roca, the president of the illegal Cuban Social Democrat Party, said that the speech by Don Carlos Alonso Zaldívar, the Spanish ambassador to Havana, during a diplomatic reception celebrating Spain's National Day, was "a remembrance of the old and mistaken policies" between "the motherland and the people of the faithful island of Cuba". According to Roca, the Spanish government considers "a failed policy to invite the Cuban dissidence to their diplomatic activities, but it had no choice but to proceed with the invitations." "This disrespectful speech in front of the Cuban tragedy, brought forth the feared reality that the Spanish government seems willing to accept the blackmail of the oldest and merciless dictatorship this hemisphere has suffered in all of its history". Roca had addressed a letter to the president of the Spanish government, José L. Rodríguez Zapatero, complaining of a potential change in Spain's position with regards to the EU's diplomatic sanctions towards Cuba. [[Carta a Rodríguez Zapatero](#)] (*Puente Informativo*, 13/10/04)

October 13: An urgent call was made by Cuban refugees detainee at the Nassau Refugee Detention Center to stop the beatings and abuse against Cubans and Haitians held in that place. In a document addressed to Amnesty Internacional, Cuban political refugees David Martinez, Frank Garcia Llerena and Jesus Montes de Oca denounce lack of medical attention, proper hygiene, spoiled food, merciless beatings, lack of spiritual and moral support, the spreading of tuberculosis, and other serious problems. "Please visit the camp (...) as soon as possible (...), demand medical attention and humane treatment for the refugees". "We are very concerned and appalled by this barbaric conduct and trust those responsible for this cruelty will be held accountable", the document said. (*Netfor Cuba*, 13/10/04)

October 13: A Chinese parliamentary delegation is currently visiting Cuba. Speaking with reporters upon the delegation's arrival in Havana, Lilian Zhu said she is very pleased to visit Cuba for the first time. Zhu is a member of the Permanent Committee and chairperson of the Education, Science, Culture and Health Commission of the People's National Assembly. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/10/04)

October 15: Speaking in Hungary, the President of the Spanish Government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, played down an incident in Havana when a group of Cuban dissidents decided to leave a function in protest against a speech by the Spanish Ambassador in Cuba, calling it a "momentary discrepancy" which does not affect his country's policy. Zapatero defended his policy to "firmly demand" changes in Cuba while seeking a softening of the European Union's sanctions against the island. (*AFP*, 15/10/04)

October 15: Cuba's communist government barred three European lawmakers from entering the country on a visit to support Cuban dissidents, a foreign ministry statement said. Deputy Jorge Moragas, of Spain's opposition Popular Party, and Dutch legislators Boris Dittrich and Kathleen Ferrier were told to reboard their Air France flight and go back to Paris when they arrived in Havana. Moragas, an opposition party member who led the trip, had planned to meet opponents of Fidel Castro in a show of support after the new Spanish government announced it would try to mend relations between the European Union and Cuba. "The publicly declared objectives of his visit are a flagrant violation of our sovereignty," the ministry said. "This is a gross political provocation for Cuba." The Cuban statement said Mr Moragas was illegally entering Cuba on a tourist visa. [[Información del MINREX](#)] (AP, EFE, BBC, 15/10/04)

October 16: Spain summoned Cuban ambassador Isabel Allende to protest the removal of deputy Jorge Moragas, external relations spokesman of the conservative opposition Popular Party. "The Spanish government deems it unacceptable that Cuban authorities refused entry to Jorge Moragas, deputy of the Popular Party, refusing him access to consular officials in Havana," a foreign ministry statement said. Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said the expulsion was "unacceptable", while urging the Popular Party to back Madrid's attempts to establish "dialogue with

the Cuban authorities but, above all, deepen democracy with respect for human rights and individual freedoms." [\[Comunicado no. 9546\]](#) (AFP, 16/10/04)

October 16: The Dutch government expressed outrage after two Dutch deputies were arrested and deported from Havana. A Dutch government spokeswoman said Cuba's envoy to the Netherlands would be summoned to explain why Boris Dittrich, head of the Liberal-Democrat group in the Dutch parliament, and Christian Democrat Kathleen Ferrier, were expelled. Dittrich's spokeswoman said the lawmaker had kept her informed of his situation via SMS text messages from his detention cell. "I am furious. I have never experienced anything like this," Dittrich said. Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot was also outraged by the incident. The Dutch ambassador in Cuba was also demanding an explanation from the Cuban government. Dittrich, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, said he would press Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot to cut the EU's diplomatic relations with Cuba to a strict minimum. (AFP, ANP, 16/10/04)

October 16: Cuban dissident leaders condemned the arrest and deportation of one Spanish and two Dutch lawmakers. They said the incident illustrated the ruthlessness of Fidel Castro's regime. "This illustrates the intransigence of the Cuban government and shows that it will never change its position," said Marta Beatriz Roque, director of the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society. "This should serve as the first lesson for the Zapatero government of what the Cuban regime is capable of," said Roque, who was among 75 dissidents jailed last year in a government crackdown but was freed on health grounds. "It is infantile to think that you can provoke a change of position" through dialogue with Fidel Castro's regime, she said. Another leading Cuban dissident, Vladimiro Roca, took the same view: "How can the Rodriguez Zapatero government try to recreate a relationship with Cuba under these conditions?" (AFP, EFE, 16/10/04)

October 17: The revolution in Cuba "was neither democratic" nor is it communist today, "but an ordinary state capitalism called 'fidelism', said the grandson of former guerrilla fighter Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Canek Sánchez Guevara. In a letter and "self-interview" published by the Mexican weekly "Proceso", Canek harshly criticized Fidel Castro's "messianism" and the change of course of the revolution, going from "the young revolutionary to the old tyrant" who "falsified" an ideal. "The revolution created a bourgeoisie, and a repressive machinery willing to defend it against its own people as well as a bureaucracy that would move it away from it. But most of all, it was anti-democratic because of the religious messianism of its leader", he said. (EFE, 17/10/04)

October 18: Cuba's Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas is participating in the 10th Meeting of Council Ministers from Latin America's Integration Association, ALADI, in Montevideo, Uruguay. The ministers' regional organization will update cooperation agreements among its member nations and the role of the Association in strengthening ties leading to Latin American Unity. The agenda also includes studying the basis for free trade among the 12 member nations whose economies represent close to 90 percent of the region's economic growth. Other issues for discussion are the MERCOSUR accord and naming Uruguayan Foreign Minister Didier Operti as ALADI's new general secretary until 2007. The Latin American Integration Association is comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay and Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 18/10/04)

October 18: Three days after it expelled three European politicians, communist-run Cuba said the European Union's policy of pressing it over human rights was destined to failure. "Relations are at a dead-end. Cuba will not give in to pressure. If there is no change, this could go on for 1,000 years," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said at a reception in Havana for the leader of Belgium's Flemish Socialist Party. Perez Roque said Spain was on a "sensible" track to restore political dialogue, which would benefit EU interests. (*Reuters*, 18/10/04)

October 18: Spain called on Cuba to release all political prisoners in the Socialist government's firmest response yet to Havana's decision to bar a Spanish politician from entering the country to meet with dissidents. The diplomatic flap came amid Spanish efforts to ease tough European Union policy toward Fidel Castro. "Cuba should free its political

prisoners," Deputy Prime Minister Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega told the press. "The Cuban government has to make moves," she said. (*AP*, 18/10/04)

