



# FOCAL

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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## October 2006

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** The Cuban government insists that Fidel Castro is recovering. The controversial dissident Congress of Independent Libraries starts in different provinces amid harassment and repression by Cuban authorities. The government appoints a new Minister of Transportation. In the wake of an investigation on corruption by state journalists, Cuban authorities announce a study about what is wrong with the Cuban socialist system.

**Economy:** Cuban official press reveals how customers are cheated by state-run enterprises. Canadian Sherritt International Corp. announces plans to expand its business on the island nation. Representatives from sectors such as transportation, tourism, electronics, and fishing attend the 4th session of the Cuba-China Business Committee. Spanish entrepreneurs express their interest for continuing business with Cuba. Cuban trade jumps 27 percent compared with the same period in 2005.

**Foreign Affairs:** Mexican president elect Felipe Calderón expresses his decision to maintain cordial relations with Cuba. Amid international tension provoked by North Korea's nuclear tests, Cuba signs in Pyongyang a protocol with this Asian nation on exchange of commodities in 2007. Guatemala's Vice President Eduardo Stein visits Cuba. The president of Cuba's National Assembly visits Spain.

**Security:** For the fourth time in recent years, representatives from the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) hold conversations in Havana.

**US-Cuba Relations:** Cuba releases its annual report to the UN General Assembly on the impact of the US embargo. US officials believe that Fidel Castro has terminal cancer. According to official statistics, nearly 6,000 Cubans reached or attempted to reach US soil by sea in 2006.



### Domestic Affairs

**October 1:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said that his ailing ally, Fidel Castro, is recovering slowly from intestinal surgery but told him recently that he was prepared to die. "Fidel told me when I went to visit him in Havana: 'Chavez, I already lived my epoch, I can die'". Chavez, who is up for re-election on December 3, also told the crowd

that Castro's health is progressing two months after he temporarily turned power over to his younger brother Raul. "Fidel's recovery is advancing, according to the report with details that I received last night," Chavez said. "It will be a slow recovery because of the type of illness, which was serious at one moment." (AP, 1/10/06)

**October 2:** In a letter to the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the Cuban government acknowledged in August the occurrence of dengue hemorrhagic fever in Cuba, although the outbreak has not been confirmed domestically. "In August, we received a communication from the Minister of Health (José Ramón Balaguer) informing of recent cases of dengue fever in Cuba, even some instances of the hemorrhagic variant (which can be fatal)," said PAHO representative on the island, Lea Guido. (EFE, 2/10/06)

**October 3:** While former Communist party members now among the ranks of the dissidence are advocating a transition based on the Chinese model, Christian Democrat activist Oswaldo Payá supports a move towards a system that promotes both economic and political freedom. Elizardo Sánchez, Vladimiro Roca, Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Miriam Leyva are all ex-communists. They claim that Castrism has not been communism, but personality-centered totalitarianism, more repressive than the variant practiced in the Soviet Union. And also more estatist. "The Cuban regime has allowed much less room for private enterprise than the Eastern bloc did," Chepe concludes." A number of small privately-owned farms were permitted to operate, but the State determines what the crops are going to be and at what price it is going to buy them." The solution, they argue, is along the lines of a Chinese-style economic opening without political reforms. "Cuba is not prepared for political-economic shock therapies," maintains Elizardo Sánchez, leader of Cuban Human Rights Commission. Roca points out that (the Cuban) society at large is more economic than political. "70 % of the population has been born under this regime and has no democratic experience," adds Leyva. However, for the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Oswaldo Payá, "the Chinese model is but a Chinese bedtime story." Because a real transition must also include political rights, (which have been) "denied to the Cubans for over 40 years." (Notimex, 3/9/06)

**October 3:** Some promotional materials for nightclubs in Havana announce: Accompanied women do not pay. This means women are given free access to artistic shows if they are accompanied by men. The so-called Ladies' Nights seem to be well accepted, especially because cover charge for these nightclubs has to be paid in convertible pesos (CUCs). Admission fees range from two to 10 CUCs. The current official exchange rate is one CUC to 24 Cuban pesos. "Ladies' nights as a concept has never been approved by the Ministry of Tourism, although many facilities have asked for permits", said a Ministry official who asked not to be identified. Skilful business people, however, have sought to present attractive ideas for women and please men. Other experts in gender issues think that the initiative goes far beyond giving free access to women. Most nightclubs in Havana admit only traditional (man-woman) couples. Yvette, a 44-year-old painter, feels excluded. I am lesbian and most of my friends are homosexuals. We are not allowed in these places because we refuse to pretend we are heterosexuals, she noted. The Ministry of Tourism official told the press that all this is part of the struggle against prostitution. Apparently, nightclub managers are flexible enough to allow men and women alone. If a couple separates after they are in, we reserve the right to ask them to leave, a provision stipulates. (Women's Features Service, 3/10/06)

**October 3:** For the first time in 40 years, Cuban official media carried US Major League Baseball game scores. The daily *Juventud Rebelde*, official newspaper of the Cuban Young Communist League (UJC), reported in a brief sports section column entitled "Trip" the final score in the US professional baseball regular season, an unprecedented move in four decades. (EFE, 3/10/04)

**October 3:** Cuba's foreign minister said Fidel Castro will return to his post as maximum leader of the island, though he did not say when, state-run media reported. "We will again have him leading the revolution," Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said of the ailing Castro at an outdoor event to discuss the ill effects of the US trade embargo against Cuba, according to the Communist Party daily newspaper Granma. The 80-year-old Castro temporarily ceded power to younger brother Raúl Castro on July 31, saying he needed time to recover from intestinal surgery. Perez Roque told the

press in New York in September that he expected the Cuban leader to be fully back at the helm by early December. (AP, EFE, 4/10/06)

**October 4:** Cuba's high number of centenarians say their longevity is down to laying off alcohol, but indulging in coffee, cigars and sex. The findings are the result of a study that looked into the lives of 54 out of the more than 100 centenarians who live in Villa Clara province. More than 60% of them had parents who also lived to be over 100. Cuba, with a population of 11.2 million, has about 3,000 people who have lived for more than a century. The results of the study were reported to the National Geriatrics and Social Work workshop in Santa Clara town, the newspaper Juventud Rebelde said. The life expectancy in Cuba is 76, but in Villa Clara province, where the study was carried out, it is 78. (BBC, 4/10/06)

**October 5:** The significance of the second edition of the book "One Hundred Hours with Fidel" by Ignacio Ramonet, revised, corrected and improved by the interviewer, was appreciated by Cuban academics. The analysis of the book took place at the Havana Conference Center attended by Ignacio Ramonet and Pedro Alvarez Tabio, as well as artists, researchers and students, among others. Tabio, editor and director of the Council of State's Office of Historic Affairs, said the revision was to formally polish up the text, clarify some areas, and enhance and complete some passages of the book. Ramonet said the book was a two-handed autobiography on ideas and life of the Cuban Revolution leader. (Prensa Latina, 5/10/06)

**October 5:** Cuban writer Amir Valle, author of "Jinetas", a non-fiction book on the issue of prostitution in Cuba, voiced at the Frankfurt Book Fair his concern that writer persecution in his country should once again reach the levels of what he described as the "dark decade" of the seventies. "According to current views in intellectual circles both on the island and abroad, everything points to a return to the dark decade of the seventies," said Valle. (EFE, 6/10/06)

**October 5:** According to its national director, the illegal Independent Libraries of Cuba Project will not participate in a congress of similar institutions called for by opposition leader Marta Beatriz Roque, because it is perceived as being more of a "political" event, rather than a cultural affair. "The call from the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) contradicts the spirit of the Project and therefore we will not take part," said Gisela Delgado, wife of political prisoner Héctor Palacios, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison in the spring of 2003, along with another 74 dissidents. (AFP, 6/10/06)

**October 7:** The 4th Congress of the Jose Marti Pioneros student organization, began its sessions. The delegates from six to 12 years-old will debate in five commissions including Primary and Secondary education, Education, Sports and Recreation, Vocational Formation and Organizational Functioning in Adult Structure. More than 1.4 million primary and secondary education students are represented at the event by 903 delegates at a unique forum that allows new generations to be heard. For the 4th time the organization will analyze its leadership, profile and main aspects of its education. Schools have been getting ready since last March, preparing the issues and readying agendas of youth concern. (Prensa Latina, 7/10/06)

**October 8:** Each year, a four-kilometer race takes place in the Havana municipality of 10 de Octubre, which takes its name from the beginning of Cuba's first war of independence on October 10, 1868. This time, a record 11,474 runners took part. Alberto Juantorena, Javier Sotomayor, and Emperatriz Wilson were among the Cuban Olympic champion athletes participating in the event that included 4,992 boys and 2,982 girls and zigzagged through the streets and avenues of the Vibora neighbourhood. David Lahera, first secretary of the Communist Party in the municipality of 10 de Octubre, fired the starting shot and participated in the awards ceremony along with provincial government authorities and representatives of the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER), Francisco Arias, representative of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Cuba, and Juan Nuiry, for many years Cuba's representative to the FAO. (Granma, 11/10/06)

**October 8:** French musician, Charles Aznavour, is in Havana for the recording of an album with the virtuoso Cuban pianist and composer Chucho Valdes. The disc will have a romantic focus featuring the warm voice of Aznavour, 82, fused with the tropical rhythms of Cuba. Aznavour is rehearsing 11 songs with Valdes to prepare for recording. The disc is scheduled for release in February or March of 2007 and features an instrumental piece, reported *Granma* newspaper. (*ACN*, 12/10/06)

**October 9:** The Ladies in White, wives and relatives of political Cuban prisoners, assured that they would not participate in a congress of independent libraries called for by the opposition activist Martha Beatriz Roque. "The Ladies in White are not members of any project, organization or party, therefore we will not take part in the congress of libraries called for by the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba (APSC) that Roque leads," they stated in a press release. (*EER*, 10/10/06)

**October 9:** Defense minister and second in the Cuban hierarchy, Raul Castro insisted that his 80-year-old brother, Fidel, was on the mend after undergoing abdominal surgery, and that he'd be back in office soon. However, the younger brother and presidential stand-in of more than two months is now taking over the leftist icon's political space like no one else has in 47 years, fostering renewed speculation over the future leadership of the Communist island nation. "Fidel is doing well. He has a telephone and is using it more and more," Raul said Sunday during a televised national meeting of 15-year-old students in Havana. "He is not dying as some press in Miami report, but constantly improving," he said, adding that the student delegates would hold a special session with his brother in December. Raul said he and other leaders had met with Fidel on October 6 "for a number of hours" during which they discussed "important matters" and Fidel "gave instructions." (*Reuters*, 9/10/06)

**October 9:** A morning of music, song, poetry, ballet, and dances from around Latin America brought an end to the Fourth Congress of the Jose Marti Pioneers Organization in Havana. The organization is made up of children and adolescents from first grade through junior high school. Yadrin Guerra Valido, a congress participant, read the pioneers declaration and 45 children, in representation of the more than 130,000 new first graders, received their blue scarves that symbolizes their affiliation. The cultural gala ended a weekend of activities for the 1,000 delegates and guests to the pioneer's congress. Among the groups performing were La Colmenita, Bebé Compañía, Los Aragoncitos, a giant chorus and the Symphonic Orchestra. The event was presided by Esteban Lazo Hernandez, member of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee; Mercedes Lopez Acea, member of the Central Committee Secretariat; Luis Ignacio Gomez, minister of Education; Julio Martinez first secretary of the Young Communist League; and Miriam Yanet Martin, president of the Jose Marti Pioneers Organization. (*Granma*, 10/10/06)

**October 9:** Six people, among them a young boy, died and four were injured in a highway crash near the eastern Cuban town of Buenaventura, the local press reported. Antonio Martinez lost control of the truck he was driving - in which the dead and injured, evidently, were riding - and went off the road some 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of Holguin, said the official AIN news agency. The dead, including an 18-month-old boy, lived in the municipality of Calixto Garcia in Holguin province. Driver negligence, the violation of traffic laws and the consumption of alcohol are among the main causes of road accidents in Cuba, according to local media. Official estimates are that traffic accidents constitute the fourth-leading cause of death in Cuba, after heart disease, cancer and cerebro-vascular problems. (*EFE*, 9/10/06)

**October 10:** An Internet discussion on cultural diversity and social exclusion in the period of terrorism and globalization took place in the eastern province of Guantanamo, as part of the commemoration of Cuban Culture Day. The Cuban Culture Day recognizes the creation of the Cuban National Anthem 138 years ago. The digital interactive forum is called "Nationalities and nations facing the persistence of terrorism and globalization" and counts with the participation of people from all over the world with opinions on this and other related topics. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/10/06)

**October 10:** Approximately 300 Fidel Castro supporters gathered for a public "act of repudiation" that prevented the opening ceremony for a congress of independent libraries in Santa Clara. "Since early in the morning, some 300 individuals have been impeding access to the house of Noelia Rodríguez, in the José Martí neighborhood, and they did not let us get there," said librarian Idalberto González Gómez. (*AFP*, 11/10/06)

**October 11:** Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque, who is heading a meeting of independent libraries considered to be illegal in Cuba, said that she will continue with the project despite an incident that occurred on the first day of the event. The congress began on October 10 with the participation of 152 independent libraries from all over the communist island, Roque told the press. Roque, who is the head of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, said that during the first day of the congress an incident was registered in an independent library in Santa Clara province when government supporters prevented a group of librarians from meeting. Supporters of Cuba's Communist government, which seeks to control what people read, sometimes form groups or "mobs" to harass opponents of the 47-year-old regime. Dissidents say the gangs are encouraged by the government, and often include government agents. In homes in the central province of Cienfuegos, Camaguey in the east and Havana discussions of library issues were being held with the participation of about 20 people. "We're ready to continue with the congress until the end," said Roque, but she could not or would not specify the number of people who might be participating in the activities. (*EFE*, 11/10/06)

**October 11:** Benito Martínez Abrogan, Cuba's oldest person and star of the government's efforts to promote healthy lives for its oldest citizens, died at the age of 126. "He died this afternoon. He had been in intensive care, but old age was the main problem," said an official at Ciego de Avila Hospital in central Cuba. Martínez, who attributed his longevity to a healthy diet of fresh vegetables, some meat and only occasional consumption of alcohol, was born in Haiti in 1880 and migrated to Cuba to work on sugar cane plantations in 1925, according to his Cuban documents. There was no definitive proof of his age as he had no birth certificate. The toothless centenarian was the star attraction of Cuba's 120-Club, a group formed by Fidel Castro's personal physician Eugenio Selman to promote healthy lives for Cuba's elderly. (*Reuters*, 11/10/06)

**October 12:** After attending the opening ceremony of the Congress of Independent Libraries, non-violent opposition activists Nancy Suárez and her husband, Orestes Suárez Torres, were brutally beaten up by a team from the Rapid Response Brigades just outside the city of Santa Clara. Members of a Brigade forced the oppositionists into a taxi and viciously assaulted them. (*Cubanet*, 12/10/06)