October 18: Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, whose Socialist government came under attack for its efforts to foster dialogue with Havana, said in a letter to supporters of a high-profile Cuban political prisoner that his aim is to improve the lives of residents of the Communist-ruled island. Zapatero replied to an October 13 letter from a group of intellectuals asking the Spanish premier to intercede with Cuban authorities to obtain the release of jailed Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero. "My government's principal objective is to improve the living conditions of the Cuban people and to achieve in that country - so close historically, culturally and people-wise to Spain - that the most basic rights and freedoms be guaranteed, an objective on which we won't give up and which is still in line with the dialogue we maintain with Cuban authorities," Zapatero said. "I fully concur with you that an important step in that direction - and my government has expressed this to Cuban authorities - would be the release from prison of Raúl Rivero," he said. (*EFE*, 18/10/04)

October 19: The first meeting of the ministerial top-official group for South-South Cooperation concluded in Havana, with a cooperation agreement among Latin American and Caribbean nations, after a two-day discussion. The agreement reached by representatives of 11 nations refers to the ways of developing cooperation for solving regional common economic, social, and environmental problems. Cuba proposed five issues, in which it can collaborate with Latin American and Caribbean countries within the framework of South-South cooperation. Cuban CITMA (Science, Technology and Environment Ministry) Vice Minister Jose Diaz Duque said the issues are integrated management of catchment areas and protection of aquifer areas in the Caribbean islands, control of soil degradation and regional desertification process, and Dealing with natural disasters. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/10/04)

October 19: Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been asked informally to help mediate with Fidel Castro in the case of a Cuban doctor banned from leaving the island for Argentina, according to one Buenos Aires daily. Argentine Foreign Relations Minister Rafael Bielsa Bielsa asked Gabo (Garcia Marquez' nickname) to intercede before Fidel Castro in order to allow Cuban neurosurgeon Hilda Molina Morejón to leave the island and be reunited with her son, who has been living in Argentina for the past 10 years. The Nobel laureate said that he would do what he could after studying the case. (*Financial Times*, 19/10/04)

October 19: Senior foreign ministry officials from EU member states met in Brussels, to discuss softening the bloc's stance toward Cuba. The talks were called by Spain, which believes that the EU should adopt a softer line towards the Cuban regime of Fidel Castro. The Spanish government believes that only an increase in dialogue will help to improve the human rights issues in Cuba. The officials agreed to request reports from their respective ambassadors in Cuba on the current situation there. These reports will be the basis for discussion during the next meeting, taking place 16 November. Britain, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden are reported to be against softening EU pressure on the Cuban regime. (*EUObserver*, *BBC*, 19/10/04)

October 19: The Standing Committee of the Uruguayan Parliament was called to hear a presentation by National Representative Jaime Mario Trobo about the situation of political prisoners in Cuba. However, the presentation was cancelled after representatives and senators of the leftist "Frente Amplio" hurriedly left the room. (*ProCuba Libre*, 19/10/04)

October 20: Amnesty International has opened an investigation on recent allegations of torture, beatings and other abuses against Cuban and Haitian citizens who are also allegedly denied medical attention at a detention centre in the Bahamas. According to human rights investigators, the detainees refer to the Carmichael Detention Center in Nassau as a "hell hole" of brutality lacking attention to basic needs. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/10/04)

October 20: Cuban teachers are working with Peruvian educational officials in the district of El Agostino, located on the outskirts of Lima, the Peruvian capital. The crusade to fight illiteracy in Peru is being supported by the Havana-based Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogical Institute (IPLAC). The initiative, expected to benefit some 5000 people who cannot read or write, was agreed upon by Cuban and Peruvian educators and recently ratified with the signing of an agreement. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/10/04)

October 20: More than 450 Cubans are on the payrolls of South African government departments including housing, health, and water affairs and forestry. Most of them (at least 339) work as doctors. Others are architects, engineers and technicians. The statistics are found in a report released by the Public Service Commission on the appointment of professional Cubans in the public service. The query arose in a question asked in parliament by Freedom Front Plus Member of Parliament Pieter Groenewald. The report makes clear, however, that the numbers could be higher. "We request that the government put a stop to this practice and start employing South Africans whose qualifications are accepted by the South African Qualifications Authority," Groenewald said. (*Cape Argus*, 20/10/04)

October 20: Clashing points of view over policy toward Cuba produced a heated exchange in Spain's parliament, with conservatives saying Madrid is coddling a dictator and the incumbent Socialists defending their actions. Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said the government had immediately condemned Cuba's "unacceptable behavior" toward a Spanish legislator it expelled. He also denied the administration is sympathetic to Fidel Castro, as the conservative Popular Party maintains. On the house floor, PP spokesman Eduardo Zaplana said that of all the reactions to PP lawmaker Jorge Moragas's expulsion from Havana, those of Spain's Socialist government "were the most sympathetic to the dictatorship" of Castro. Zaplana compared those responses with the reactions of the rest of the European Union countries, which, he said, had "harshly" criticized the incident, leaving "the Spanish government isolated in its strategy." (*EFE*, 20/10/04)

October 21: Cuba will offer Laos all the support it needs in the sports area, Humberto Rodriguez, president of the Sports Institute of Cuba, said in Havana. In a meeting with Rodriguez, Phounthon Seng Akon, visiting head of the Laos Olympic Committee, expressed his interest to extend collaboration from boxing to other disciplines like volleyball, gymnastics and athletics. (*Xinhuanet*, 21/1/04)

October 21: The Papal Nuncio in Havana, Luigi Bonazzi, wished Fidel Castro a speedy recovery from the two fractures he suffered as a result of a fall. "We wish Fidel Castro a speedy recovery and express to him our regards", said the Vatican representative. The statement was made in the presence of Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega, dignitaries of the Catholic Church, members of the diplomatic corps and officials from the Religious Affairs Section of Cuba's Communist Party (PCC). (*AFP*, 21/10/04)

October 21: Loyola de Palacio, Vice-President of the European Commission, was pessimistic about the prospects for democracy and freedom in Cuba and suggested Fidel Castro's passing as the only solution. "We hope Castro dies as soon as possible. I don't mean killed, but dead, because I doubt there will be any change while he lives," she said. (*El Mundo*, 21/10/04)

October 22: Spain called on the European Union to help Cuba negotiate entry into the Cotonou Agreement, an EU trade and development aid pact with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) developing countries. "Cuba would be better as part of the Cotonou Agreement than under the EU's non-negotiated, unilateral common policy of sanctions, said Enrique Viguera, chief coordinator for European affairs at the Spanish foreign ministry. By allowing Cuba to join the comprehensive trade pact, which already includes all other Caribbean nations, the EU would gain "on the political front, and would be better able to monitor the respect of human rights" in Cuba, he said. "We will see how circumstances evolve and whether the reality makes it possible for Cuba to join Cotonou," added Viguera, who was speaking at a forum on relations between Cuba, Spain and the EU, organised by a Cuban business magazine.

Membership of the agreement would be worth an estimated 48 million euros (60 million dollars) per year for Cuba, according to the Spanish official. (*EUBusiness*, 22/10/04)

October 22: Brazil will propose that the Haitian crisis and a dialogue between the Rio Group and Cuba be included in the coming presidential summit of that political consultation mechanism, according to official sources. "Brazil is interested in intensifying a regional dialogue with Cuba and we think this can be pursued within the Rio Group", said a Brazilian diplomatic source on condition of anonymity. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/10/04)

October 23: An important concentration of people to support Cuba and reject the US economic, trade and financial blockade on the island took place in Barcelona, Spain. Organizers of the event, Plataforma Defendamos Cuba, said that more than 300 people gathered at the Sant Jaume Square in Barcelona to show their rejection to Washington's aggressive policy on Havana. "The US government is not only causing death in the Middle East but also suffering to thousands of Cubans," said Salvador Torres, representative of the solidarity organization. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/10/04)

October 24: The Inter-American Press Association, which represents the hemisphere's newspapers, issued its remarks about the condition of freedom of the press in the region during an annual review. The report said unfair restriction of and attacks on the press continue "often under the indifferent nose of governments." In Cuba, the report said, "some 30 journalists remain in prison for attempting to freely exercise their right to inform and be informed." Among those behind bars is Raul Rivero, a member of the IAPA board of directors. That came on the opening day of meetings in the picturesque community of Antigua, 45 kilometers southwest of the capital, Guatemala City. (*AP*, 24/10/04)

October 25: Jose Marti International Colloquium for a Culture of Nature began in Havana, with the participation of over 300 delegates from 33 nations worldwide. The meeting took place at Havana's Hotel Nacional and gathered outstanding personalities, such as Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, former Costa Rica's President Rodrigo Carazo, Argentinian sociologist Atilio Boron, and Cuban writer Cintio Vitier. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/10/04)

October 26: According to a report from media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, Cuba ranked second worst for being "second only to China as the biggest prison for journalists", with 26 in jail along with some 50 dissidents. This is the third annual index published by the Paris-based group. [[Third Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index](#)] (*BBC*, 26/10/04)

October 26: Cuba said it will not make any "gesture" to induce the European Union to soften its stance toward the country's Communist regime, and also deplored what it termed "the low human quality" of a high-ranking EU official who said Fidel Castro's death would bring positive change on the island. Cuba's ambassador to the European Union, Rodrigo Malmierca, also insisted that it was the EU that is mistaken in its policy toward the 45-year-old one-party state, and that it must "rectify" its position if relations are to improve. Malmierca said statements concerning the convenience of the rapid demise of Fidel Castro by the European Commission vice president for energy and transport, Loyola de Palacio, demonstrated the lack of "ethics" and "low human quality" of the conservative official. "They surprised me. I thought that any European politician or official would have a modicum of human quality. It doesn't seem very ethical to me to wish for anyone's death," Malmierca said when reporters asked him about the comments made by De Palacio, a Spaniard. (*EFE*, 26/10/04)

October 27: The South Africa Western Cape housing department has recruited 10 Cuban senior engineers and architects to assist in housing projects, because local specialists are too expensive. Housing and Local Government MEC Marius Fransman said this is part of the department's bid to deliver houses faster. Fransman said the 10 full-time Cuban specialists in social housing would work on site with beneficiaries involved in the People's Housing Process projects, in which they built their own homes with the subsidies received from the government. Said Fransman: "I challenge local engineers and architects to match what the Cubans are going to do in our province. The Cubans will

also train young people in building housing for the poor. We are not able to recruit our own professionals because they are too costly." (*Cape Times*, 27/10/04)

October 27: The head of the Organization of American States' says it is "inconceivable" Cuba is not a member. Luigi Einaudi, who became the interim head of the organization after former Costa Rican President Miguel Angel Rodriguez resigned, said that "It's inconceivable in today's world to keep isolated or outside of the organization a nation for reasons of incongruent ideologies," Einaudi said at a news conference. "But the charter of the OAS and the slow process of democratic jurisprudence has changed very little." Einaudi hinted Fidel Castro's regime was responsible for the country's expulsion in 1962 from the organization and is the reason why the country has not been invited to rejoin. "Cuba's return as it is, with a president that if he's not ruling for life, has ruled for more than 40 years (...) creates a problem," he said. (*UPI*, 28/10/04)

October 28: Fidel Castro has asserted that achieving an integral general culture is the only efficient measure against attempts to globalize the world domination and manipulation culture. The Cuban leader says in a letter to those attending the Jose Marti for a Culture of Nature International Discussion , that Cuba opens new and promising ways with its efforts to make their citizens gain an integral general culture. He adds that is "the only efficient measure against attempts to globalize the world's domination, manipulation, zombi turning, and individualism, which is hypnotizing and marginalizing millions of human beings today." (*Prensa Latina*, 28/10/04)

October 28: The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights said it will open an investigation on Cuba for arresting and jailing dissidents and executing hijackers, the first such move in five years. The IACHR, part of the Organization of American States, announced the decision after its regular three-week period of sessions, when judges examine human rights abuses in the Americas. The IACHR investigation of Cuba is likely to have little practical effect for more than 70 dissidents in jail since March and April of last year, following a crackdown on the opposition. Cuba does not recognize the authority of the IACHR. (*AP*, 29/10/04)

October 28: Seven Cuban men have reached the Honduran island of Roatan in a small boat as part of a continuing trickle of refugees, officials and local news media reported. "We are all adults and we made the trip because of the tough economic situation in Cuba," boat captain Raul Dominguez Castro told a local television station. He said the group came from the town of Santa Cruz in southeastern Cuba. The government announced that it would give the group permission to stay temporarily in Honduras. (*AP*, 28/10/04)

October 28: Cuba has suggested that the European Union (EU) take care of its own problems -- including xenophobia, domestic violence, racism and drug abuse -- before trying to criticize the island. In response to comments by an EU representative at the United Nations, Cuba's alternate permanent representative at the United Nations, Rodney López, rebuffed statements made by the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union, "which has no moral authority to criticize Cuba." Rodney López said that "the EU must change its policy and rectify its shaky position and lack of principles regarding Cuba." (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 29/10/04)

October 28: Spain and Britain agreed to look at revisiting European policy on Cuba "so it can be more effective," Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said following talks with British counterpart Jack Straw. "The United Kingdom agrees with the Spanish position to revise some measures so they may be more effective," Moratinos said after some three hours of talks with Straw. Moratinos said that following his discussions with Straw on a variety of issues, including Gibraltar, he believed both countries "share the same philosophy regarding reinforcing democracy, respect for human rights and public freedoms." (*AFP*, 28/10/04)

October 28: Panamanian investigators are reviewing a large amount of documents extracted from that country's embassy and consulate in Cuba as part of an investigation on alleged fraud related to Panamanian visas, said a judicial

source. The investigators returned to Panama after several days in Havana carrying at least five boxes of documents. (EFE, 28/10/04)

October 29: Eight National Argentinean members of Parliament have each decided to sponsor one Cuban prisoner of conscience after the March 2003 crackdown. The eight are: Guillermo Cantini (Unión por Argentina), Federico Pinedo (Compromiso para el Cambio), Andrés Zottos (Partido Renovador de Salta), Encarnación Lozano (Movimiento Popular Neuquino), Alberto Natale (Partido Demócrata Progresista), Hugo Martini (Recrear para el Crecimiento), Guillermo Alchourón (Acción por la República) and Mauricio Bossa (Ucedé). During a meeting at the Mexican Parliament in solidarity with Cuban pro-democracy activists, national representative Gabriel Llano (Partido Demócrata de Mendoza) decided to sponsor political prisoner Iván Hernández Carrillo, an independent journalist sentenced to 18 years in jail. (*ProCubalibre*, 29/10/04)

October 31: The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Belarus, Serguei Marynov, arrived in Cuba, responding to an invitation of his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. The visitor and his delegation will carry out a very intense program of activities that include official talks with the island's Foreign Minister and other government officials. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/10/04)

Terrorism

October 14: Cuba has asked the UN counter-terrorism committee to evaluate Panama's pardon of four Cuban exiles that the communist government accuses of trying to assassinate Fidel Castro. In a letter to the UN Security Council, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said his government hopes that "such an effort might bring an end to impunity for these terrorists." Perez Roque said Cuba's first report to the committee in 2002 listed instigators of terrorist acts against Cuba, including the four men pardoned by Moscoso. He said the government wants to know what steps the counter-terrorism committee "has considered taking in response to the voluminous information that Cuba has provided to it." Cuba also requests the committee to evaluate the pardons. (*AP*, 14/10/04)