**October 16:** Cuban Vice President Raul Castro sent a diploma recognizing the work of Cuba's Mundo Latino TV Productions Enterprise on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. The diploma sent by the Minister of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces highlights the contribution made by Mundo Latino to the spread and defense of the truth of the Cuban Revolution, and the rescue of the most significant developments of the recent national history. Esteban Lazo, Vice President of the Cuban Council of State, also attended the ceremony at Havana's Jose Martí Memorial. More than 450 documentary films produced by Mundo Latino have been sent to all continents and have raised the interest of countless TV production companies due to their high quality and the content of their subjects, such as the transformations of Cuban education and culture. (*ACN*, 16/10/06)

**October 16:** The Ladies in White, made up of relatives of imprisoned Cuban dissidents, denounced the authorities in Havana for not allowing their representatives to travel to New York to receive a human rights prize. About 20 members of the movement met in the home of the group's spokeswoman, Laura Pollan, just a few hours before the Human Rights 2006 prize award ceremony, sponsored by the organization Human Rights First, was due to begin in New York. Pollan said that she and Miriam Leyva, one of the founders of the Ladies in White, had followed the proper travel procedures with the Cuban authorities to make a trip to the United States, and she lamented the Havana regime's lack of response to their requests. (*EFE*, 16/10/06)

**October 18:** Cuba's Jose Marti National Library celebrates its 105th birthday with 24,000-plus clients and daily average services to 450 readers. Director Eliades Acosta told Granma daily that services comprehend a stock of four million books, photos, maps and other documents. He added that restoration work allowed to show 16th century books and a hall to provide service for blind people. The Library was initially opened at a small hall at La Fuerza Castle, on October 18, 1901, until it moved to its current location on June 12, 1957. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/10/06)

**October 18:** Carlos Lage Codorniu, 25, leads 300,000 Cuban university students and is the son of Cuba's third most powerful man after the Castro brothers. He confidently believes one-party socialism will survive in Cuba for another generation whether or not ailing Fidel Castro re-emerges to run the nation. But Cuba must win the hearts of its disaffected youth and improve "material" conditions for its people who have put up with economic hardships since Soviet communism collapsed, Lage told the press. "The greatest challenge of the Revolution is to incorporate these young people and get them to participate more in Cuban society," Lage said. Lage admits the benefits of Cuban socialism are not always visible 47 years after Castro's revolution and there is room for debate over changes in Cuba's economic policies. "The main thing is to keep the guiding principle of the revolution: this apparently utopian search for the greatest possible social justice," Lage said. "We know there are deficiencies (...) People must be able to see results in their material life," he said. Lage said Cuba still had to find the right balance between centralizing control over the economy and opening up incentives to spur growth. But for the student leader there is no question of reducing 90-percent state ownership in the Cuban economy. Nor of following the Chinese path to "market socialism" that opened up China to capitalist enterprise while keeping political power firmly in the hands of the Communist Party. "We do not agree with privatization, not even on a small scale," he said. "China cannot be our model. We are a much smaller country. They do not have the United States 90 miles (145 km) away," he said. (*Reuters*, 18/10/06)

**October 20:** Jorge Luis Sierra is the new Transportation Minister of Cuba, a change decided due to the importance of the sector, officials sources announced. Sierra, member of the Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), substitutes Carlos Manuel Pazo. Before his appointment he was in the Secretariat of the political organization, The decision to replace Pazo was adopted by the Council of State, on a proposal of the PCC Political Board and attending the importance of the sector, the daily states. Public transportation was one of the Cuban industries that shrank most with the end of subsidies related to the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Cuba has increased commercial ties with China in recent years to replace its aging vehicle, train and fluvial technologies. (*Prensa Latina, EFE*, 20/10/06)

**October 20:** A Cuban writer of detective novels and a new nonfiction book about prostitution on the communist-run island says he has not defected to Germany, but he doesn't know when -- or if -- he can return home. Amir Valle, now living in Berlin with his wife and their 5-year-old son, says he planned to return to Cuba in a few months when he left the island last fall for a book tour in Europe. Despite differences with his government, "I had decided to remain in Cuba because I feel that from there my way of thinking and acting is most valid," Valle said. But a year later, the celebrated 40-year-old author he says he lacks papers from his own government allowing him to return. After months of confusion about his migratory status, Valle now says that if he is allowed back in Cuba, he'll return only on his own terms and timing. "Many Cuban intellectuals have spent years asking for this absurd regulation for entering and departing the country to be annulled," Valle wrote from Berlin. "We have not received any answer, except for the classic, 'It's under discussion.'" Valle said, he demands "my right to return to Cuba when I deem it convenient in accord with my current international commitments." (*AP*, 20/10/06)

**October 22:** Author, critic and literary expert Salvador Bueno Menéndez (Havana, 1917), who presided over the Cuban Academy of the Language until two years ago, passed away in Havana at the age of 89. Bueno joined the Academy in 1992 and became its president in 1995. In 2004, he was replaced by author Lisandro Otero. (*EER*, 23/10/06)

**October 22:** Cuba has begun debating how to correct rampant theft and inefficiency in state-run services, from pouring beer to shining shoes, that could signal a step toward economic reform under acting President Raul Castro. In a

scathing three-part series on graft in shops and bars entitled The Big Old Swindle, the Communist Youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde said a team of university experts will investigate ways to improve services. "The current irregularities in the country's services, in the midst of the search for a better economic model, has meant Cuba still does not have a retail and services sector that satisfies people's expectations," the newspaper said. Cuba's economy, modeled on Soviet communism that ultimately failed, is overwhelmingly state-controlled. The state provides supplies and sets serving amounts and prices for everything from a cup of coffee and ham sandwich to watch repairs and shoe shining. "The theory that came from the Soviet Union was skewed," economist Luis Marcelo Yera of the National Economic Research Institute told Juventud Rebelde. He advocated giving workers more power to decide the running of state enterprises. Yera was one of a number of academics quoted in the paper who stated systemic problems, including over centralization, hampered economic development and could not be dealt with simply by more regulation and discipline. "We live in a society with many distortions; that's why many things have to be guaranteed through cohesion and control, but not everything can be accomplished that way," Ernesto Molina, from Cuba's top school for international relations, told the paper. "We need a scientific plan to organize society politically and economically so it works better," he said. (*Reuters*, 23/10/06)

**October 23:** Ongoing restoration work in the historic centre of the Cuban capital has been praised by UNESCO consultants, and could serve as a model for preserving heritage sites around the world. In 2007, Old Havana will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of its proclamation as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), with one-third of its total area of 2.1 square kilometres completely restored. Two highly qualified independent experts, architects Sylvio Mutal of the Netherlands and Fernando Carrión of Ecuador, described the work carried out by the Cuban state in that part of the city as "successful and commendable," in a report commissioned by UNESCO. (*IPS*, 23/10/06)

**October 24:** The ten best Cuban books on Art and Literature published in 2005 received the Literary Critics 2005 Award in a ceremony at the Dulce María Loynaz Cultural Center. These high acknowledgements were for "Falsos Documentos" by Mirta Yañez, who received the same awards in 1998 and 1999, "El Caribe en su Discurso Literario", by Luis Alvarez Alvarez and Margarita Mateo Palmer and "La Visita de la Infanta", by Reinaldo Montero. Also awarded were "Alejo en Tierra Firme", by Leonardo Acosta and "La Neblina del Ayer", by Leonardo Padura, Ensenada de Mora, by Alex Pausides, "Contra el Silencio", by Zaida Capote and "Una Vieja Redonda", by Ivette Vian. Added to this list are "El Amor como Energía Revolucionaria en José Martí", by Fina García Marruz and "El Hombre Discursivo", by Antón Arrufat. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** Fidel Castro's health has been improving each day since his intestinal surgery in late July, and he will soon resume his duties, the head of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington said. "His health has been improving every day and soon he will resume his responsibilities as president," said Dagoberto Rodríguez in an attempt to lay to rest the rumours that have gained strength in certain circles about Castro's alleged terminal illness. (*EFE*, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** A small group of ordinary craftsmen in Cuba are trying to preserve one of their country's national treasures, the boat Ernest Hemingway once fished from. The fishing vessel named "El Pilar" has fallen into disrepair following years of being ravaged by hurricanes and a lack of upkeep. The craftsmen are now using little more than their hands and sandpaper to tear years of corrosion from the boat. The men hope to have "El Pilar" returned to its former glory within six months. The boat has been part of Cuba's national history since Hemingway's death in 1961 when his estate on the communist island became government property. (*NBC6.Net*, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** Bactivec, a biological product produced in Cuba, will be used throughout the island against the reproduction of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, the agent transmitting dengue fever, Granma newspaper reported. Developed by the Cuban company Labiofam, the product rapidly destroys larvae of Culex, Anopheles and Aedes, the latter a dengue and yellow fever carrier. Over 62,000 liters of the product have been sprayed by helicopter in the city of Havana and Havana province, as part of the health drive implemented in the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/10/06)

**October 25:** Catholic priest Julio Alberto Fernández Triana, a member of the Salesian Priests congregation, was detained and confined in a cell at a police station located on the corner of Dragones and Zulueta, in Old Havana. Father Julio went to the police station to inquire about a young man who had been previously arrested on the street for not carrying personal ID. He identified himself as a catholic priest and asked the desk officer why the young man had been detained. The policeman exploded in anger, took away his ID document and ordered him jailed. Father Julio resides at the church of María Auxiliadora (Mary the Helper) in Old Havana. (*Puente Informativo*, 25/10/06)

**October 25:** Interim Cuban leader Raul Castro appeared for the first time in three weeks to congratulate "Palante" humor magazine on its 45th anniversary, the Cuban agency AIN said. Castro, interim head of state while his brother Fidel, Cuba's longtime strongman, recuperates from surgery, hadn't appeared in public since October 8, when he announced that Fidel was "constantly improving" and "not dead as the Miami press has reported". (*AFP*, 25/10/06)

**October 25:** In the wake of an unusual investigation by Cuban state journalists into public employees who regularly cheat customers, Havana has announced an even more surprising response: a study of what's wrong with the entire system. But the study won't be all. New rules aimed at cracking down on widespread fraud at state businesses will take effect January 2, the Communist Party newspaper Granma reported. Together, the two announcements appear to hint at what some experts say could be a significant change in policy in the wake of Fidel Castro's surrender of power - an acknowledgement that perhaps the root cause of Cuba's workplace fraud is a flaw with its socialist system. This week's announcements came on the heels of a three-part series in the Communist youth newspaper, Juventud Rebelde. In a remarkably unusual piece of journalism for Cuba's state-controlled media, reporters went undercover to restaurants, taxis and shoe repair shops to show how customers were routinely cheated. Beer mugs were not filled to the top, sandwiches were light on ham, taxi fares were too high and repair shops charged more than state-set prices. While the October 1 article did not stress the meager wages that often drive Cubans to pilfer from their state employers, it quoted workers as saying it was unfair to judge them when the government failed to provide the supplies needed to conduct business. (*McClatchy Newspapers*, 25/10/06)

**October 26:** Fidel Castro sent a digital camera to a Cuban teenager who was denied the prize he won in an international competition by the terms of Washington's four-decade-old economic embargo against the island, the Cuban press reported. Raysel Sosa Rojas, 13, was the author of one of the winning submissions to a UN-sponsored environmental contest, but unlike the other award winners, he did not receive a Nikon camera. Because the camera contained parts made in the United States, Nikon maintained that delivering it to the youngster would be in violation of Washington's embargo, according to Cuba's Juventud Rebelde newspaper. The official daily had reported that Sosa had since received more than 1,200 messages of support from around the world and even offers to send him a camera with similar features. The newspaper accused Nikon of "obsequious reverence for the Yankee embargo." (*EFE*, 26/10/06)

**October 27:** Cuban authorities released a pro-democracy activist who had been imprisoned since July 2005 after taking part in a rally outside the French Embassy in Havana, dissident organizations said. The outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society said in a statement that Ricardo Medina Salabarría, a member of that organization, received notice that he was being released and was subsequently taken to his home by a government official. Medina was among a score of dissidents arrested during a July 22, 2005 rally to demand the release of political prisoners. With his release, seven of those detainees remain behind bars, according to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN). That demonstration was held a week after several opponents of the island's Communist regime were arrested - six of whom remain in prison - following a ceremony commemorating Cuba's deadly sinking of a tugboat packed with fleeing refugees. Thirty-seven would-be migrants to the United States died in that 1994 tragedy. CCDHRN leader Elizardo Sanchez told EFE that the people detained in the two demonstrations never had formal charges filed against them and are in a "type of (legal) limbo." (*EFE*, 27/10/06)

**October 28:** Fidel Castro appeared on state television speaking to Cubans as he browsed the day's newspapers, his first public appearance in 40 days. "Now, when our enemies have prematurely declared me moribund or dead, I'm happy to

send to our compatriots and friends around the world this short film footage," said Castro, 80. The Cuban leader walked unassisted in the five-minute video. The footage showed Castro in a sports jacket as he paged through copies of the government dailies Granma and Juventud Rebelde. "This," Castro says as he lifts the day's newspapers, "is in case there were any doubts that this (was filmed either) ten days ago or today," he said. (AFP, 28/10/06)

**October 29:** Photographs of Fidel Castro standing and talking on the phone were published in Cuba's state-run media, a day after the ailing leader appeared in a video to dispel rumors he was on his deathbed. The Communist Youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde dedicated its front page to the Cuban president, printing a blown-up picture of a pensive Castro with the title "Always fighting for something, and fighting with optimism!" The latest photos apparently were taken during the filming of a video, in which Castro, looking thin and tired, was shown walking slowly but steadily in an unidentified room and reading in a loud voice an edition of Granma, the Communist Party daily newspaper. "They've declared me moribund prematurely," he said. "But it pleases me to send my compatriots and friends this small video." (AP, 29/10/06)

**October 30:** Fidel Castro's older brother said the Cuban leader is doing well and that the family will try to make him rest more before he goes back to work. "He is well, he's been resting a bit because of the operation he had," Ramon Castro, 82, told reporters at a trade fair outside Havana. "It's been published that he's going to start working again. We're trying to hold him back a bit longer though." (AP, 30/10/06)

**October 31:** A low and declining birth rate, one that does not provide for replacement of the population, combined with high life expectancy has Cuban authorities concerned about who is going to do the country's work in the coming decades, including caring for more and more old people. "For 28 years the fertility rate in Cuba has been below the level needed for replacing the population," said the official Communist daily Granma in an article underscoring the worrisome demographics. Though officials of the nearly 48-year-old one-party state have been looking at this matter for years, Granma says it is becoming "more disturbing" lately, as more and more women decide either to have only one baby or forgo the experience of motherhood entirely. Juan Carlos Alfonso Fraga, director of the national office of population studies, said the falling birth rate is the main reason for the aging of the Cuban population. Other factors are the relatively high level of education achieved by Cuban females and easy and free access to birth control and state-provided abortion. But material and economic factors also come into play. Many women are discouraged from having children, he said, by a lack of housing and other things and the high cost of living. He also noted the scarcity of support services for small children such as day care and the difficulty in obtaining "la canastilla," or "basket" of infant-care items that used to be readily available at subsidized prices. Another factor pointed out by experts on demography is the inclination to emigrate among women of child-bearing age. (EFE, 31/10/06)

**October 31:** IOC president Jacques Rogge arrived in Cuba for a three-day visit in which he'll inaugurate the international Sport for All Congress and meet with the island's top sports officials. "It's a great pleasure to be in the congress, and to see my friends from Cuban sports," Rogge, who last traveled to Cuba in 2003, said at the airport. "We are going to cover issues of great interest." Jose Ramon Fernandez, the president of Cuba's Olympic Committee, received Rogge and his wife Anne Bovijin at the airport. Rogge was to attend the congress' opening ceremonies on November 1 and give a press conference before traveling to Jamaica. More than 1,000 health and sports specialists from 132 countries are expected to participate in the congress, an IOC-sponsored event held every two years. (AP, 31/10/06)

## **Economy**

**October 1:** More than half of state-run enterprises inspected in the Cuban capital this year have cheated their customers, the Communist Youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde reported. Officials making spot inspections found that nearly 11,700 of the 22,700 businesses checked through August were selling their products at a higher price than advertised or delivering lesser quantities than required, a local director of inspection told the newspaper. Among the

worst offenders are farm markets, restaurants and bakeries, the director said. Reporters at the newspaper did their own investigation, describing state cafes where beer mugs weren't filled to the brim and taxi drivers charged more than the metered fare. The two-page spread on the pervasive cheating came four days after Cuba's acting President Raul Castro urged workers to crack down on corruption and stealing from the state in a speech to the island's communist labor union. "Some state services are being used for personal gain by insensible people who change the prices and norms of the products, deceitfully passing the limit between state-run and private," the report in the state-controlled newspaper said. (*AP, BBC, 1/10/06*)

**October 1:** China and Venezuela are major players at this year's Havana International Transportation Fair, both having demonstrated a desire to help Cuba modernize its transportation system. He Hongda, Chinese vice minister of Railroads, told official daily Granma that his country will do everything possible to assist Cuba in the development and modernization of its railway system. He said the collaboration could have a big influence on the rest of Latin America. Previous agreements, signed between Venezuela and Cuba, are also geared to boosting the island's transportation infrastructure. One example is the recent forming of Astimarca, a joint enterprise between companies of the Venezuelan ministry of Infrastructure and the Cuban ministry of Transportation to build a floating dock in Cuba which will then be relocated to the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo, in the state of Zulia and used to provide maintenance to smaller ships. Cuban specialists are also providing technical assistance to the Venezuelan National Institute of Civil Aeronautics in more than 30 projects aimed at improving air navigation and airport infrastructure. (*Periódico 26, 1/10/06*)

**October 2:** Colombia and Cuba started a second negotiation round to expand and foster the Agreement of Economic Complementation, inked in the framework of the Latin American Integration Association. Cuban Trade Adviser Bogota Alexis Martinez said the meeting is analyzing issues like access to markets, rules and proceedings. Martinez recalled that the first round held on September 18-20 tackled topics like solution to controversies and technical obstacles to trade, plus health measures. After this gathering, Martinez talked of third and fourth rounds as necessary to conclude the expanding and strengthening of the Agreement of Economic Complementation between the two nations. The increase of bilateral trade links was agreed between Colombian Trade, Industry and Tourism Minister Jorge Humberto Botero, and Cuban Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez, during the former's visit to Havana in April. (*Prensa Latina, 2/10/06*)

**October 3:** Pebercan, oil company quoted as PBC in Toronto's Stock Exchange, announced an increase of 42 per cent in extraction of fuel from its north-western oil fields in Cuba this year, compared to the same period of 2005. Gross daily production at Block 7 in the Cuban north-western oil belt, approaches 21,000 barrels per day, of which 11,500 barrels is Pebercan's share, and that was before the hook up of well STC-302 which has proven successful, according to the company. Subsidiary of Sherritt International which has also signed for four blocks in Cuban waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Pebercan expects that with the two extra wells that will be drilled before year-end, it should be able to achieve the objective of 15,000 barrels per day in her share of production, a 60 per cent increase over 2005. (*Prensa Latina, 3/10/06*)

**October 3:** The IT revolution taking place in Cuba is positioning the country as an attractive outsourcing option for Canadian companies, and a gateway to the Latin American market, according to website OffshoringTimes.com. Cuba has proved masterful in reinventing its economic priorities in troubled times, said the Canadian online news service. Since 1991, Cuba's information technology sector has been developing at warp speed and now consists of about 45,000 highly skilled workers, 38 per cent of whom have specialized degrees. More than 85 per cent of the country's IT industry is concentrated in technical services and software development, highlighted OffshoringTimes. "We've been investing in this sector for the last 14 years and we now have highly skilled IT workers at every level," says Luis Marin, general manager of Avante, the marketing arm of Cuba's Ministry of Information Technology and Communications. "IT doesn't require a lot of investment (...) except in human resources." Canada is Cuba's third-largest trading partner and fourth-largest foreign investor, with more than \$750-million tied up in the island nation,

according to Canadian sources. Cuba's Centresoft Corp. and Cimex Corp. have partnered with Sentai Software Corp. of Edmonton and Indcom Trading Co. of Orleans, Ontario, to create an international software consortium called CubaSoft Solutions Inc. CubaSoft is recruiting Cuban IT talent to work on projects for the Canadian companies and is also developing domestic IT projects. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/10/06)

**October 4:** Cuba introduced a new medical device to facilitate the diagnosis of vascular peripheral diseases, official sources said. The Cuban-made equipment, Digital ANGIODIN PD-3000 detects ailments like arrhythmia, arterial failure, erectile sexual dysfunction and micro and macro vessel failures at an early stage, Prensa Latina news agency reported. The equipment is simple in design and useful for the vascular haemal-dynamic laboratories. According to the National Information Agency, the island nation has exported this equipment to Venezuela, and is all set for its production by the Medical Biophysical Centre headquartered in Santiago de Cuba. (*IANS*, 4/10/06)

**October 4:** Sherritt International Corp., a Canadian company that produces nickel and oil in Cuba, plans to expand on the island nation because executives are confident the investment will be safe after Fidel Castro cedes power or dies. Nickel production at Sherritt's Moa facility in Cuba will rise almost 50 percent to 50,000 tons a year by about 2010, Chief Financial Officer Guy Bentinck said at a conference in Toronto. The company also will produce more than 20 percent of Cuba's electricity within the next few years, he said. Shares of Sherritt trade at a discount because of its joint ventures in Cuba, Bentinck said. The executive said he is counting on the company's investment in key parts of Cuba's economy and relationships with the government and workers to secure its investments after Castro leaves office, he said. "Our relationships in Cuba are exceptional, and no matter who's in power, that will continue," Bentinck said. "We operate all the assets and control the technology, that's one of the reasons that our position is so strong in Cuba." Shares of Sherritt are discounted because its business in Cuba prevents it from accessing US capital and markets, Bentinck said. (*Bloomberg*, 4/10/06)

**October 4:** Cuban farmers will help Trinidad and Tobago revive its anaemic agriculture sector, Trinidad's prime minister said. Trinidad, hoping to curb inflation fueled by high-priced food imports, will set up 10 large farms, two of which will be run with the assistance of Cuban agricultural experts, Prime Minister Patrick Manning said as he introduced his 2007 budget in Parliament. (*AP*, 4/10/06)

**October 6:** Venezuela's state-owned oil firm PDVSA has cut its October unleaded gasoline export flow to neighbouring Cuba due to refinery problems, oil traders and ship brokers said. In the past two weeks, PDVSA shut its 54,000 barrels per day cat cracker at El Palito refinery after an electrical outage, and its Puerto La Cruz refinery was also experiencing operational problems. The export flow stoppage to Cuba was confirmed by a source close to PDVSA. "Venezuela will not be exporting any unleaded gasoline to Cuba in October," said a ship broker in the United States. A PDVSA official did not immediately respond to request for comment. (*Reuters*, 6/10/06)

**October 6:** After three days of tasting, meetings and exhibits, the 7th International Wine Festival, most important of its type in the country, was closed at Cuba's Hotel Nacional. A group of foreign companies maintain their operations with the Caribbean island and confer a special touch to the international tourism. One of those business examples is the Juanita Mateo S.L Company importing the Fraixenet Spanish cava produced at the region of Penedes in Barcelona. The representative of those sparkling wines, Luis Ortega, is one of the main promoters of the culture of wine in Cuba, founder of the initiative in the Hotel Nacional and organizer of courses to train sommeliers. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/10/06)

**October 7:** The Viet Nam Oil and Gas Corporation (PetroVietnam) and the Cuba Oil Company (Cubapetroleo) signed an agreement for oil and gas cooperation. The signing ceremony was witnessed by visiting Vietnamese Minister of Industry Hoang Trung Hai and Cuba's Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas. In a working session the two ministers dealt with the two countries' cooperation, especially in the industrial field. The two countries were cooperating in basic industries, metallurgy, light industries and the food-processing industry. (*Vneconomy*, 9/10/06)

**October 7:** Cuban Vice Minister for Foreign Investment and Cooperation Ramon Ripoll visited the northern province of Hung Yen to review construction projects supervised and carried out by Cuban advisors in Vietnam. Ripoll was received in the provincial office of the Cuban consulting firm Quality Courier International (QCI) whose general director Rasciel Alvarez gave detailed information on the six major road plans the entity advises in this country. Projects amount to 1,382 kilometres long, 116 of them four-lane highways with complex construction systems due to the soft ground, 410 bridges and more. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/10/06)

**October 9:** The increase of family vegetable gardens, popular organoponics and other tasks have added to urban agriculture over 139,960 plots of land to contribute to feeding the population. Now, nearly 76 percent of Cubans live in cities and towns, and the fostering of this method is more and more popular. More than 4 million tons of agricultural products were produced in these parcels using organic gardening methods. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/10/06)

**October 11:** Czech exports to Cuba rose by 57 percent year-on-year to \$21.7m (around Kc480m) last year, the daily Pravo said. The Industry and Trade Ministry has therefore recently drafted a strategy for trade with Cuba, the paper said. Trade between the Czech Republic and Cuba showed a surplus of \$8.3m last year. Cuba was one of the few Latin American countries with which the Czech Republic did not have a trade deficit. In recent years, the Czech Republic has exported mostly agricultural products and food to Cuba. Imports include mainly tobacco and tobacco products, and spirits. Some Czech companies have successfully launched operation in Cuba, Pravo said. Engineering company Skodaexport, for instance, does repairs and reconstructions of transformers in Cuba. It has also entered talks over the renewal of Cuban coal-fired power plants. Motorbike maker Jawa supplies to Cuba components and spare parts for motorbikes which are then assembled there. Company Simplex exports dried milk and other dairy products, hops, malt and beer to Cuba. Spark plugs maker Brisk Tabor has built an assembly hall in Cuba where it supplies semifinished products. Further growth in the development of Czech-Cuban trade is prevented by Cuba's approach to the repayment of its debt to the Czech Republic, the ministry said. The debt has first to be converted to a freely convertible currency, which Cuba refuses, the ministry added. (*CTK*, 11/10/06)

**October 11:** Iran is planning to export 100 freight train wagons to Cuba. Exports Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) has financed 85 percent of the seven-million-euro contract on the export of 100 freight train wagons from Iran to Cuba, the local press reported in Tehran. Earlier, the bank had undertaken to finance the export of 250 freight train carriages including 100 cement carrier and 150 trailer wagons to the Latin American nation. The bank has also helped develop major projects in Cuba including the building of sewage pumping station and water treatment facilities there. Based on the report, EDBI has so far earmarked around \$200 million euros loans for development of various projects in Cuba. (*Tehran Times*, 12/10/06)

**October 12:** Cuba is eager to revive its once mighty sugar industry and, with the help of foreign investors, become a global player in the fast-growing ethanol fuel sector, say Cuba analysts and energy specialists. It has been decades since the communist island stood alone at the top of the list of the world's biggest sugar producers, but Cuban officials reportedly are adamant about reviving sugar, the country's No. 1 export until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. One Cuba analyst with close ties to the country's sugar ministry noted that Cuban officials were seeking overseas assistance in reviving the industry, though they acknowledged that will be difficult because of the country's chronic lack of revenue and resources. In response to the growing global demand for the commodity, Havana created a Cuban business society called ZERUS, which is charged with supervising investment projects in Cuba's sugar sector. ZERUS Director Jose Rivera Ortiz said in a recent interview with Cuban business magazine Opciones that Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Investment has already approved the group's initiative to revive the sugar industry - with an eye on ethanol. (*The Washington Times*, 12/10/06)

**October 15:** Theft and negligence are rife in Cuba's state-run services, with employees often making money on the side by changing prices or portions in places such as cafeterias, appliance repair shops and beauty salons, an official newspaper reported. The Union of Young Communists newspaper, Juventud Rebelde (Rebel Youth), gave a scathing

assessment of such everyday services, saying the majority of places the paper visited during an investigation were "going through a bad moment." "A new analysis is needed to turn the situation around," the paper said in its report, the second part of an investigation into state-run services. It gave no indication what solutions might be needed. Investigative reporting is rare in communist-run Cuba, although occasionally the state-run media plays the whistle-blower role. Suggested remedies are usually calls for more discipline and control rather than for radical change. (*Reuters*, 15/10/06)

**October 16:** Cuban Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro announced an increase in the number of sugar mills active for the upcoming harvest, with a total of 51 factories. The current situation of the Cuban sugar industry and sugar cane plantations, plus the economic need to carry out a harvest between January 1st and April 30th, allows for the operation of an additional nine sugar mills over the number of factories that worked in the last sugar cane harvest. In recent statements, the Cuban Sugar Minister said the additional sugar mills did not work last year because of a low bulk of sugar cane or due to their need for important investment in their energy systems, *Granma* daily reported. (*ACN*, 16/10/06)

**October 16:** CDC Group, a British government development finance corporation, will sell its 60 percent stake in CariFin, a joint venture with Cuban banks that offers short- and medium-term financing in Cuba, officials said. "This was a decision of our share holders and we are selling to our Cuban partner, the Grupo Nueva Banca," CariFin president Paul Nabavi. CariFin has operated in Cuba since 1997 providing working capital and short-term trade finance to Cuban and foreign companies through loans and the purchase of bills of exchange at a discount. Nabavi said the decision to pull out of Cuba had no connection with the US government's tightened enforcement of sanctions against Havana that has led several international banks to close dollar accounts used by Cuba. (*Reuters*, 16/10/06)

**October 17:** The 4th session of the Cuba-China Business Committee ended with the signing of an action plan for 2007, according to Cuban diplomatic sources. The session, attended by representatives from sectors like transportation, tourism, electronics, fishing and others, took place in the context of the 100th edition of the Guangdong International Fair, held in the southern city of Guangzhou, China. About 50 representatives from Cuban companies and entities and 100 Chinese businesspeople from several branches of economy and trade took part in the exchange of information and experiences. The Cuban delegation is made up of Iron and Steel Industry Minister Fernando Acosta, Cuban Business Committee Pedro Alvarez, and Cuban ambassador Carlos Miguel Pereira. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/10/06)