October 14: The Supreme Court of Panama will soon rule on the constitutionality of pardons granted by former president Mireya Moscoso during her final days in office. A petition, supported by the country's new attorney general, José Antonio Sossa, requests a legal opinion from the high court on 183 pardons -- including four Cuban-born terrorists who were also released in August, just one week before Moscoso left the presidency. The legal brief allows ten days for the presentation of arguments, after which the Supreme Court will issue a ruling on the petition. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 14/10/04)

October 17: Many detainees at Guantanamo Bay were regularly subjected to harsh and coercive treatment, several people who worked in the prison said in recent interviews, despite long-standing assertions by military officials that such treatment had not been used except in some isolated cases. Military guards, intelligence agents and others described a range of procedures that included treatment they said was highly abusive. They said it took place over a long period of time, as well as rewards for prisoners who cooperated with interrogators. (*The New York Times*, 17/10/04)

October 22: Biotechnology experts who recently visited various facilities in Cuba said that while the communist nation has sophisticated technology there is no evidence to support claims it is working on bioweapons. "We can't give Cuba a clean bill of health, but we have no evidence to support these allegations," said Jonathan Tucker, a senior researcher at the Washington-based Center for Nonproliferation Studies, an independent group working to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. "They have the capability, but so do we," he told a conference focused on whether Cuba

should be kept on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. Cuba's capability to produce bioweapons has long been a source of speculation. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/10/04)

October 27: The US war on terror has followed a two-faced strategy on prisoner abuse, condemning it publicly while engaging in it behind closed doors, Amnesty International said. "In the war on terror the US has not practiced what it has preached on the treatment of prisoners," Rob Freer, lead author of the 200-page report, told a news conference in Madrid. The study examines US abuses in Afghanistan, at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. (*AP*, 27/10/04)

US-Cuba Relations

October 1: The US government allowed several hundred more Cubans to migrate to America over the past year than during the year previous, according to figures released by the US Interest Section in Havana. The American mission in Cuba said it had granted 23,000 immigrant visas for Cubans during the US fiscal year that just ended — 2,000 more than last year and 3,000 more than required by migration accords. Under migration agreements signed in the mid-1990s, the United States must provide at least 20,000 visas to Cubans annually, and Cuba must discourage its citizens from making risky attempts to immigrate illegally to the United States. The accords are aimed at encouraging safe, legal and orderly migration from Cuba to the United States. Nevertheless, hundreds still leave communist Cuba each year on smugglers' fast boats, or homemade rafts made with floating inner tubes, heading toward an uncertain fate in hopes of illegally reaching the United States. (*AP*, 1/10/04)

October 3: A Houston company's recent cancellation of an agreement with Cuba has sparked new complaints about Havana's insistence that Americans wishing to sell products to Cuba should first agree to push Washington to ease economic sanctions against the communist-ruled island. In recent months, US businesses have been privately grumbling that Alimport, Cuba's food-importing monopoly, has increased pressure for political cooperation. Americans who have exported food products to Cuba or wish to do so report that they "are receiving pressure (...) to be more public" and "more forceful" about their opposition to the United States policy," the New York-based US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council reported recently. Americans also "report that representatives of Alimport have decreased purchases from (...) [U.S.] companies whose 'commitment' to a change in United States policy (...) is suspect; or have stated that products would be sourced from those United States-based companies that 'support our position'," the USCTEC report added. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/10/04)

October 3: The United States will not allow a new wave of rafters illegally fleeing from Cuba as a result of the current economic crisis facing Fidel Castro's regime, now worsened by the discontent created by shortages of electric power, warned a high-ranking official of the US State Department. "We have previously warned the Cubans that the United States will deem any attempt to stimulate or manipulate a mass exodus to our shores as a threat to its national security", said Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega. "I think that they have understood the message", he added. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 3/10/04)

October 3: The National Network on Cuba (NNOC), a coalition of 55 groups that oppose the US government's anti-Cuban policies, met in Washington for its second meeting of the year. About 70 persons from all over the US discussed the situation in Cuba today, ending US-imposed restrictions on travel and trade with the island, and finding additional ways to highlight the case of the "Cuban Five." Representatives from the Cuban Interests Section in Washington and the Havana-based Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples also participated in the sessions, as did Marvin Glass, co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba, and representatives of the Venezuelan UN Mission in New York. At a pre-meeting reception at the Cuban Interests Section, Cuban Minister of Health Jose Ramon Balaguer said that the Cuban

people are unified, that they will fight to preserve their values, and that "to prevent a war is to win the war." (*People's Weekly World*, 15/10/04)

October 4: Asked on a flight to Brazil about Latin American complaints that the United States views regional problems through the lens of Cuba, Secretary of State, Colin Powell, answered that, "We don't see everything through the lens of Fidel Castro." "Fidel Castro is a problem for the Cuban people. I don't view him as that much of a problem for the rest of the hemisphere. Certainly not the way he was when I was [President Reagan's] national-security adviser — 15 years ago — when he really was." (*Knight Ridder*, 5/10/04)

October 4: Cuba's top trade official has warned that American agricultural companies could suffer sharp financial losses because of the new US restrictions on trips to the island nation. Trade with the United States has already declined to a trickle since the Bush administration sought in June to further squeeze the government of Fidel Castro, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman and chief executive of Empresa Cubana de Alimentos, or Alimport, the national import agency. On paper, 2004 looks like a record year for US imports to Cuba. By the close of December, US suppliers and shippers will have earned some \$450 million, a 20 percent increase over 2003 sales of \$349 million. But Alvarez said he signed 95 percent of the year's US contracts before the White House limited Cuban-American travel and remittances to family members on the island. Now, in a challenge to the US government, Alimport is inviting American companies to show their products at Havana's annual trade fair next month. The company intends to sign its first contracts for 2005, worth some \$150 million. (*NBC News*, 4/10/04)

October 5: The Russian company TNK has been accused in an American court of engaging in "criminal activity" by trading with Iraq and Cuba in the 1990s. The allegations were made by Norex Petroleum in a new legal submission to a wider "racketeering" case but were rejected by TNK's lawyers as "devoid of fact and logic". The Canadian-based oil company Norex has been fighting a case against TNK and its former majority shareholders - Access Industries, Renova and Alfa Finance Holdings - in the US legal system. Norex lost the first round in a New York district court and has sought to introduce new evidence for its appeal. (*The Guardian*, 5/10/04)

October 6: Government and business leaders from across the country will convene in Tampa to look at the evolving relationships between the United States and Cuba, and to discuss the implications of opening Cuban markets to US businesses. The National Summit on Cuba will be hosted at the University of Tampa's landmark Plant Hall. Previous summits have been held in Miami and Washington. (*Tampa Tribune*, 6/10/04)

October 6: Cuba is still ready to sign a cooperation agreement with the United States on drug smuggling, Cuban Vice Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno told the press. Moreno stressed that any agreement must be based on mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Washington has rejected six proposals from Havana on the issue since December 2001 although the American people will be the principal beneficiary of such an agreement, he said. (*Xinhua*, 6/10/04)