**October 18:** After three years of remaining on a summer daylight savings time schedule, Cuba's National Electrical Union decided to go back to its normal schedule during this month of October. On October 28 going into October 29, watches should be set back one hour returning to the normal schedule, which in Cuba is known as the winter schedule. Due to electricity generation shortages, it was decided to maintain the summer daylight savings schedule for three years; however, the country is now in a position to produce all the energy it needs, which is why it was decided to go back to the regular schedule. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/10/06)

**October 19:** Cuba and China have agreed to launch a biotechnology venture to develop neurotechnology products in China, official Cuban media announced. Raul Morgalo, deputy chief at Cuba's Neurosciences Institute, and Xihong Wu, a representative of the University of Beijing, signed a letter of intent on the deal after two-day bilateral talks in Havana, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper *Granma* reported. The venture will be the third between the two countries. The first two biotech ventures produce and market products from Cuba's Molecular Immunology Center and its Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Center. (*AFP*, 19/10/06)

**October 19:** Cuban chemists look for new technologies that allow efficient use of renewable energy sources, said the president of the Cuban Chemistry Society Doctor Alberto Nuñez Sellen during the 27 Latin American Chemistry Congress, underway in Havana. The challenge facing our professionals is to find ways that make the country increasing independent from oil-based fuels, with the growing use of renewable energy sources and ecologic systems that have a

positive impact on the planet's environment, the expert said. In statements to the press, Doctor Nuñez said that chemistry can make its contribution to the development of the Cuban national energy program. He explained that some energy sources that can be exploited in Cuba include sun and wind energy, while the combustion of hydrogen is another challenge ahead. (*ACN*, 19/10/06)

**October 19:** During the inaugural day of the Spanish-Cuban Management Cooperation Committee's annual Session in Havana, Spanish entrepreneurs ratified their bet on Cuba and underscored the country's economic stability in the current political juncture. In the months since Cuban leader Fidel Castro temporarily transferred power to his brother Raúl, the Cuban economy has maintained its "normal" patterns and no decisions pertaining foreign firms on the island have been altered, stressed Juan Arenas, Spanish cochairman of the Committee. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/10/06)

**October 20:** Montreal-based junior Pebercan is gearing up for further development of its Santa Cruz field in Cuba's Block 7. Pebercan exploration manager Patrice Bedu said the company plans to spud three more wells this year as part of its Cuban oil programme. Santa Cruz is currently producing about 6,000 barrels per day, with output expected to reach commercial levels by the end of this year, possibly in November. Ongoing development and well drilling at the field should allow the company to take crude output to 15,000 bpd by the end of 2007, he said. Located off Cuba's northern coast between Havana and Matanzas, Block 7 holds three oil fields, including Santa Cruz, where horizontal wells on the shoreline tap deep into a stack of carbonated thrust sheets offshore. The other two fields in the block are Canasi and Seboruco. Pebercan holds a 60% stake in Canasi and 55% in Seboruco, with the two fields operated by Canadian oil producer Sherritt. (*Upstream*, 20/10/06)

**October 20:** Spanish exports to Cuba grew by 40 % in the first half of 2006, consolidating a tendency toward recovery that began in 2005 after four years of stagnation in bilateral trade. Cuba remains the third largest recipient of Spanish exports in Latin America, after Mexico and Brazil. Up until July, sales of Spanish goods to the island had already reached 351 million euros, whereas in 2005 Spain exported a combined 488 million euros worth of goods to the Caribbean nation, 13 % over the previous year's figure. (*El País*, 20/10/06)

**October 22:** Satellite dishes are prohibited in Cuba, and those who defy the ban face a fine of 30,000 "pesos", an exorbitant amount for a population with a median salary barely over 200 pesos a month. Three months ago, the government toughened the legislation to prevent the private use of these antennas and has added a fine of 20,000 pesos for those citizens who share with their neighbors their access to foreign TV broadcasts. (*ABC*, 22/10/06)

**October 23:** The "Sierra Maestra" International Airport in the eastern Cuban province of Granma concluded a modernization process that left a 2.6 km long landing strip, according to an official report. A report from the Tourism Ministry indicated the airport is already giving first-quality international services. Located to eight kilometers from Manzanillo city, the airport has modern redecorated areas for travelers like waiting rooms and service cabins for passengers. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/10/06)

**October 23:** A seed "biofactory" with technology transferred by Cuba and an annual output capacity of five million seedlings was inaugurated at a scientific park in Colombia. The plant was officially inaugurated by the governor of the department of Antioquía, Aníbal Gaviria, who praised it as the "most advanced in Latin America." (*EFE*, 23/10/06)

**October 24:** According to sources in the tourist sector, the Cuban authorities have turned economic management of the majority of its resorts and hotels over to European hotel chains, mostly Spanish firms. High-ranking Cuban officials have acknowledged an alarming reduction in the number of tourists visiting the island. High prices and poor service quality stand out among the problems affecting the tourist industry in the Caribbean country. (*El Mundo*, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** According to the president of the High Council of Chambers of Commerce, Javier Gómez Navarro, for the first time in recent years, the Cuban authorities are ready to discuss the country's debt to Spain, which exceeds a billion dollars. (*EFE, 24/10/06*)

**October 24:** At the close of September, the National Institute of Housing reported 79,751 homes finished out of a plan of 100 thousand this year. To support this effort, Cuba will set in motion this quarter investments of millions of dollars to complete resources for projects. This program is a priority of the country, said Construction minister (MICONS), Fidel Figueroa. He added that MICONS is working to set up a sustainable construction materials industry in each province. In addition to building houses, the program includes 250 thousand rehabilitation and conservation actions supporting about one thousand social projects with the production of materials, hand labor and technical means. With a new plant in Havana that produces 2.2 million square meters of flooring yearly, MICONS will produce seven million square meters of flooring a year. Contributing to the plan are 10 more tile factories, two plants that increased their productive capacities and the incorporation of tile industry. There is also a technological line to produce 52 thousand high quality sanitation fixtures. (*Prensa Latina, Reuters, 24/10/06*)

**October 24:** Cuban Sugar Minister, Ulises Rosales expressed satisfaction over the reactivation of sugar cane production in the country, while cutting this crop at a plantation in Pinar del Rio province. In statements to Cuban TV, the official said the future of the sweet commodity in Cuba depends on the quality of the grass, reason for which he exhorted to giving the best attention to the crop. Rosales headed a journey of spontaneous work at enterprise number 16 of the westernmost province of Pinar del Rio, where workers are trying to hasten planting and other labors of the sugar cane. The Minister assured recently that the next sugar harvest will be higher in volume and quality, judging by improved supplies and a better industrial and agricultural preparation. (*Prensa Latina, 24/10/06*)

**October 24:** Cuba is the only country in the world to achieve sustainable development, a leading global conservation organization said in Beijing in its biennial appraisal of the state of the natural environment. "The world's natural ecosystems are being degraded at a rate unprecedented in human history," according to the WWF's 2006 Living Planet Report, presented this year for the first time in Beijing. "No region, nor the world as a whole, met both criteria for sustainable development. Cuba alone did, based on the data it reports to the United Nations," the report says. "That does not mean, of course, that Cuba is a perfect country, but that it does meet the necessary standards," Jonathan Loh, one of the authors of the study, said in response to a question from the press. "Cuba has reached a good level of development according to United Nations' criteria, thanks to its high literacy level and a very high life expectancy, while the ecological footprint is not large since it is a country with low energy consumption," said Loh, who presented the study in Beijing. (*EFE, 24/10/06*)

**October 24:** What have been billed as the world's most expensive cigars, a limited-edition from the hands of one of Cuba's most famous rollers, have gone on sale at \$436 each. The Cohiba Behike, named after a tribal chief of Cuba's indigenous Taino tribe, was launched to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cohiba brand. Just 4,000 have been rolled, packaged in boxes of 40 and sold at \$17,447. The humidors, made of ebony, cedar, sycamore, nacre and ox-bones, are numbered and bear a plaque on which the buyer's name is engraved. Ordinary hand-rolled cigars sell from about \$3 up while "super premiums" can cost \$14. The maker, Habana SA, justified the Cohiba Behike's price by saying each was rolled by Norma Fernandez, one of its most experienced rollers, or torcedoras, at the El Laguito factory in Havana. (*Mail & Guardian, 24/10/06*)

**October 25:** Venezuelan State Minister for Integration and Foreign Trade, Gustavo Márquez, announced that a line of credit for 220 million USD has been set up with Cuba through the Foreign Trade Bank (Bancoex), allowing exports to the island by more than 120 Venezuelan companies. According to the official, the Venezuelan goods exported to Cuba via this mechanism include construction materials, supplies, as well as plastic and ceramic products, textiles and boots. (*El Universal, 25/10/06*)

**October 25:** With the opening of another new bakery in the province of Camaguey, Cuba moves full swing into the modernization of some 1,000 bakeries across the island using Chinese technology. Alejandro Roca, Cuba's Food Industry minister, said the modern new ovens employed in the bakeries will significantly raise the quality of bread and use energy saving and cost efficient technologies. (*Granma*, 25/10/06)

**October 25:** The Cuban parrot, an endangered bird species, has found a safe haven in Cuba following ongoing preservation efforts by environmental and governmental institutions on the island. More than 300 species of the Cuba parrot live under protection in the Peninsula of Guanahacabibes, a World Biosphere Reserve located in the westernmost region of the country. (*ACN*, 25/10/06)

**October 26:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage attended the inauguration of a 24 km water pipeline that will supply the 45,000 residents of Nuevitas, an industrial city in the province of Camaguey, with a safe and secure water source. The new pipeline runs from the California reservoir to Nuevitas and will be used both for domestic and industrial supply, *Granma* daily reported. Abundant rainfall this year has helped increase reservoir supplies in this drought-prone region of the country, but levels are still below the national average. Nuevitas was one of the worst hit municipalities by the prolonged drought of the last few years. A significant investment was required to install and put into operation the new California to Nuevitas pipeline. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 27/10/06)

**October 30:** Cuban trade through September jumped 27 percent compared with the same period in 2005, the Caribbean island's foreign trade minister said, forecasting 2006 economic growth at around 12 percent. "The Cuban economy this year continued its ascent, which can also be seen in foreign trade," Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez said at an international trade show in Havana. The government reported trade was \$9.5 billion in 2005, of which around \$2 billion was exports and \$7.5 billion imports. "Up to September of this year, trade of goods increased 27 percent compared with the same time last year," de la Nuez said. He said imports led the trend, but he did not provide detailed information to support the figure. The government said service exports and other revenues covered the 2005 trade deficit, leaving a current account balance of payments surplus, which sources placed at around \$800 million. (*Reuters*, 30/10/06)

**October 30:** Cuban authorities are citing the island's international trade fair as proof that the US embargo has failed to fully isolate the communist-run nation. About 800 companies from 48 countries have exhibits at the International Fair of Havana, Cuba's most important trade event. "This is proof that the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States for 45 years has failed to achieve its objective of isolating us from other nations," Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez said at the fair's opening ceremony also attended by Vice President Carlos Lage. Recently tightened sanctions against Cuba have provoked a decrease in the number of American firms at the fair this year, said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import company Alimport. About 100 U.S. companies ordered booths at the fair, down from 188 last year, he said. (*AP*, 31/10/06)

### **Exile Community**

**October 2:** Marta Fernandez de Batista, the widow of former Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, died at her home, her son said. She was 82. She died at her West Palm Beach home, Roberto Batista told the press. She had suffered a heart attack on September 8 and was hospitalized until last week, when she returned home under hospice care, her son said. Her husband was ousted out of power by Fidel Castro's rebels more than 47 years ago, leaving Havana in the middle of the night on January 1, 1959. The former dictator, then 58 years old, fled first to the Dominican Republic, then Portugal, and finally Spain, where he died in 1973. Fulgencio Batista had a home in Daytona Beach and donated an extensive art collection to the city. His wife had lived in Palm Beach County since the 1980s. (*AP*, 4/10/06)

**October 3:** An overwhelming majority of Cuban Americans and Cuban exiles think that an ailing Fidel Castro will never return to power and that a transition could take hold within four years, according to a new poll examining the attitudes of South Florida's Cuban community. Those are among several findings in a poll of 600 Cuban and Cuban American adults in Miami-Dade and Broward counties conducted September 14-20 by Bendixen & Associates. The poll has a margin of error of 4 percentage points. Seventy-four percent of Cuban Americans believe Fidel Castro is terminally ill, and 14 percent think he will recover from illness but never return to power. With Cuba's Defense Minister Raúl Castro now in charge of the communist island, 55 percent of Cubans surveyed think a "major transition towards democracy" is a major probability, and 30 percent believe it's a minor probability. Asked if they approve or disapprove of the way Bush "has managed the situation in Cuba since Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother," 51 percent approved, while 28 percent disapproved and 21 percent didn't know or didn't answer. The results of one question in particular may catch the attention of Washington and of Raúl Castro's temporary government in Cuba. Seventy-two percent said the United States should "negotiate" with a "new Cuban government [if it] shows an interest in a gradual improvement of relations with the exile community and with the United States." Only 20 percent said it should not negotiate. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/10/06)

**October 7:** More than 100 mourners bid farewell to Cuba's last first lady. Marta Fernandez Miranda de Batista was the second wife of ousted Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. She died after a heart attack in September left her homebound. She had also suffered from Alzheimer's. She was 83, according to one of her sons. Marta Batista's death is symbolic for the thousands of Cubans, who like her have never been able to return home. Married to the last president to hold office in Cuba before Fidel Castro rose to power, she was one of the first exiles to flee as a result of the Cuban revolution. A procession of cars followed the hearse a few miles to St. Juliana's Catholic Church where a Mass was held in her honour. "Many years ago she put into practice her faith," said Father Jose Angel Crucet, one of three priests to conduct the Mass. "She established schools in the fields, and hospitals, and the Saint Barbara sanctuary." The Mass in her honour ended with a song that touched on the themes familiar to so many Cuban exiles. "On the sand, I left my raft," mourners sang. "With you Lord, I seek a new home." (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/10/06)

**October 10:** Cuban exile organizations in South Florida working together with dissidents on the island launched a five-point plan designed to bring democracy to Cuba -- without budging on controversial issues like negotiating with the current leadership. The document is an important historic step, because it demonstrates an unusual level of cooperation between dissidents and prominent Cuban exile groups, its signers said. The resolution was signed by the Cuban Patriotic Forum, an umbrella exile group, and the dissident Cuban organization Assembly to Promote Civil Society. The Patriotic Forum includes the Bay of Pigs Veterans Association, the Cuban Liberty Council, Cuban Municipalities in Exile and others. The resolution advocates for: a) Freedom for all political prisoners and an end to harassment of all kinds to internal opposition; b) the installment of a transition government that establishes democracy in Cuba, that respects human rights and offers the following freedoms: economic, press, religion, to associate, to assemble and to protest peacefully; c) the establishment of a constituent assembly that provides a new constitution submitted to a popular vote; d) recognition of political parties and multiparty elections; e) the reestablishment of the rule of law, making sure that "every Cuban is protected from whimsical decisions that could lead to social discontent." (*EFE*, 10/10/06)

**October 12:** High officials from the incumbent Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) met with representatives of the People's Party, made up of Cuban exiles. According to an ARENA press release, the Cubans talked with the president of El Salvador, Elías Antonio Saca, who is also ARENA's leader. The communiqué indicates that the Cubans later met with members of the National Executive Council (COENA), the highest body within ARENA, the ruling party in El Salvador since 1989. (*ACAN-EFE*, 12/10/06)

**October 19:** Cuban activist Rosa Berre, an advocate of independent journalism in Cuba, passed away in Miami after losing her battle against cancer. She was 64. The protracted disease did not prevent her from devoting all of her energy

to the project she had launched in exile to promote the outflow of freedom of expression from the island: the Cubanet news agency, founded in 1994. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 20/10/06)

**October 23:** The similarities between Hugo Chavez's restrictions on civil liberties and the erosion of rights in Fidel Castro's regime have bred a political and social affinity among Venezuelan and Cuban immigrants. Venezuelans attend anti-Castro rallies in significant numbers, and Cuban exiles abound at anti-Chavez demonstrations. Cuban exile organizations have allowed Venezuelan groups to operate out of their offices, many of which now display Venezuelan flags and other symbols of the South American nation on their walls. And just as Castro has mentored Chavez, Cuban exiles are showing Venezuelans how to become a potent lobbying group in the United States. They are introducing Venezuelans to their many friends in the U.S. Congress and the media. They are also helping anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela by providing funding, political campaign advice and firsthand stories to the media about oppression in Cuba and the ineptitude of the Castro regime. "They are masters of getting the movers and shakers in Washington, D.C., to listen to their concerns and support their cause," Manuel Kohn said of the Cuban exiles as he sat in a meeting room at the Unhon City headquarters of the Union of Cuban Ex- Political Prisoners. (*The Record*, 23/10/06)

**October 26:** Cuban exiles demanded in Miami the immediate release of Luis Posada Carriles as they believe that he is the target of "a political maneuver" aimed at pleasing the governments of Cuba and Venezuela. Some 60 activists, ex-political prisoners and sympathizers with Posada Carriles gathered at the House of the Prisoner, in Little Havana, to endorse a declaration that deems it unjust and abusive to keep him imprisoned for more than a year in Texas. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 27/10/06)

**October 28:** In December 2001, Cuban officials abruptly summoned Alberto Rodriguez to a meeting at the Ministry of Transport and told him he was being sent to work at a shipyard on Curacao. Over the next three years, Rodriguez claims he and dozens of other men were held as virtual slaves, forced to work long hours for pennies a day in dangerous conditions. Rodriguez, who escaped in October 2004, and two other Cubans who were sent to the shipyard say they suffered serious injuries, were not permitted to move freely in Curacao and were forced to watch videotapes of hours-long speeches of Fidel Castro "extolling the virtues of the Revolution." "They humiliated us. They exploited us," Rodriguez said in an interview. Now, Rodriguez and the others have filed a federal lawsuit in Miami seeking unspecified damages from the Curacao Drydock Co. for what they claim was a conspiracy in which Cuba provided low-cost, forced labor in return for hard currency desperately sought by the communist Havana government. "Curacao Drydock Co. knew that the Cuban laborers that the Cuban government provided to it were not free individuals but subjects of the Cuban totalitarian regime, who were compelled to perform the will of the Cuban state," said their lawsuit, filed by Miami attorney John Andres Thornton. (*AP*, 28/10/06)

## **Foreign Affairs**

**October 1:** In a report presented during its 62nd General Assembly in Mexico, the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) maintains that government control over the exercise of journalism in Cuba "has clearly intensified" following Fidel Castro's temporary transfer of power to his brother Raúl. The organization elaborates that censorship is also practiced through "(...) acts of repression against independent journalists, mistreatment of jailed reporters and very strict government surveillance." (*AP*, 1/10/06)

**October 1:** Twenty more hospitals equipped by Cuba will join a previous 20 supplied by the Cuban government to Bolivia this year, said Cuban Ambassador to Bolivia Rafael Dausa. The announcement was made by Dausa during the opening of a diagnosis center in San Cristobal, in the Bolivian southern department of Potosi, at which Bolivian President Evo Morales was also present. Dausa said equipments will be supplied soon, with the help of the Bolivian

Republic of Venezuela, which will also finance acquisition of 200,000 lenses for people learning to read and write by means of Cuban method "Yo Si Puedo." (*Prensa Latina*, 1/10/06)

**October 2:** Criticism of Cuba and Venezuela over freedom of expression there and of Mexico for a decrease in security for reporters are the focus of the annual meeting of the Inter American Press Association, which began in Mexico City. The opening ceremony of the 62nd IAPA general assembly was presided over by Mexican President Vicente Fox, IAPA chief Diana Daniels of The Washington Post Company and the president and director general of the Mexican daily El Universal, Juan Francisco Ealy Ortiz, all of whom are on the host committee. In an analysis of the regional journalism panorama, Daniels said that "big question marks still remain concerning Cuba and Venezuela" and she called for attention to be paid to the circumstances of "the 24 independent journalists imprisoned" on the Communist island. She said that those professionals are "true heroes of freedom of expression who remain locked up for daring to exercise their rights." "We will continue our struggle until the last journalist (in Cuba) is freed" and all of them are allowed to exercise their basic human rights, Daniels said. (*EFE*, 2/10/06)

**October 4:** Mexican president elect Felipe Calderón expressed his decision to maintain cordial relations with Venezuela and Cuba, which governments questioned his narrow electoral victory over leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Calderón said that he will seek closer relations with the countries of Latin America, "including Colombia, Venezuela and Cuba. I hope that such willingness is mutual." (*AP*, 5/10/06)

**October 4:** The Costa Rican President, Oscar Arias, rebuffed an allegation made by the Cuban press that he was "militarising" the Costa Rican police to curb opponents of his government. The allegation, published in the official Cuban daily Granma on 3 October, is the latest chapter in the quarrel between Arias and the Cuban administration. Arias recently advocated "regime change" in Cuba. The Granma article accused Arias of being "a representative of the Costa Rican agricultural elite" and of "militarising" the police to curtail opponents of his administration. The article went on to say that Arias was using "coercive politics" and carrying out "political trials" to silence the opposition. Arias considered Granma's allegations "ridiculous". He said they were "typical of a dictatorial regime where only the official media is allowed". He went on to say that his opponents were "on the streets and can tell me whatever they want" while the opposition in Cuba had to flee into exile or are in prison. Arias, however, made sure he is not seen as a pawn of the US. He also criticized the US administration for the embargo on Cuba, which to his mind just helps to perpetuate the Cuban dictatorship. (*Latin News Daily*, 5/10/06)

**October 4:** Cuba pointed out to the UN Disarmament Commission that just 10 percent of the current money spent on military build-up would help meet UN Millennium Development Goals. Cuban Ambassador to the UN Rodrigo Malmierca repeated his nation's proposal to devote at least half those costs to socio-economic development. With the money used for weapons, the 852 million hungry people could be fed for 12 months or medication supplied for 40 years for the 38 million AIDS HIV patients, he said. The Cuban diplomat noted that at the recent 14th Non Aligned Summit in Havana, leaders from 118 countries agreed to promote priorities on disarmament and security. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/10/06)

**October 4:** Newly appointed Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba Alí Rodríguez Araque presented his agenda before the Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, and claimed he intends "to enlarge and deepen bilateral relations, by moving forward to new stages, both regarding bilateral ties and our joint efforts in international organizations." The former Foreign Affairs Minister added that Caracas and Havana are to join efforts "particularly in the United Nations and the World Trade Organization (WTO)," two bodies he labelled as "emblematic." Questioned about an alleged reduction in bilateral humanitarian programs, the diplomat replied: "Social missions will continue. Evidently, some missions are to change slightly. For instance, in the case of Miracle Mission (intended to provide free eye surgery), sending patients to Cuba will not be necessary as long as we have started to improve domestic capacity to perform eye surgery in Venezuela. This way, such treatment is less expensive." Rodríguez Araque declined to respond whether President Hugo

Chávez' Government was considering the possible scenarios in the event that Fidel Castro dies. "Only the President and the Foreign Affairs Minister have that answer." (*El Universal*, 4/10/06)

**October 6:** Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung affirmed that the Vietnamese Government will do its best to further boost all-round co-operation with Cuba. He made the affirmation when receiving in Hanoi Cuba's Standing Deputy Minister of Economic Co-operation and Foreign Investment, Ramon Ripoll Diaz, who is the head of the Cuban delegation to the 24th session of the Vietnam-Cuba Intergovernmental Committee. He said the two countries need to co-ordinate more closely to increase the efficiency of their co-operation and execute signed economic contracts so as to contribute to fulfilling their socio-economic targets. (*Nhan Dan*, 7/10/06)

**October 6:** Thunder Bay, Ontario, is providing some medical assistance of a different kind to a small centre in Cuba. Several shipments of obsolete medical equipment from the old Regional Hospital have already been sent to Cuba. But last week, a medical team, including two local orthopedic surgeons, also arrived to help teach surgical procedures. And the experience was so rewarding, they're already planning a return visit. The group of volunteers made the day for many people when they offered their materials and knowledge to hospital staff in Cuba. Dr. David Puskas and Dr. Tracy Wilson, led by Dr. Jerome Harvey, spent a week at the hospital in Placetas, Las Villas province, teaching the surgeons different techniques on performing surgery. The two Thunder Bay doctors demonstrated these techniques, while performing shoulder surgery and twelve knee scopes on patients at the Cuban hospital. Wilson says they didn't think twice about joining this organization to help the people of Placetas. (*Thunder Bay's Source*, 6/10/06)

**October 7:** Fourteen Cuban raft people traveling on a flimsy makeshift craft were rescued by a cruise liner on the Caribbean Sea, just off the coast of Cozumel Island, where they were handed over to immigration authorities. (*AFP*, 7/10/06)

**October 9:** A nine-year-old Vernon, British Columbia, girl who has allegedly been forced to stay behind in Cuba after her mother got in trouble with the law may not be able to get much help from Foreign Affairs. Dunia Garcia, 25, a Cuban-born permanent resident of Canada, says her daughter, Amanda, was not allowed to return home with her after an August visit to Cuba. Catherine Gagnaire, a spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs, declined to say what role the government is playing in getting the girl home. Ms. Gagnaire said Canada has little influence on cases involving citizens of Cuba. Cuba does not recognize dual citizenship and anyone born in Cuba is considered a Cuban citizen while in Cuba. Ms. Garcia said Amanda is "doing fine" and staying with relatives in Havana. Ms. Garcia was charged with assault after an incident with a police officer. After being released, officials ordered her daughter to stay behind to ensure the mother would return to the country to deal with the charge. (*Ottawa Citizen*, 10/10/06)

**October 9:** "After two and a half years, the medical mission to Guatemala has been a very rich experience that has fostered human and revolutionary values," said doctor Yoandra Muro, who headed the Cuban medical brigade to that Central American nation. The first Cuban doctors arrived in Guatemala on the heels of the devastating passage of Hurricane Mitch through that country in 1998. At that time, a small medical team arrived at the southern Guatemalan port town of San Jose, while another group went to the town of La Tinta, a remote settlement in the northern department of Alta Verapaz. Today 350 Cuban medical specialists are offering assistance in 17 of Guatemala's 22 departments, Dr. Muro told the press. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/10/06)

**October 9:** China, Russia, South Korea and Japan quickly joined the United States in condemning North Korea for its reported test of a nuclear weapon. Cuba's communist government did not comment on North Korea's reported test. In Havana, state media only carried a news dispatch from Pyongyang, without offering a point of view. (*AP*, 9/10/06)

**October 9:** A Cuban proposal to control air quality was one of the issues of the International Conference of Atmospheric Chemistry and its inter-phases held in Cape Town, South Africa. Barbaro Moya, researcher of the Meteorological Center in the western Cuban province of Matanzas, and delegates to the event, told the press that the

action plan opened spaces for the future collaboration between the island and other nations. The expert stated the project is in a phase of development in Matanzas, towards a monitoring network for decision-making. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/10/06)

**October 10:** Cuba has warned on high tensions within international political and diplomatic circles in the coming next days, when the UN will begin debating severe sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The international measures against the Asian country are based on its recent nuclear test, according to the official note appearing in Granma daily. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/10/06)

**October 11:** China and Cuba signed in Beijing a five-year agreement to cooperate in the field of meteorology, Cuban diplomatic sources reported. Fernando Gonzalez Bermudez, acting minister of Science, technology and Environment (CITMA), and Zheng Guoguang, deputy director of the Chinese Meteorological Administration, inked the document. The accord establishes and regulates bilateral collaboration on weather changes, meteorological satellites and their applications to other spheres, impact of natural disasters, and monitoring wind resources. Likewise, the parties agreed to collaborate in environment issues like damage due to droughts, flooding and forest fires. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/10/06)

**October 10:** Honduras announced that it will send an ambassador to Cuba in 2007, 45 years after the staunch US ally pulled its diplomatic representative from the communist-run island. Foreign Minister Milton Jimenez said that President Manuel Zelaya already was considering candidates for the January posting. Honduras withdrew its ambassador in 1962 after the US imposed an embargo against Fidel Castro's administration. The government re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba in 2002 but still has no ambassador in Havana. Cuba sent an ambassador back to Honduras four years ago. Jimenez said Zelaya wants to "open Honduras to the world" and had discussed the matter with Washington. (*AP*, 11/10/06)

**October 11:** A Cuban doctor who claims to have fled Venezuela and Chile went on a hunger strike on the Panamanian border with Colombia in an attempt to obtain refugee status, confirmed Pablo Pérez, director of the National Office for Refugees (ONPAR). The Cuban is currently at Obaldía's Port, after entering Panama illegally from Colombia. (*AFP*, 11/10/06)

**October 11:** A group of political personalities who participated in the Forum 2000 conference recently concluded in Prague sent a letter to acting Cuban leader General Raúl Castro, petitioning for neurosurgeon Hilda Molina to be allowed to leave the country. "We write to you as president of Cuba, but also as a father and grandfather," former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell and French philosopher Andre Gluckman said in the letter. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/10/06)

**October 13:** A protocol of the 25th meeting of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Cuba's inter-governmental economic, scientific and technological consultative committee, and a protocol on exchange of commodities in 2007, were inked in Pyongyang. Present at the signing ceremony from the Korean side were Rim Kyong-man, minister of foreign trade, and officials concerned and from the opposition side were members of the Cuban government economic delegation headed by Ramon Ripoll Diaz, first vice-minister of foreign investment and economic cooperation, and Ruben Perez Valdes, Cuban ambassador to the DPRK. (*KCNA*, 13/10/06)