October 6: Seeking to gain inroads within the critical bloc of Cuban American voters, Senator John Kerry immediately pounced on remarks made by Secretary of State Colin Powell that suggested Fidel Castro is a problem for Cuba, not "the rest of the hemisphere." Kerry, whose campaign hopes to siphon even a sliver of the reliably Republican voting bloc from President Bush, rapidly assailed the remarks, calling it "shocking that the Bush administration is telling the world that Fidel Castro no longer poses a problem for this hemisphere". "Fidel Castro is a tyrant who brutally oppresses the Cuban people," Kerry said in a statement. "Castro's Cuba is the last bastion of communism in our region and a major obstacle to the triumph of democracy in this hemisphere." (*The Miami Herald*, 7/10/04)

October 6: A North Dakota trade delegation has agreed to sell 5,000 metric tons of peas to Cuba, and Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson hopes the country will strike another deal to buy five times that amount. The sale of yellow and green peas is worth \$1 million to North Dakota, and about \$500,000 to pea producers themselves, said Eric

Bartsch, director of the North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Council. "Any time you have a sale ... it's always an impact to North Dakota. It's moving the product," Bartsch said during a telephone conference call from Havana. "We have a lot of product out there, so we're going to be continually needing sales like this to move our product." Johnson, Bartsch and Greg Johnson, owner of Premier Pulses International Inc. of Minot, are in Cuba this week to explore pea sales. The country, which has a centralized system for buying food, has bought \$5.5 million worth of North Dakota dry peas and beans in the last five years. (AP, 7/10/04)

October 6: The United States Treasury Department has tightened its prohibitions against US citizens importing or consuming Cuban cigars. The department's Office of Foreign Assets Control has announced in a notice posted on the Internet that even Americans licensed to bring back up to \$100 worth of Cuban goods will no longer be allowed to include tobacco products in what they carry. Previously, those licensed were exempted from what was otherwise a total import ban on Cuban tobacco products. The notice also clarifies that Americans are barred from not only purchasing Cuban goods in foreign countries, but also from consuming them in those countries. (VOA, 6/10/04)

October 6: The State Department's decision to deny visas to 65 Cuban scholars seeking to attend a conference in Las Vegas drew protests from Congress and academia. Representatives William Delahunt, (Democrat-Massachusetts), and Jeff Flake, (Republican-Arizona), asked Secretary of State Colin Powell to reconsider the decision to prevent the Cubans from taking part in the Latin American Studies Association annual meeting. Cuban scholars have participated for years; about 100 attended last year. Professors from Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies said they are turning what was planned as a workshop on the Cuban economy into a protest about the government's action. (AP, 6/10/04)

October 7: A proposed bill aimed at terrorists could drastically change rules for undocumented migrants and place Cuban refugees at risk of being sent back to their homeland even if they make it onto US soil. The lengthy Recommendations Implementation Act was born from suggestions by the 9/11 Commission to keep terrorists out of the country. Immigrant advocates and several lawmakers are pushing for an amendment that would strike worrisome language affecting immigrants and essentially eliminate a 10-year-old policy -- known as wet-foot/dry-foot -- which allows most Cubans who make it to US soil to remain in the country. The same policy permits only those Cubans interdicted at sea to be returned to Cuba. "We want to make sure it is the terrorists who we are keeping out and not the immigrants who need our protection," said Florida Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who co-sponsored the amendment. (The Miami Herald, 7/10/04)

October 7: The Tisch School of the Arts will offer New York University's first semester-long study abroad program in Havana in spring 2005, Tisch officials said. Twenty-four NYU students will be accepted to the Tisch program, which is operating in collaboration with the Ludwig Foundation, a nonprofit group that supports young Cuban artists, and two Cuban schools, the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos and the University of Havana. Joanne Savio, a professor in Tisch's department of film and television who will lead the program, said she is excited to have the honor of overseeing NYU's newest study abroad site. "It's the excitement, intrigue and seduction of being able to go back and really live and study and work in an environment that, for the most part, has been off limits to Americans since 1959," Savio said. (The Washington Square Arch, 7/10/04)

October 7: Vice president Dick Cheney continued his post-debate campaign swing with a townhall meeting in Miami. The enthusiastic audience at the Radisson Mart Plaza Hotel and Convention Center saved its loudest applause for Cheney's promise that Bush would veto any legislation that attempts to water down his new Cuba policy, which restricts travel to the island to once every three years. In response to a question from the audience, Cheney noted that there is "an effort in Congress" to prevent the White House from carrying out the travel restrictions. Despite threats of a veto, the US House voted two weeks ago to prevent funding to carry out the new restrictions. "The president has made it very clear any bill that interferes with his Cuba policies will be vetoed," Cheney said as some in the audience rose to their feet. (The Miami Herald, 7/10/04)

October 7: Under an exception to a US trade embargo, communist Cuba has become the third importer of American rice after Mexico and Japan, officials said. Cuba bought 110,000 tons of rice this year from the United States, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's food import company Alimport, which signed a letter of intent to strengthen trade relations with the US Rice Producers Association. Dwight Roberts, president of the association, said Cuba could eventually surpass Mexico and Japan as America's main rice importer. (AP, 7/10/04)

October 7: Seeking to contain a minor political storm over recent remarks on Cuban leader Fidel Castro, Secretary of State Colin Powell said that Castro has "never stopped being a troublemaker" in Latin America and that the region will be better off when he's gone. Powell spoke with the press one day after Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry seized on earlier remarks in which the secretary of state suggested that Castro was a problem for Cubans but not for the rest of the Western Hemisphere. But he staunchly defended his record on dealing with Castro and suggested his remarks had been twisted. His point, he said, was that Castro's Cuba doesn't present the sort of regional threat it did when Castro had the military and political backing of the Soviet Union. "We're in a political environment," said Powell, who seemed dismayed at the brouhaha. "Castro is an anachronism. He is causing his own people to suffer greatly. He is a troublemaker in the rest of the region. He is a troublemaker in Venezuela. He's a troublemaker in Colombia. He's never stopped being a troublemaker. But he is not the kind of threat he was when we had the Soviet Union backing him up about 15 to 20 years ago." Powell said he chaired a presidential commission that studied ways to ease the transition to democracy in Cuba and repeatedly has pushed for international condemnation of Castro's human-rights record. (Knight Ridder, 8/10/04)

October 7: The United States is defending its decision to deny visas to 67 Cuban scholars who wanted to attend a conference this week in the western US state of Nevada. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that the academics are Cuban government officials whose aim is to "spout the party line." Mr. Boucher also noted that 68 Cuban dissidents remain jailed in the communist country after being arrested last year in a crackdown on opponents of Cuban leader Fidel Castro. (VOA, 7/10/04)

October 8: Free trade with Cuba could generate \$50 billion and 900,000 jobs for the United States over a twenty year period, according to a forecast presented at the National Summit on Cuba by Dr. Tim Lynch, director of the Center for Economic Forecasting and Analysis at Florida State University. "It's in everyone's best interest to see free trade between the US and Cuba," said Lynch. This is good for America and good for Cuba." Lynch determined that Florida would stand to benefit more than any state for three reasons -- a historic linkage to Cuba, Florida's proximity to Cuba and large and growing Hispanic population. "Florida could see as many as 112,000 new jobs over a 20 year period that would not otherwise exist in a variety of industry sectors," said Lynch. "Where is a hungry nation like Cuba going to turn? It's cheaper to ship from Florida to Cuba, especially from Tampa and Miami, than anywhere else." (PRNewswire, 8/10/04)

October 8: Lifting trade and travel restrictions on Cuba is the only way to bring about real change in the island nation, panelists said during a national summit largely critical of long-standing US policies. But some speakers at the third National Summit on Cuba showed there is still support for using the trade embargo, now more than four decades old, and recently tightened travel restrictions to squeeze the island's economy and push leader Fidel Castro out of power. They were supported by a knot of protesters near the event's venue at the University of Tampa. Wayne Smith, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and former chief of the U.S. interests section in Havana, said the containment policy has made less and less sense as the years have passed, especially after the breakup of the Soviet Union, with which Castro had aligned himself. (St. Petersburg Times, 9/10/04)