**October 13:** Eastern European officials urged anti-Castro groups to present a united front against Cuba's government and cautioned against banning political leaders there from involvement in any future government. The officials shared their countries' experiences transitioning from communism to democratic societies in a daylong forum on the future of Cuba, hosted by Florida's Cuban-American congressional delegation and Governor Jeb Bush, and attended by more than 300 people. "We were subject to an embargo. We suffered, and the regime continued," Poland's assistant secretary of foreign affairs, Witold Waszczykowski, said. "They need the contact. They need to see that we are not the bad guys." Waszczykowski cautioned against excluding communist leaders from helping craft a new government, comparing

possible problems to the situation in Iraq, in which the government and military was disbanded. Poland held its first partially free elections in 1989. By bringing former leaders to the table as Poland did, the communists will be invested and take responsibility for the new government, rather than simply trying to undermine it, he said. Opposition groups are often split, and the communist party can take advantage of that, Estonian Ambassador Juri Luik said. "When change starts, you don't have time to argue," Luik said. No one can predict what Cubans will choose to do in the future, but some Eastern European countries' experiences could serve as lessons, Hungarian Foreign Minister Kinga Goncz said. She said the growth of civic society was a slow process in Hungary. (*Sun Sentinel*, 14/10/06)

**October 13:** The Non-Aligned Movement of 118 developing nations urged North Korea -- one of its members -- to discontinue nuclear testing and adhere to the group's disarmament goals. The NAM, led since last month by communist-run Cuba, also called for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and resumption of six-nation talks aimed at ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. (*Reuters*, 13/10/06)

**October 14:** The Japanese Cabinet appointed a new ambassador to Cuba. Akira Takamatsu, 56, new ambassador to Cuba, has served as Japanese consul general in Vladivostok, Russia. (*Japan Times*, 16/10/06)

**October 15:** The Cuban government plans to build 20 more hospitals in Bolivia, Bolivian Health Minister Nila Heredia said. Havana, along with Venezuela, has been among the biggest providers of aid to Socialist President Evo Morales since he took office in January. As of September, Cuba had built and equipped 20 hospitals, most of them in rural areas. Cuba has also established seven eye clinics in the Andean nation under "Operation Miracle," a health-care initiative being carried out by Havana and Caracas. The program was initially launched by Cuba and later joined by Venezuela, and it provides free eye surgery, especially for cataracts, to the poor, with the goal of helping some 250,000 people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The hospitals currently in operation have the equipment needed to provide diagnostic services, such as X-rays, electrocardiograms and lab tests, and are staffed with surgical and specialized personnel, the health minister said. Heredia told the press that 10 similar hospital would be set up in different municipalities, and 10 others would be established with lesser levels of equipment. Where necessary, the Cuban Medical Brigade, which has 1,681 members in Bolivia, will provide volunteers to staff the medical centers, Heredia said. (*EFE*, 15/10/06)

**October 16:** Despite the temporary transfer of governmental power in Cuba on July 31, the Cuban government continues to subject independent journalists in the Caribbean nation to "constant harassment," says a human rights official for the Organization of American States (OAS). In an October 12 quarterly report on the state of freedom of expression in the Americas, the OAS official, Ignacio Álvarez, reiterated his concern over the situation of journalists in Cuba who have been imprisoned or face other forms of repression from the Cuban dictatorship. Álvarez, the OAS "special rapporteur" for freedom of expression in the Americas, said that from the most recent period reported -- July 1 to September 30 -- independent journalists in Cuba were "arbitrarily and repeatedly imprisoned, and were physically attacked and threatened by agents" of the Cuban government. The OAS official said that he has not "perceived any change in the situation of total lack of respect for freedom of thought and expression in Cuba" since the change in power in Cuba. Álvarez once again urged the Cuban government to release imprisoned journalists and "to respect the right of all Cubans to freedom of thought and expression." (*Washington File*, 16/10/06)

**October 16:** Cuba and Antigua & Barbuda explored ways in Havana to fight drug trafficking, which will be controlled by an accord that both nations will sign on October 20. This initiative was detailed at a meeting between Justice Minister Colin Derrick and his Cuban counterpart Roberto Sotolongo, during a one-week visit to Havana by the Antiguan minister. Minister Sotolongo highlighted the Cuban government's total political will to quicken steps in the area of combating the drug trade. Derrick stressed Antigua & Barbuda's interest in fostering very positive ties with Cuba in areas like health and education. (*Antigua Sun*, 18/10/06)

**October 17:** Cuba's Ambassador to Tehran stressed his country's full support for Iran. Speaking in a press conference in Tehran, Fernando Garcia referred to Iran's nuclear issue, and reminded that all the world states are entitled to the enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes. The diplomat stated that Cuba has always held a transparent stance in the face of Iran's uranium enrichment since the very beginning of the issue, and stressing that the production of nuclear fuel for peaceful purposes should not be monopolized by any specific group or power, he underlined, "We stand beside the Iranian nation while we are opposed to the use of nuclear weapons." (*Fars News*, 17/10/06)

**October 17:** Cuba's embassy in Mexico will carry out an extensive agenda as part of the celebration for the Cuban Culture Day, the embassy's cultural adviser Margarita Ruiz stated. According to Ruiz, the screening at the National Cinema of Cuban film "El Benny," premiered with great international success and candidate for an Oscar award, is one of the most relevant events in these activities. Also included is the 10th Workshop for Mexican-Cuban Fine Arts, the performance of Cuban improviser Alexis Pimienta and his group, and a Cuban dance contest. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/10/06)

**October 17:** The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) representative in Cuba, Francisco Arias, congratulated the island for decreasing differences between the countryside and the city, a local source reported. The FAO representative, on occasion of the World Food Day being held every October 16, visited an urban agriculture center in the capital suburb of Alamar. During the tour, Cuba's Deputy Agriculture Minister Jose Puente, stated that his country is engaged in over 130 technical cooperation projects, sponsored by the FAO. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/10/06)

**October 17:** The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, defended the socialist Government's efforts to seek "the best relations possible" with Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia as it does with the rest of the Latin-American countries. He emphasized that the most important thing is to maintain a dialogue with all of them, "regardless of who it is" that is ruling in each State. (*Europa Press*, 17/10/06)

**October 16:** Cuba would pursue in providing assistance to Ethiopia in the efforts being made to improve the sports and youth sector, Cuban Deputy Minister of Foreign Investment and International Cooperation said. While conferring with Ethiopian State Minister of Youth and Sports, Abdissa Yadeta, Ramon Ripoll said Cuba would provide the necessary assistance to the efforts geared towards producing skilled manpower needed to improve the sports sector in Ethiopia. According to the Deputy Minister, Ethiopia could draw lessons from Cuba in the youth and sports sector. (*AllAfrica.Com*, 18/10/06)

**October 19:** A press freedom watchdog accused Cuba of trying to prevent people from reading independent media, saying less than 2 percent of Cubans connect to the Web at closely monitored Internet access points. "In a country where the media are under the government's thumb, preventing independent reports and information from circulating online has naturally become a priority," Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in a report on Cuba. Cuba, like China, controls access to the Internet. Direct access to the World Wide Web is generally only available to government-approved individuals, though passwords can be purchased on the black market. "With less than 2 percent of the population online, Cuba is one of the world's most backward countries as regards Internet usage," RSF said. "This is quite surprising in a country that boasts one of the highest levels of education in the world," it added. Internet access points such as the 'Correos de Cuba' Internet cafes were closely monitored, RSF said, and messages seemed to be scanned for suspect keywords, such as those linked to dissidents, which trigger the shutdown of programmes. [[Going Online in Cuba](#)] (*Reuters*, 20/10/06)

**October 19:** Solidarity actions among nations are essential to the fulfillment of the UN's Millennium Goals draw up in 2001, said the President of Cuba's parliament at the opening session of the 13th Ibero-American conference on youth. Ricardo Alarcon said one of the main principles of the Ibero-American Youth Organization (OIJ) is to speak out for the creation of global alliances for development that could be instrumental in the attaining of the UN's goals for the millennium. Alarcon cited the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the reduction in infant mortality and the

guarantee of worldwide primary education as attainable goals. He also pointed to equality of gender and the fight against HIV/AIDS as achievable targets. (ACN, 20/10/06)

**October 19:** Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said he was disappointed that Fidel Castro, the ailing leader of communist Cuba, had missed his chance to implement a "democratic opening." "I am a lover of the Cuban Revolution," Lula, his country's first democratically elected leftist, who has had fairly warm relations with Cuba, told the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo in an uncharacteristic criticism. "I only regret that Fidel Castro did not carry out a process of political opening while he was alive," Lula added, apparently misspeaking on the state of Castro's health. "In my opinion, (Castro) could have taken Cuba on a great leap forward. He did not do it. Now Raul has taken over the interim presidency and I do not know what he will do, but I think that our (Cuban) comrades missed their chance to move closer to democracy," said Lula, a founder of the Workers Party. (AFP, 19/10/06)

**October 19:** Cuba expressed its satisfaction with the content of the main proposals to be discussed at the 16th Ibero-American Summit, scheduled to take place in Montevideo from November 3-5, an official source said. "To date, the principal documents are in line with our expectations," Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno told Prensa Latina. The high-ranking official attended a meeting of national coordinators, the final one prior to the meeting of heads of state and government, in order to discuss and clarify details on the content of the Montevideo Commitment. Moreno said that his delegation feels satisfied with the Special Communiqués that are to be endorsed at the highest level of the meeting. (Granma International, 19/10/06)

**October 20:** A total of 36 Cuban raft people, including an 18-month old baby, were intercepted in Cancún, in the Gulf of Mexico, and in neighboring Isla Mujeres, reported sources with the local police and the Navy. The arrivals of four rafts loaded with the Cuban illegal immigrants were detected in the span of just 36 hours. (AFP, 23/10/06)

**October 21:** According to the daily "El Universal", Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez may have "rushed" to Cuba recently. "Reliable Venezuelan sources revealed in Washington that President Chávez traveled to Havana to bid his farewell to the Commander in Chief," claimed the publication. It acknowledged, however, that the Venezuelan president's trip had not been confirmed by Caracas. (EER, 23/10/06)

**October 23:** New countries have moved ahead of some Western democracies in the fifth annual Reporters Without Borders Worldwide Press Freedom Index, while the most repressive countries are still the same ones. "Unfortunately nothing has changed in the countries that are the worst predators of press freedom," the organisation said, "and journalists in North Korea, Eritrea, Turkmenistan, Cuba, Burma and China are still risking their life or imprisonment for trying to keep us informed. These situations are extremely serious and it is urgent that leaders of these countries accept criticism and stop routinely cracking down on the media so harshly. [[World Wide Press Freedom Index 2006](#)] (RWB Press Release, 23/10/06)

**October 23:** A collaboration agreement in the area of science and technology was signed between Cuba and the Republic of Serbia. The agreement was signed in the Serbian Ministry of Science and Technology, Belgrade, by professor Doctor Alexander Popovic and Fernando Gonzalez Bermudez, according to a press note from the Cuban Embassy in Belgrade. (Prensa Latina, 23/10/06)

**October 23:** The speaker of Cuba's legislature criticized the silence of European countries in the face of almost half a century of the "extraterritorial policy" embodied by the US economic embargo against the Communist-ruled island. Ricardo Alarcon said on state television that the economic, trade and financial embargo that the United States has been maintaining against Cuba since the early 1960s also affects the countries of Europe and those of other continents. (EFE, 23/10/06)

**October 24:** With the aim of reinforcing the over 30-year bilateral ties, the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry's Sub-Saharan Africa director, Ivan Mora Godoy, arrived in Luanda. On his arrival in Luanda's 4 de Fevereiro International Airport, the diplomat informed to the press that he will examine, with the Angolan authorities, proposals to strengthen the brotherhood between both countries. Ivan Mora Godoy, who will be received in an audience by the Foreign Affairs minister, João Miranda, is carrying a message from the Cuban Foreign Affairs minister, Felipe Pérez Roque. "On the message, it is stated Angola's recognition in helping to solve various matters, mainly in Africa" he said. (*Angola Press*, 25/10/06)

**October 24:** Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon will tour Spain, Belarus, and Russia where he will hold bilateral meetings and attend an international event against imperialism, sources in Havana reported. Alarcon told the press that in the scheduled meetings he expected to raise issues of common interest and the reality of the situation in Cuba, besides strengthening relations with the legislative organs. He said he will attend the Second International Meeting against Imperialism in Oviedo, Spain, from October 25-28, and will discourse on data manipulation and control by the monopolies. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/10/06)

**October 24:** The former No. 2 man of the Sandinista government and brother of the ex-president who is leading polls in a bid to regain that job says he is concerned about Nicaragua eventually being lumped with Cuba and Venezuela in a perceived anti-US axis. But Humberto Ortega, erstwhile longtime defense minister under his brother Daniel's 1979-90 leadership of the Central American nation, said in Managua that he had a long talk recently with his sibling in which Daniel said he too wants to avoid being closely identified with Cuba and Venezuela. "It would be painful for the country if we were considered part of a Castro-Chavez-Ortega axis," Humberto, a retired army general, told Managua's Canal 10 television station. "I don't see that axis, but Daniel's opponents are talking about it," he said. Raul Castro for the past three months has been exercising the provisional presidency of Cuba, replacing an ailing Fidel who underwent intestinal surgery in late July. "I've kept up a relationship with Raul Castro and talk with him," said Humberto. "It seems to me that Cuba doesn't exercise a significant presence these days, because Cuba is enclosed in its own set of problems and no longer has the capacity to be wielding great influence the way it did in the 1980s with us." (*EFE*, 25/10/06)

**October 24:** The ecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, His Holiness, Bartolomeo sent Fidel Castro a message wishing him a speedy recovery. In a meeting with Cuban ambassador to Greece Hermes Herrera, the Patriarch was interested in knowing about the health of the Cuban Revolution leader, and he thanked Fidel for his support of the Orthodox Church on the island. His Holiness Bartolomeo recalled a religious ceremony recently held in Salonica, the second capital city of Greece, where he made reference to Fidel Castro and the Orthodox Church in Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** Representatives from Cuban religious institutions from across the island are meeting at Havana's Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral to participate in the second edition of the Cuban Clerical Forum and address slanderous statements made by the Czech Republic Ecumenical Council against Cuba. "It is not love but submission and surrender to a [US] master whom they want to please that has led the Czech Republic Ecumenical Council to issue a slanderous statement against Cuba and interfere in the island's internal affairs," said Reverend Rafael Columbie. The event was called to give a direct reply to statements made by Jitka Klubalova, general secretary of the aforementioned Ecumenical Council, who said that Christians in Cuba should not back government-supported institutions, alluding to the Cuban Council of Churches. Reineirio Arce, dean of the Matanzas-based Evangelical Seminary, pointed out that this disrespectful attitude contrasts with that of other churches that have fully supported Cuban Christians with no interference whatsoever and expressed his gratitude to the World Council of Churches, for its flat out rejection of the Czechoslovakian council's statements. (*Granma*, 24/10/06)

**October 25:** Guatemala Vice President Eduardo Stein began a visit to Cuba with a high-level delegation, to augment bilateral relations in several fields. The entourage is made up of deputy ministers of Health, Energy, Foreign Affairs,

Interior, Economy, Culture and Sports, the Presidential Commissioners of Tourism and Human Rights, as well as a group of businesspeople. "The agenda is quite large and the aim is to retake the level links had when they were renewed in 1998," said Deputy Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Andrade, member of the delegation and former counselor of the Guatemalan embassy in Cuba. In statements to the press, Andrade highlighted his country's will of increasing areas of cooperation and exchange, above all, in health, energy, biotechnology and security. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/10/06)