October 9: To hasten freedom in Cuba, the United States is pursuing a comprehensive approach that includes greater support for the Cuban political opposition and measures to limit the resources available to the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, according to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Dan Fisk. In his remarks to the Cuban American Association in Miami, Florida, Fisk outlined the Bush administration's efforts to isolate

and pressure the Castro regime through the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC). As part of this effort, Fisk explained, the United States has already provided \$14 million of a proposed \$29 million in additional assistance to support the development of civil society in Cuba. He pointed out that the United States is also working to promote greater international support for, and involvement with, Cuban civil society and transition planning. (*Washington File*, 14/10/04)

October 9: The State Department is accusing Cuba of training Colombian rebels and says it is troubled by a large presence of Cuban personnel in Venezuela, whose president, Hugo Chavez, is a close ally of Fidel Castro. The department's view was outlined in response to a press question about Secretary of State Colin Powell's comments in an agency interview that Castro is "causing his own people to suffer greatly" and has become a troublemaker in the neighboring South American countries. Elaborating on Powell's remarks, a State Department official said in an authorized comment that the United States continues to be concerned by Cuba's support for terrorist organizations in Colombia. It said the two largest leftist guerrilla organizations there, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, continue to maintain a presence and receive training in Cuba. Both are on the State Department's list of international terrorist organizations. The official, who could not be identified under State Department ground rules, said in the written response that the United States worries that the large Cuban presence in Venezuela might harm Venezuela's democracy. (*AP*, 9/10/04)

October 10: Senator John Kerry sought to court important South Florida voting constituencies in a campaign swing, assailing President Bush's crackdown on Cuba travel. Kerry met with The Miami Herald's editorial board for a wide-ranging interview in which he assailed Bush's policies in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere. He accused the administration of ignoring Latin America and Haiti and said that as president, he would work with US allies that do business in Cuba to bring pressure on Fidel Castro. "Our ability to remove Castro is going to depend on earning the respect of other nations, and making them to get tough," Kerry said. "Every other country, the Germans, the French, others, have been buying property in Cuba, playing games. There's no concentrated focus on [Castro's] repressive anti-human rights behavior, and there should be. But because the US has isolated itself, in a way, we've lost the legitimate pressure that ought to be brought on him." Kerry argued that Bush's travel restrictions will punish families while isolating dissidents on the island. "It's counterproductive to the kind of exchange of information we need," Kerry said. "To shut it off is to empower Castro, and frankly I think that's a huge mistake." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/10/04)

October 11: Five veterans of Cuba's national series and a member of the country's national junior program are in Miami after the largest mass desertion of baseball players since Fidel Castro's revolution. The six players, all reportedly under the age of 24, arrived in the Keys after spending two days at sea. They are infielder Yunel Escobar Almenares, pitchers Yamel Guevara, Jose Angel Cordero Valdez, Rafael Galbizo Figueroa and outfielders Yoel Perez Mendietta and Yoan Limonta Zayas. (*AP*, 11/10/04)

October 12: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has denounced the so-called "democratic system" in the United States. During an international workshop on democracy and the role of local and national governments, Cuba's top legislator noted that millions of eligible voters in the US don't even exercise the basic right to cast their ballot. Ricardo Alarcón told participants at the workshop that only half of those eligible to vote in the United States even bother to register and, of that total, only 50 percent go to the trouble of voting. He contrasted this with Cuba's electoral experience where, he says, more than 90 percent turn out to vote and also take part in nominating candidates. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/10/04)

October 12: Vermont expects to send its first shipment of dairy cows to Cuba early next year. The shipment is part of a trade agreement Agriculture Secretary Steve Kerr worked out during a trip to the island nation in early September. The estimated seven million dollar deal calls for Vermont companies to sell dairy cows, nonfat powdered milk and apples to Cuba. Kerr's visit followed a trip by Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie in April to find out what Vermont

products the Cubans might want. Vermont plans to send 50 Holstein heifers and 50 pregnant Jersey heifers. (AP, 11/10/04)

October 13: The Dutch firm Intervet has stopped sending a quadruple vaccine to Cuba after warnings from the United States that it could be fined since the vaccine uses a US antigen. According to the online edition of the weekly *Trabajadores*, the US embargo has also prevented Cuba from obtaining isotope I-125 for the treatment of children with eye cancer. "After acquiring the Mexican company Refractarios Mexicanos, the American company Harbison Walker Refractories banned any sales to Cuba of those supplies", adds *Trabajadores*. (EFE, 13/10/04)

October 13: The Supreme Court debated the fate of two Cubans who are scheduled for deportation, aren't welcome back in their native land, and exist in a state of indefinite detention in America that wouldn't be legal for other immigrants or citizens. Deputy Solicitor General Edwin Kneedler told the justices that that is just as it should be because the nation's need to protect its borders requires that some foreign nationals be treated as if they have no due-process rights. Advocates for the two Cubans said the government's behavior was unconstitutional, and they urged the justices to apply their ruling barring indefinite detentions to the refugees. The two were part of the 1980 Mariel boatlift, in which 125,000 Cubans were welcomed to the United States by President Jimmy Carter as a humanitarian gesture. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/10/04)

October 13: A protest was held at Harvard University over the recent denial of entry visas by the US State Department to a group of Cuban scholars. According to the Harvard Crimson newspaper -- published on the university campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts -- the protest was the idea of John Coatsworth, director of Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. Coatsworth, along with several other professors at Harvard, set up 65 empty chairs where the Cuban scholars were to have addressed a forum at the university. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/10/04)

October 13: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón insisted that current plans by US President George W. Bush entail the destruction of the Cuban nation. The Parliament president emphasized -in an Internet forum - the real purposes behind the hostile policy promoted by the US administration in their efforts to subvert the Cuban political system. Bush's new genocidal measures in force since June are an example of this US aggressive policy on Cuba, said Alarcón, noting that Bush's project -favoring a Cuban political and economic dependence on the US- has met strong rejection in the Island and abroad. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/10/04)

October 13: A United Nations report released in Mexico City recalls Havana's repeated efforts to sign cooperation agreements with Washington in order to jointly fight drug trafficking. The document refers to the application of recommendations adopted in the 13th Meeting of Heads of National Organizations to Fight Drug Trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Brazil last year. The countries participating in that meeting suggested establishing and applying official agreements beyond national borders and the region to facilitate operations against international crime. Cuba has signed cooperation agreements with 33 countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/10/04)

October 13: A triumph of the Democrat candidate John Kerry in US presidential elections would not affect Cuba, Ricardo Alarcón said. The president of Cuba's National Assembly added that Kerry's policy towards the island is "more of the same". "We have to see what Kerry thinks and what he will do." "Right now, everything he has said is more of the same", Alarcón added. (EFE, 13/10/04)

October 13: A US doctor has led a Cuban surgical team performing an operation on the island, defying restrictions imposed by the administration of US President George W. Bush. William Stetson, a specialist in sports medicine and a professor at the University of Southern California, led the team that performed arthroscopic surgery on Oscar Luciano Martinez's shoulder at a hospital in Ciego de Avila in central Cuba, the official newspaper *Granma* reported. Stetson also donated some of the surgical instruments needed for this type of operation, which had previously been done only at Havana's Frank Pais Hospital. (EFE, 13/10/04)

October 14: The Cuban trade organization has indicated in a letter to Senator Tom Daschle that it is interested in pursuing an arrangement that would lead to the purchase of agricultural commodities from South Dakota. The group, known as Alimport, is Cuba's largest single importer of food supplies. The letter was a follow-up to a visit from a South Dakota delegation that traveled to Cuba earlier this year to pursue expanded exports to Cuba. In the letter, the head of Alimport indicated that Cuba would like to enter into negotiations to purchase roughly \$10 million in various agricultural commodities from South Dakota. The letter referenced the visit of a delegation of South Dakota farmers and ranchers to Cuba this past March. Daschle and his staff have also met with Cuban officials to urge Cuba to purchase South Dakota products. (*Aberdeen American News*, 14/10/04)

October 14: Cuban political analyst and former Culture Minister, Armando Hart, warned that with what he called a "delirious, mediocre and aggressive person" for President, the United States is currently gripped by a dangerous "crisis". Hart, one of Cuba's leading political thinkers, made his remark during a press conference to announce the upcoming International Colloquium "José Martí for a Culture of Nature" that begins in Havana with the participation of representatives from 32 countries. The Prensa Latina news agency reported Hart saying that George W. Bush was "an insane individual" who claims God "ordered him to bomb and murder people around the world" adding that every individual had the duty to control both personal and social violence and work toward a more humane world. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/10/04)

October 15: In Havana, the 2nd Forum on Cuban Civil Society concluded its debates and reflection on "The People Versus the Blockade". Intellectuals, religious believers, historians and attorneys discussed the effects of Washington's embargo in the fields of education, culture and sports, as well as harm caused to the island's economy, trade and finances. Cuba will demand UN Secretary General to distribute a document released by Cuban civil society organizations on the aggressive policy of the United States against the island, Minister of Foreign Relations, Felipe Perez Roque, announced at the closing ceremony. Perez Roque said he would instruct Cuba's permanent mission to the UN that the declaration approved at this meeting circulates as an official document of the UN General Assembly. (*AIN, Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/10/04)

October 16: Representatives of the US Rice Producers Association were in Havana, Cuba, at the invitation of Pedro Alvarez, president and CEO of Alimport (Empresa Cubana de Alimentos), the Cuban food import agency. The visit was highlighted by the joint signing of a letter of intent by Alvarez and Dwight Roberts, president and CEO of the US Rice Producers Association, which called for the expansion of trade relations between the two groups including the proposition to elevate the level of Cuba's purchases of rice from the United States. "Cuba has imported 100,000 tons of rice from the United States this year, and despite commercial restrictions placed on doing business, Cuba is the third largest importer of rice from North America after both Mexico and Japan," Alvarez said. (*The Lafayette Daily Advertiser*, 16/10/04)

October 18: The Democrats don't expect their presidential candidate, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, to win the Cuban American vote in the November 2 election. But because the group is so large, just making inroads would translate into a handy boost in a battleground state that was decided by only a few hundred votes four years ago. President Bush will overwhelmingly win the support of the Cuban American community," said Al Cardenas, a lawyer and former state chairman of the Republican Party. "Democrats have no choice but to come and fight for every vote. If this were anywhere else but Florida, they would have written off our community a long time ago." (*Reuters*, 18/10/04)

October 18: Representative Bob Menendez (Democrat-New Jersey), the highest-ranking Hispanic in Congress, told a Miami audience that President Bush has ignored the needs of Latin America and enacted policies on Cuba that hurt families more than they hurt Fidel Castro. Menendez said the Bush administration punishes Cuban-American families, tightening restrictions on visits to relatives on the island even as US-Cuba commercial exchanges have increased. He said Kerry supports the US embargo on Cuba but would push for a more "humane" policy and would provide massive US humanitarian aid to Cuba through the International Red Cross, not the Castro government. "We must act to create

new additional external pressures to the Castro regime," Menendez added. "Under this administration, that's impossible. That's one of the key opportunities we have with Senator Kerry, who is committed to maintaining the embargo, but also committed to family travel." (*The Miami Herald*, 19/10/04)

October 18: For 12 years, the US government has financed a station aimed at bringing news and information to the Cuban people. There is only one problem. Almost no one on the island has ever seen it. Cuban officials have jammed its signal since the broadcasts began in 1990, saying it is an act of aggression and a violation of Cuba's sovereignty. After years of failure, the Bush administration launched a new effort in late August to break through the jam by beaming the TV signal from a US military plane flying off the southern coast of Florida. The results are uncertain. Critics say TV Marti is a \$10 million-a-year boondoggle that should be shut down. The C-130 broadcast is the latest attempt by the US to penetrate Cuban jamming after failing to reach large numbers of Cubans through satellite transmission and a transmitter fixed on a helium-filled balloon tethered 10,000 feet above the Florida Keys. "You can't repeal the laws of physics," said Philip Peters, a former State Department official and Cuba expert at the Lexington Institute. "It's always going to be easier for Cuba to jam the broadcasts than for the US to get them through." (*Chicago Tribune*, 18/10/04)

October 19: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Cuba would win a "resounding victory" when the resolution condemning the US embargo of the island comes up for a vote in the UN General Assembly. Perez made the remarks while introducing a multimedia presentation entitled "No More Embargo" and a digital photography exhibit, "In Spite of the Embargo," both prepared by the Foreign Ministry. (*EFE*, 19/10/04)

October 19: Rosa Aurora Freijanes, married to Cuban political prisoner, Fernando González, has denounced the constant obstacles put in the way of family members to visit relatives in prison in the United States. Fernando Gonzalez is one of five Cubans who were arrested in the US and sentenced to severe jail terms by a Miami court. Rosa Aurora Freijanes, told *Trabajadores* newspaper that throughout the six years Fernando has been in prison, she has been allowed to visit him only three times even though he is serving a sentence of 19 years. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/10/04)

October 19: Washington is blocking educational exchanges between the United States and Cuba by denying entry visas to teachers from the island. According to Lidia Turner, Honorary Chairwoman of Havana's Teacher's Association, the US blockade has forced Cuba to organize alternative educational seminars. In an interview with the daily *Granma* newspaper, Lidia Turner said that as a researcher and leader of the teacher's association, she has personally suffered from restricted academic exchanges between Cuban and US professors. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/10/04)

October 21: Washington has declined to wish Fidel Castro a speedy recovery, with some officials joking that they preferred to hear of a "different kind of fall". The US state department appeared to be in no mood to show sympathy for a Communist revolutionary who has defied Washington's power for more than four decades and who has reportedly survived hundreds of assassination attempts. Asked if the state department wished him a speedy recovery, spokesman Richard Boucher simply replied: "No". "The situation of Mr Castro is little concern to us but, unfortunately, of enormous importance to the people of Cuba, who have suffered very long under his rule," he said. One unnamed state department official quoted by a news agency in Washington quipped: "We've been looking forward to Castro's fall for years but this isn't what we had in mind." (*BBC*, 22/10/04)

October 23: Parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon blasted Washington's four-decade trade embargo against Cuba as "genocide" as thousands gathered to draw attention to the upcoming UN vote to condemn the sanctions. Alarcon noted that 70 per cent of Cuba's 11.2 million citizens were born after the United States imposed trade sanctions on the Caribbean country in the early 1960s in an effort to undermine Fidel Castro's communist government. "It's a policy of genocide (...) aimed at causing suffering and hunger," Alarcon said of the sanctions. The rally was the first major political gathering in Cuba since Castro, 78, tripped and fell after a graduation ceremony speech in the central city of Santa Clara. (*AP*, 25/10/04)