**October 25:** Canadians who hold a second citizenship from a country considered a security risk by the United States cannot apply for some jobs at Montreal-based CAE Inc., a multinational company that produces flight simulators. The company's job postings state that a number of positions are restricted to people who comply with the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, which prevent dual citizens from 17 countries, including China, Cuba, Syria and Lebanon, from working on US military contracts. (*Globe and Mail*, 25/10/06)

**October 25:** Cuban ambassador to Bolivia Rafael Dausá said his country is to back Bolivia in the bid to occupy a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council in representation of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (Grulac), if Bolivia is nominated "by consensus." "Our vote was for Venezuela. Venezuela has announced it could withdraw in favor of Bolivia. In this case, obviously we would have no problem to consider Bolivia as the candidate to the Security Council," the diplomat told radio station Erbol. He clarified, however, that Grulac wants to have "a candidate chosen by consensus so that no more ballots are needed, and which is accepted by all the countries in the region." "If Bolivia was the candidate, we would be worthily represented at the Security Council." (*El Universal*, 25/10/06)

**October 25:** The President of the General Assembly of the Principality of Asturias, Maria de Jesus Alvarez, received Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban National Assembly to discuss topics of mutual interest. During talks, held at the head office of the General Assembly in Oviedo, Alarcon and Alvarez spoke about the history of immigration of people from Asturias to America, especially to Cuba. The Cuban leader also met with the spokespersons from the three parliamentary groups in Asturias: Rodrigo Grossi, from the Partido Popular; Fernando Lastra, from the Partido Socialista; and Noemi Martin, from the Partido Izquierda Unida. The Cuban vice president is in Asturias to participate in the Second International Seminar for World Progress. (*Granma*, 26/10/06)

**October 26:** The Governor of Michoacan, Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas Batel, opened a new state-of-the-art ophthalmic center donated by Cuba to the local general hospital that will be able to treat thousands of patients free. Cuban Ambassador to Mexico Jorge Bolanos noted that 2,500 locals underwent eye surgery in Cuba, and it was decided to consolidate the surgical infrastructure within Mexico to continue treating the patients. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/10/06)

**October 26:** Some 100 UN member countries officially expressed their opposition to the over 40-year economic blockade the United States has maintained against Cuba, and urged annulment of this coercive measure. The report contains evaluations by 20 UN bodies that disqualify the sustained practice of this policy in the US hostility against Cuba. UN diplomats confirm that this report, drafted by the UN secretary general, is a substantiation of the global consensus of rejection of the extraterritorial character of the US blockade. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/10/06)

**October 27:** Cuba's expertise in preventive medicine and energy saving experiences are on the table as part of official contacts with Guatemala Vice President Eduardo Stein during his second day of visiting the island. Stein's agenda included meetings with Public Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer and Basic Industry Minister Yadira Garcia. The encounter with Balaguer will be used to tackle aspects of the medical collaboration and professional training, while that of Garcia is to learn more details of the government's program to save energy and substitute high-consumption equipment, denominated in Cuba the Energy Revolution. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/10/06)

**October 29:** The Ladies in White, wives and relatives of Cuban political prisoners, petitioned the heads of State and Government attending the Ibero-American Summit to be held November 3-5 in Uruguay, to intercede for the "immediate and unconditional" release of their incarcerated relatives in Cuba. (*EFE*, 29/10/06)

**October 30:** Cuba is one of the priorities of Belarus' foreign policy, official information sources quoted Aleksandr Lukashenko as saying while receiving Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly of the People's Power. The two nations have been connected by warm relations since the times of the former USSR, the Belarusian leader said. He pointed out that after the collapse of the USSR, Belarus was in fact the only post-Soviet country that preserved its ties with Cuba at the former level. "Belarus and Cuba have a huge potential for the development of bilateral cooperation," Mr. Alarcon said at the meeting. "Cuba has long had a good attitude to Belarus." He handed a message of greetings from Fidel and Raul Castro, as well as from all the Cubans, who he said watched and heard Mr. Lukashenko's speech at a summit of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in Havana this past September. According to Mr. Alarcon, the Cubans are happy about the "success and progress that Belarus has achieved." "We express a feeling of solidarity with your country and your people," he said. (*BelaPan*, 30/10/06)

**October 30:** The Spanish Secretary of State for Ibero-America, Trinidad Jiménez, announced her plans for an official visit to Cuba within the next "six to eight months," and warned against foreign interference in the post-Castro period because "it leads nowhere" "Obviously, we are all asking ourselves what is going to happen with Cuba and the answer is, 'That is something for the Cuban people to decide.' (...) When I speak of the Cuban people, I mean the Government and society at large, who will be determining the pace, timing and changes that may be coming about," she indicated. In her opinion, it has already been "well demonstrated" that outside interference "leads nowhere." (*Europa Press*, 30/10/06)

**October 31:** A father whose son died on holiday in Cuba has demanded to know why his body was returned with his lungs, kidney and part of his brain missing. Andrew Redfern, 37, from the Wirral, Merseyside, UK, died after slipping and hitting his face on a marble floor in a hotel lobby in Havana in August. When his body underwent post-mortem tests in the UK it was discovered that several of his organs were missing. His father, Lawrence, from Inverness, said he had no idea what had happened. Mr Redfern, 58, said: "If his organs were taken for transplants then I wouldn't have minded but nobody mentioned anything. "Somebody just removed them without asking permission and no one seems to know why." (*BBC*, 31/10/06)

**October 31:** Fidel Castro congratulated his counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva for his re-election to lead Brazil's destination for another four years. In the message broadcast by the Cuban Television, Castro said, "Dear Lula: I never doubted that your victory will be the best for Latin America and Brazil." "So, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate you for your triumph," concludes the text. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/10/06)

**October 31:** The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples convened the friends of Cuba to join the 50 Anniversary of Granma International Brigade. With deadline set November 15, the (November 27 to December 10) brigade will be an excellent opportunity to know Cuba and its people, said an ICAP source. In addition to better understanding Cuba's reality the goal is to do voluntary work in agriculture and other fields of Cuban production. The brigade will attend Fidel Castro's birthday organized by the Guayasamin Foundation, the ceremony on the 50th Anniversary of Granma Yacht landing and beginning of guerrilla warfare in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/10/06)

**Security**

**October 8:** Speaking at the closing session of the Fourth Congress of the Jose Marti Pioneers Organization, Raul Castro said that they [the US] should not be mistaken with this small country home to an honourable and peaceful people, "If they pick a fight with us they will meet by a potent olive-green force (...) We want the best for our people, but they want the worst." Raul Castro announced that a military parade would take place in Havana on December 2, to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, during which a display of the army's modernized weapons systems would take place. He also said that another military parade would take place on November 30 in Santiago de Cuba, on occasion of the 50th anniversary of the uprising of that city in support of the landing of the revolutionary forces of the Granma yacht. (*Granma*, 10/10/06)

## **Terrorism**

**October 12:** For the first time, the International Red Cross met with 14 suspected al Qaeda operatives being held in Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba, including the reputed mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, according to knowledgeable sources. Suspected mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Ramzi Binalshibh, an alleged would-be September 11 hijacker, were among the 14 prisoners to meet with Red Cross officials. (*CNN*, 12/10/06)

**October 12:** The US Southern Command has been told to investigate possible abuse at the Guantanamo Bay prison after a Marine officer said she overheard guards boasting about abusing detainees, the Pentagon's Inspector General's office said. Marine Lt. Col. Colby Vokey, who represents a detainee at the US naval base in eastern Cuba, filed the "hotline" complaint, attaching a sworn statement from his paralegal, Sgt. Heather Cerveny, 23. In it, Cerveny described comments made by several guards in a bar at Guantanamo Bay. Several of them bragged about beating detainees and described it as common practice. "Other ones of them were talking about how when they get annoyed with the detainees, about how they hit them, or they punched them in the face," Cerveny told the press in a telephone interview. (*AP*, 13/10/06)

**October 14:** A paralegal and a military lawyer who brought forward allegations about prisoner abuse at the Guantanamo Bay detention center have been ordered not to speak with the press, lawyers and a military spokeswoman said. Marine Lt. Col. Colby Vokey, who represents a detainee at the US naval base in eastern Cuba, filed a complaint with the Pentagon alleging that abuse was ongoing at the prison. He attached a sworn statement from his paralegal, Sgt. Heather Cerveny, in which she said several Guantanamo guards bragged in a bar about beating detainees, describing it as common practice. Muneer Ahmad, a civilian defense lawyer for Omar Khadr, a Canadian detainee whose military counsel is Vokey, said that Vokey and Cerveny were ordered by the US Marines not to speak with the press. A spokeswoman for the Marines confirmed the order, saying Vokey's supervisor — Col. Carol Joyce, the Marines' chief defense counsel — had directed him not to communicate with the media "pending her review of the facts." (*AP*, 15/10/06)

**October 15:** A delegation from the National Liberation Army (ELN) flew to Havana from the Colombian city of Medellin for peace talks with the Colombian government, reports said. The rebel group will hold talks on October 16-19 with civil society groups, in preparation for the fourth round of peace talks with the Colombian government slated for October 20-25. The first round of talks began in December 2005, and all three previous rounds were supported by observers from Norway, Spain, France and Switzerland. The 4,500-strong ELN has indicated willingness to reach a deal with the government. (*Xinhua*, 16/10/06)

**October 21:** Representatives from the Colombian government and National Liberation Army (ELN) are holding the 4th Negotiation Round in Cuba, looking for a peace agreement, *Granma* daily reported. Luis Carlos Restrepo, the High Peace Commissioner of the Colombian Executive, is heading the governmental delegation, while Commander Antonio

Garcia is doing so for the ELN. The meeting was inaugurated at a hotel in Havana, and representations of the Cuban and Venezuelan governments attended the opening session as guests. Also present in the dialogue are delegates from the governments of Spain, Switzerland and Norway, with representatives from Japan, Italy, Holland, Canada, and Sweden as observers. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/10/06)

**October 24:** Representatives of Colombia's government and its second-largest rebel group announced they are on the verge of reaching an agreement to start formal peace talks after decades of hostility. The two sides began the latest round of Havana-hosted peace discussions, and planned to continue meeting to hammer out the final details. "We have a meeting tomorrow (...) in which there will be a base agreement," Antonio Garcia, commander of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, rebel group, told journalists during a break from talks being held in a residential district of western Havana. Government peace envoy Luis Carlos Restrepo also expressed optimism about the progress of the latest conversations, part of a round of meetings that began last December in Havana. "The balance is positive from these months of exploratory talks," he said. (*AP*, 24/10/06)

### **US-Cuba Relations**

**October 2:** US trade sanctions have cost Cuba \$4.1 billion over the last year in higher financial and shipping costs, lost business and cancelled contracts, the island's communist government said. Cuba said the Bush administration had tightened enforcement of its 44-year-old economic "blockade" despite the opposition of nearly every country in the United Nations. Washington has cracked down on Americans who go to Cuba without special licenses by fining 487 people a total of more than \$500,000 for breaking a ban on travel to the island. Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said. It is also increasingly chasing companies in third countries who do business with Cuba and threatening banks to close down Cuban accounts and transactions in dollars, he told a news conference. "The blockade intensified and its extra-territorial reach has extended," Rodriguez said during the release of Cuba's annual report to the UN General Assembly on the impact of the US embargo. [[Report by Cuba to the UN General Assembly](#)] (*Reuters*, 2/10/06)

**October 2:** Harvard will participate with the University of Havana in a semester study-abroad program, after overcoming strict federal regulations on US travel to the island, reported The Harvard Crimson. The arduous process of obtaining this license took 18 months, and permission lasts for only one year, according to Harvard's vice provost for international affairs, Jorge I. Dominguez. The 2007 program will run from late January to early May. For these four months, students will live in Havana, the country's capital. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/10/06)

**October 2:** A group of Cuban migrants sent home in January after reaching an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys said their own government has not given them approval to leave more than six months after they received US visas to emigrate. Growing more desperate as the months pass, the 14 migrants met with US officials, who said they would investigate the matter. "Right now we're looking very carefully at this case," said John Wallace Bird, who oversees US citizenship and migration services for the American mission in Havana. "We're concerned it's taking so long for them to receive permission to leave the country." Bird said US-Cuba migration accords prohibit the island's government from punishing Cuban migrants that are returned home. (*AP, EFE*, 3/10/06)

**October 2:** US Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, who is attending a meeting in Managua of Western hemisphere military leaders, made a reference to Cuba as one of main US antagonist in the region. He said he hoped that one day soon "the final holdout in our hemisphere against the democratic sweep of history will give its citizens the right to choose their own destiny and will participate in our conference." (*The New York Times*, 3/10/06)

**October 3:** A popular celebration to reflect against the blockade and annexation started in Cuba with the attendance of social and political organizations and people in general. The celebration, to be run until October 27, includes debates, forums, statements from union, student and grass-root entities, as well as extensive broadcasting on this issue in the press. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/10/06)

**October 3:** Jesus Diaz Jr. said he resigned as president of the Miami Herald Media Co. and publisher of The Miami Herald and its Spanish-language sister paper. Diaz said his decision was crystalized by the recent revelation that some El Nuevo Herald journalists were paid for appearing on US-government broadcasts aimed at promoting democracy in Cuba. David Landsberg, a longtime Herald employee who served as general manager, took over immediately as company president and publisher of both newspapers, said The McClatchy Co., the papers' parent company based in Sacramento, California. In a letter to readers, Diaz said the company would rehire two El Nuevo Herald reporters and a freelance contributor that he dismissed last month for getting paid by Radio Marti and TV Marti. He said six others who took payments would not be disciplined. (*AP*, 3/10/06)

**October 3:** The Netherlands Caribbean Bank (NCB), a subsidiary of Dutch financial services group ING Groep NV, has been put on a US blacklist for doing business in Cuba, ING said. An ING spokesman confirmed a report in the Volkskrant daily that the US government put NCB on July 28 on a list which bans US companies and citizens from doing business with the bank. "ING is viewing what the implications might be," the spokesman said. ING, one of the top five insurers in Europe, owns a 50 percent stake in NCB. Two Cuban financial organisations, Gilmar Project Finance Establishment and Banco Metropolitano, each own a 25 percent stake, the spokesman said. (*Reuters*, 3/10/06)

**October 3:** Two men charged in a Cuban-migrant smuggling operation that left a 24-year-old woman dead pleaded guilty to all 68 counts in federal court. Rolando Gonzalez, 20, and Heinrich Castillo, 28, pleaded guilty in Spanish and showed little emotion during the 30-minute proceeding. But several family members and friends wept when assistant US attorney Jeff Tsai said that the most serious offense, migrant smuggling that results in death, carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. U.S. District Court Judge K. Michael Moore set sentencing for January 8. A third defendant, Amil Gonzalez, decided to take his chances at a trial. Gonzalez has said he was not a smuggler, but simply a migrant like the others who were intercepted by the Coast Guard on July 8. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/10/06)