October 23: Cuba considered ridiculous the statements of the US Department of State spokesman, Richard Boucher, about the health of Fidel Castro after his accidental fall in a public act. Granma newspaper rejected statements by Richard Boucher, the State Department's spokesman, and what it called his lack of sensibility and scruples for a human life, and denounced that "ignorant and chatty politicians are common in Washington's policy". (*Prensa Latina*, 23/10/04)

October 23: Some 10,000 people in the Cerro district of Havana demanded the lifting of the US economic embargo on Cuba imposed for more than 40 years. The demonstration demanded the lifting of the US embargo on Cuba and denounced that it violates the principles of International Law and the human rights of the Cuban people. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/10/04)

October 25: Cuba said it was prepared to use "every possible measure" to repel any form of aggression against the Communist state as it renewed its criticism of the United States over its decision to establish a radio and television station to broadcast material to the island. Ambassador to Barbados, Rody L6pez, told the International Frequency Registration Board (IFRB) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) that Washington was using a military plane to broadcast the material to Cuban citizens. He said Radio and TV Marti underscored Washington's policy of tightening the four-decade old trade embargo against Cuba. (*BBC*, 25/10/04)

October 25: The US Department of the Treasury identified the electronic money transfer business, SERCUBA, as a national of Cuba. "As we have seen, the Castro regime uses a variety of schemes and businesses located not only in Cuba, but also in countries around the world to feed its military and security infrastructure – instead of the Cuban people. Today, we are financially isolating SERCUBA to make it more difficult for the Cuban regime to obtain the hard currency it uses to oppress its own people and to prop up its government," said Juan Carlos Z6rate, Treasury's Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crime. SERCUBA provides a means by which US persons can forward remittances to Cuban nationals via a third country or through SERCUBA's own website. SERCUBA has a call center in Havana and sixteen offices located in Cuba, along with two offices abroad – one in Italy and one in Spain. The entity is organized under Cuban laws and is supported by Cimex, a Specially Designated National of Cuba. (*Press Release. US Department of the Treasury*, 25/10/04)

October 25: A 30-second Bush ad, in Spanish, depicts Kerry as sympathetic toward the Cuban dictator and targets Florida's Cuban-Americans - a community that had been strongly Republican but has splintered over economic hardships it claims the Bush administration has put on family and friends in Cuba. The spot whacks Kerry for voting against the 1996 Helms-Burton Act to beef up sanctions on Cuba, and charges he and the "liberals in Congress (...)" don't understand what a dictator is." But Kerry spokesman Phil Singer said Kerry opposed one provision that would have led to frivolous lawsuits. The Bush administration has opposed the same provision. "So now they are taking issue with a provision that they want removed from the law," Singer said. (*Washington Bureau*, 25/10/04)

October 26: The State Department said Cuba's move to ban the circulation of dollars underscores the weakness of Fidel Castro's communist government. At a news briefing in Washington, State Department Deputy spokesman Adam Ereli described the dollars-for-pesos exchange requirement "draconian," and said it shows that Mr. Castro is "cynically trying to preserve a bankrupt regime" at his peoples' expense. "We see it is a confiscatory measure that demonstrates that President Bush's policy is working," he noted. "It's squeezing the regime, and causing them to take extreme measures that underscore its own inherent weaknesses." (*VOA*, 26/10/04)

October 27: Stricter travel policies and restrictions on the number of visits to Cuba approved by Washington, have cut the number of visits by US residents to the communist island by half, according to official estimates. The flow of visitors from the United States to the island had dropped by almost 50 percent, as of September, while the number of visits to the island by Cubans who live in the United States had fallen this year by 38 percent, Cuban Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero said. Marrero estimated that at the end of this year, the visits of Cuban-Americans and other US

residents to the island will have dropped to only 30 percent of their former levels, down from 115,000 and around 40,000, respectively, in 2003. (EFE, 27/10/04)

October 28: Friends and adversaries of the United States voted overwhelmingly in the UN General Assembly against the four-decade-old American economic, financial and commercial embargo against Cuba. The vote, conducted for the 13th consecutive year, was a lopsided 179 to 4 with one abstention on the resolution opposing the embargo. The United States, Israel, Palau and the Marshall Islands voted "no" and Micronesia abstained. "The U.S. government has unleashed a world wide genocidal economic war against Cuba," said Havana's foreign minister, Felipe Perez Roque, the only speaker warmly applauded. But the US delegate said Cuba has shown no interest implementing economic reforms that would lead to democratic change or a free market. "The Cuban government is not a victim as it contends. Rather it is a tyrant, aggressively punishing anyone who dares to have a differing opinion," said Oliver Garza, a State Department adviser. (Reuters, 28/10/04)

October 28: Agriculture officials in the state say Cuba will buy \$1-million bushels of Oklahoma wheat in November and December. Oklahoma Agriculture Secretary Terry Peach says based on current prices the sale is worth more than \$4-million. Peach recently led a trade mission to Cuba that included six farm organizations. The state Wheat Commission, US Wheat Associates, state Farm Bureau, state Farmers Union, Plains Grain and WB Johnston Grain joined Peach on the trip. (KOTV, 28/10/04)

October 28: US Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, urged Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, to stop supporting the regime of Fidel Castro. "President Chávez should stop anti-democratic forces in the region", said George W. Bush's rival in a harsh statement released in Madison, Wisconsin. "In supporting Castro' repressive regime, (Chávez) has jeopardized regional security and progress toward democracy", said the candidate. (AFP, 28/10/04)

October 29: A judge dismissed charges against organizers of a sailboat race from Key West to Cuba who were accused of violating federal laws against trading with enemy nations. Peter Goldsmith and Michele Geslin had been charged with two counts of providing unlicensed travel services to Cuba. If convicted of both counts, they could have faced 15-year prison sentences. "The defendants certainly feel vindicated," said attorney Mario Cano, who represents Goldsmith. Carlos B. Castillo, spokesman for the US Attorney's office, said his office was reviewing the decision. (AP, 29/10/04)

October 31: President Bush campaigned from one end of battleground Florida to the other, criticizing Cuba's Fidel Castro in a pitch to the state's Cuban-Americans and urging Republican supporters in Miami to help give him a second term. "We will not rest - we will not rest, we will keep the pressure on until the Cuban people enjoy the same freedoms in Havana they receive here in America," Bush said to cries of "Viva Bush!" Then, in a direct reference to Castro, Bush said, "I strongly believe the people of Cuba should be free from the tyrant." (AP, 31/10/04)

October 31: Cuba's dolphin-export business is in the spotlight again after US authorities fined a Nevada physician \$70,000 for buying six dolphins from the socialist nation. Graham Simpson, 53, has said he didn't think the purchase was illegal because he wasn't living in the United States at the time. US authorities say any American who does business with Cuba risks up to 10 years in prison and fines of \$250,000 and up. Not all animal-protection activists agree with or even care about the US ban on trade with Cuba. But they say that if it helps them free even a single dolphin, they're glad to see it enforced. (Dallas Morning News, 31/10/04)

October 31: Just days before an American presidential election, Cuban communist officials were designing deals to buy \$US150 million more in corn, wheat, cattle and other American farm products at a trade fair. Agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland of Illinois, Tyson Foods of Arkansas, Splash Tropical Drinks of Florida, Marsh Supermarkets of Indiana and White Rose Foods of New Jersey were among 125 American companies participating in the weeklong International Fair of Havana. "This is happening at a crucial moment, during elections in the United States," Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import company Alimport said Saturday after inspecting stands at the exposition

centre where the Americans will display food samples. "Many companies and their people will come after the elections," so they don't miss the chance to vote, Alvarez said. Alvarez declined to talk about the US presidential candidates or express a preference. (*News 24*, 31/10/04)