**October 3:** Two months without Fidel Castro at the helm in Cuba have shown how wrong US predictions of upheaval on the communist-run island have been, a senior Cuban official said. Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly and Havana's point-man on relations with Washington, said the US government ought to rethink its policy of pressing for change. "The situation since July 31 has shown the stability and solidity of Cuban society's institutions and the degree of cohesion in our country," Alarcon said in an interview. "It has also shown how out of touch with reality some people are in the White House, where (US Secretary of State) Condoleezza Rice seemed to be talking about another planet," Alarcon said. (*Reuters*, 3/10/06)

**October 4:** A Cessna 172 airplane, which was stolen from the Marathon Airport, is in Cuba. The 1978 plane, valued at \$78,000, was discovered in Cuba on September 29. The pilot landed there due to mechanical problems, federal officials told the Monroe County Sheriff's Department. Charges are expected to be filed against the pilot in federal court, said Alicia Valle, spokeswoman for the US Attorney's Office. Federal officials said the man, who has not been identified, was accompanied by a young boy, but their relationship is unknown. The motive for the theft also is not known, whether it's a custody dispute, joy ride, kidnapping or something else, police said. Police identified the owner of the current stolen Cessna in Cuba as William Jones of New York. He flew out of New York on September 25 with one passenger. They made a stop in Savannah, Georgia, and landed in Marathon, according to the sheriff's report. Jones did not discover his plane was missing until September 30. After a quick search of the small airport that borders US 1, officials decided the plane had been stolen. How the plane will be returned to the United States is still up in the air, authorities said. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/10/06)

**October 4:** Cuban Americans in a local congressional district support travel restrictions on tourism and family visits to Cuba, according to a new poll exploring the views of the Cuban community in South Florida. The poll, commissioned by US Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart for his district, indicates that 89.7 percent of the 400 Cuban-American voters surveyed support retaining the US restriction on tourism, while 85.2 percent back the current policy that prohibits Cuban nationals from visiting the island more than once in three years. Among those voters, 88.5 percent also supported the economic embargo against Cuba, although those younger than 34 were less inclined to back it. The time of their arrival did not make a significant difference in attitudes toward those policies, according to the poll. The respondents to Díaz-Balart's poll, conducted September 25-30 by analyst Dario Moreno, were all registered voters and 80 percent arrived before the 1980 Mariel boatlift. They all live in Díaz-Balart's district, which encompasses portions of South Broward and Central Miami-Dade down through Palmetto Bay. The poll's margin of error was not immediately available, according to Díaz-Balart's office. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/10/06)

**October 4:** A Texas man who allegedly stole an airplane from Marathon Airport and flew it to Cuba with his young son as a passenger was charged by federal prosecutors with transportation of stolen property overseas. Randall Ray Franklin, 52, from Laredo, Texas, is currently in Cuba while the US and Cuban governments work out his extradition to the United States. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/10/06)

**October 9:** An anti-Castro militant, now elderly and being held in a Texas jail, warned the CIA months before the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that fellow exiles were planning such an attack, according to a newly released US government document. The document shows that Luis Posada Carriles — who was cut off by the agency earlier that year — was secretly telling the CIA that his fellow far-right Cuban exiles opposed to Fidel Castro's communist government were plotting to bring down a commercial jet. The document does not say what the CIA did with Posada's tip. A CIA spokesman said he had no comment, a federal holiday. The CIA had extensive contacts with anti-Castro militants and trained some of them, but has denied involvement in the bombing. The documents were posted online on October 5 by the National Security Archive, an independent research institute at George Washington University that seeks to declassify government files through the Freedom of Information Act. (*AP*, 9/10/06)

**October 8:** US officials believe that Fidel Castro of Cuba has terminal cancer and will never return to power, according to a report in *Time* magazine. Castro has remained largely out of the public eye since undergoing what was said to be serious abdominal surgery on July 31. Official reports about his health have been few and vague. "Certainly we have heard this, that this guy has terminal cancer," a US official told *Time*. But others cautioned that it was nearly impossible to obtain definitive facts about the health of the 80-year-old Cuban leader. Previous reports have surfaced suggesting that Castro might have cancer, either of the stomach or the colon, or else a serious ulcer. Cuban officials have denied the reports. (*International Herald Tribune*, 8/10/06)

**October 10:** Human Rights First will honor the Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) from Cuba and Suciwati from Indonesia with the organization's 2006 Human Rights Award for their courage and contributions to the human rights movements in their respective countries. The awards will be presented at an October 16 gala ceremony and dinner, which will be open to the press. Accepting the award on behalf of the Damas de Blanco will be Yolanda Huerga Cedeño, a founding member who now lives in Miami with her husband, Manuel Vázquez Portal. (*HRF Press Release*, 10/10/06)

**October 10:** The federal government announced the formation of a new law enforcement task force that will aggressively pursue violators of the US trade and travel sanctions that have been in effect against Cuba for more than four decades. Miami-based US Attorney R. Alexander Acosta said the task force will focus on prosecuting violators of laws governing such things as commercial business with Cuba, currency reporting requirements, money laundering and travel to the island. The task force's formation comes about a month before US elections in which Cuban-American voters in South Florida — most of them fervently anti-Castro — form an important Republican Party constituency. (*AP*, 10/10/06)

**October 11:** Suspected immigrant smugglers beached a speedboat with some unusual passengers on the millionaires' enclave of Fisher Island, Florida. Along with the 28 Cubans on board were six Cuban finches. According to US Customs and Border Protection, one of its jets saw a speedboat with its navigational lights off about three miles east of Key Biscayne. When a Black Hawk helicopter tried to intercept it, the boat changed course, barely missing a rock jetty and landing on the island's shore, said Customs and Border Protection spokesman Zachary Mann. Everyone on board jumped out and ran toward nearby condominiums, Mann said. Officers rounded up 28 Cubans, who were turned over to the Border Patrol for processing. It was not clear whether the suspected smugglers were part of the group, Mann said. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement is investigating. The finches were sent to a US Department of Agriculture Quarantine Center, where they will be observed and tested for diseases such as Avian Influenza. (*Sun Sentinel*, 12/10/06)

**October 12:** The Cuban National Assembly of the People's Power termed the US blockade on Cuba a true economic war aimed at plunging the people into starvation and desperation to overthrow the Revolution. The White House has been systematically applying for 47 years a fierce economic, trade and financial blockade on the island, states a declaration published by the Cuban Parliament's International Relations Commission. Never before in the history of humanity have any people been subdued to as cruel and hostile a policy, pointed out legislators. On November 8, the UN General Assembly will vote on a resolution for 15th time to demand an immediate end to the US economic, trade and financial blockade on Cuba. Last year, the motion was supported by 182 countries. The Cuban National Assembly also requests lawmakers of the world and the international community to take effective actions with that aim, in defence of justice, the right to life, peace and freedom of peoples. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/10/06)

**October 12:** The interagencies group created by the United States to tighten its 44-year-old economic embargo on the island was dismissed by Cuba as being "more of the same." Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl de la Nuez also predicted that this "will not work either. (*AFP*, 12/10/06)

**October 12:** A federal jury convicted a Cuban migrant of conspiring to smuggle other migrants to the United States, but acquitted him of the more serious charges involving the death of a woman during a chase on the high seas. If convicted of the more serious charges, Amil Gonzalez could have received life in prison. The jury also found the 32-year-old jeweler from Santa Clara, Cuba, guilty of giving false information to law enforcement officials. "He's more in shock," defense attorney Irving Gonzalez (no relation) said of his client. "If anything, he just thought he'd be guilty of giving false information." Federal prosecutors said they did not know if this was the first time a Cuban migrant trying to reach US soil for freedom also had been convicted of being a smuggler in the same trip. (*The Miami Herald* 12/10/06)

**October 12:** Puerto Rico will contribute to the recovery of a Cuba in political transition so that both nations can reap the economic benefits, said in Miami the vice-president of the Puerto Rican Senate, Orlando Parga. "We Puerto Ricans cannot see the changes that will inevitably take place in Cuba as a threat, but rather as an opportunity to collaborate, promote the development of a stagnant economy and help each other," said Parga. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 13/10/06)

**October 13:** Washington has no solid information about the health of veteran revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, a senior US official said. "We have no way of verifying any information," US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez told the press. He spoke when asked about a report in Time magazine saying that many in the US government are convinced Castro, 80, has terminal cancer. (*Reuters*, 13/10/06)

**October 14:** The Cuban authorities are arresting people that have been repatriated following botched attempts to emigrate illegally to the United States. Temporary arrests of those repatriated by the US Coast Guard Service had proliferated since Washington called off migratory talks with Havana in January 2004, but in the last year the situation has become dramatically worse. "We have received reports of Cubans being detained for several days or longer after

their return to the country," said an official with the US Interests Section (USINT) in Havana." (*El Nuevo Herald*, 15/10/06)

**October 14:** Some South Florida leaders are convinced that quick change will only come one way: with the death of Fidel Castro. "Fidel Castro has to die for the future of Cuba to begin," Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart said at the first Cuba Transition to Democracy Summit gathering in Miami. "I do think destiny will have something to do with that, hopefully soon." More than 300 Cuban exiles and political leaders, including Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Mario Diaz-Balart, Governor Jeb Bush and Senator Mel Martinez gathered at the Biltmore Hotel to hash out the beginnings of a new Cuba. Likening Castro to the despotic Roman emperor Caligula, Diaz-Balart suggested he actively wished death upon the communist dictator. "Oh yes, for humanitarian reasons," Diaz-Balart told the press. "I'm a humanitarian." Representatives from former communist nations in Europe that underwent dramatic political and social upheavals after the fall of the Soviet Union were on hand to offer advice to the exile leaders. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/10/06)

**October 14:** Cuban spy Ana Belen Montes gave Havana detailed information on US eavesdropping programs against the Castro government, allowing Cuba to mount effective counterintelligence and deception operations for years, according to a new book on US intelligence failures. The book, by Washington Times defense writer Bill Gertz, also describes Alberto R. Coll, a Cuban American and former deputy assistant secretary of defense in the early 1990s, as "an apparent spy" -- a charge Coll vehemently denied. Montes, of Puerto Rican descent, was a senior Cuba analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency, enjoying near-unfettered access to top secrets until she was caught in 2001. She is now serving a 25-year prison term. Gertz writes that she leaked so many significant U.S. secrets to Havana that some U.S. officials rank her with Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen, the infamous spies for Moscow who sent dozens of US agents to their deaths. Gertz's book also notes the case of Alberto Coll, who pleaded guilty last year to a charge of lying about a trip he made to Cuba in 2003. He had claimed he was visiting relatives, but he later acknowledged he was visiting a lover. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/10/06)

**October 14:** The US blockade on Cuba took out a new victim, the Dresser Rand Group Inc, a New York-based company that the US Treasury Department fined \$171,300 for trading with the island. The information, published by Granma newspaper, is one of the "examples of Washington's extra-territorial trade sanctions of third countries in its policy of economic, trade and financial blockade imposed to our country." (*Prensa Latina*, 14/10/06)

**October 17:** Cuba's acting ambassador to the United Nations Ileana Nuñez denounced the increasing radio and TV war against the island by the Bush Administration, which this year has earmarked \$37 million USD for that effort. Speaking during the General Assembly's Fourth Committee on information-related issues, the Cuban diplomat pointed out that these attacks against the island have been going on for decades. She added that these were intensified in August, when Washington launched a G-1 aircraft to increase broadcasts aimed at Cuba from one hour to six hours a week. (*ACN*, 17/10/06)

**October 18:** Latin American migrants in the United States will send a record \$45 billion to support relatives back home this year, according to a study released that sheds new light on the powerful economic forces driving migrants -- legal and undocumented -- to America's labor-hungry regions. \$60 billion annually from remittances worldwide, a number that dwarfs what countries receive in aid from the US government or such institutions as the World Bank. Remittances even exceed the \$40 billion that private companies are expected to invest in Latin America this year, according to the Institute of International Finance, a group that represents big financial institutions. Florida's numbers, while the fourth largest, excluded remittances to Cuba, which according to several other reports, obtains more than \$1 billion from around the world. The IDB can't cross-check the data on remittances to Cuba because of U.S. sanctions against the island. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/10/06)

**October 19:** The US government recently promised to crack down on those who violate trade travel sanctions against Cuba, but legal American trade with Cuba is thriving despite pressure from both governments, industry leaders said. Since the ban on agricultural trade was lifted in 2001, US companies have gone from selling about \$4 million (euro3 million) a year in corn and poultry to about \$350 million (euro279 million) worth of more than a dozen products in 2005. The Bush administration created a new law enforcement task force that will aggressively pursue those who violate restrictions on commercial business with Cuba, currency reporting requirements, money laundering and travel to the island. Industry leaders disagree on how the task force would affect future business with the communist nation, which ranked 30th out of 224 US export markets last year, according to the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council Inc. (AP, 19/10/06)

**October 19:** Cuba will never be the same as it was before leader Fidel Castro took ill in July and handed power to his brother, according to the US pointman to democratize the communist island. "Cuba is not actually going to be the same after July 27," said Caleb McCarry, who was named Cuba Transition Coordinator a year before. McCarry spoke before Latin America experts at an event sponsored by the Inter American Dialogue, a Washington think tank, and Florida International University, in Miami. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who chairs the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba along with Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, recommended to US President George W. Bush, who agreed, to spend 80 million dollars to help Cuba's opposition make the transition to democracy. Cuba promptly called the decision "arrogant" and "shameful" and in "violation" of international law. The opposition also rejected the outside help, as "counterproductive." Anthony Maingot, professor of sociology at Florida International University, suggested it "might be time to stop and listen" to opposition leaders. "You can't stand by and not help people," McCarry said. "It's up to the Cuban people, but we have to give them this opportunity," he said. (AFP, 19/10/06)

**October 19:** As signatory country of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, Venezuela has "a role to play" in a Cuban transition toward democratic rule, said US State Department official Caleb C. McCarry, coordinator of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. (AP, 19/10/06)

**October 23:** US independent candidate Brian Moore traveled to Cuba to underscore his opposition to US trade sanctions against the communist-run island after he was shut out of a debate between top Democratic and Republican candidates for one of the two Florida Senate seats. "Rather than sit around and mope and whine, I decided to come here instead," Moore said after arriving in Havana for a four-day visit. "I'd like to highlight my opposition to the embargo. Moore said the US sanctions imposed more than four decades ago in an attempt to undermine Fidel Castro's communist government violate the rights of Americans who want to visit and conduct trade with the island. (AP, 23/10/06)

**October 23:** Afro-Cubans and African-American civil rights leaders discussed the issue of race in Cuba during a show aired live by Radio Martí, the US government broadcast of news, information and entertainment to the communist island, The Miami Herald's news partner, WFOR-CBS4, reported. The unprecedented broadcast was hosted by the US Interests Section in Havana, where black Cubans participated in the discussion with black Americans at Radio Martí's facility in Doral. The program was to focus on the plight of blacks in Cuba. James Meredith, known as the first black student who broke US color barriers to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962, was among the participants. Meredith told CBS4 that "the Cuban blacks are probably as bad off as any blacks there are in the whole world. And that's why I say that the improvements of the condition for blacks in Cuba will result in the improvement of blacks in all of Latin America." Cuba's government has long insisted that the revolution brought great gains for black Cubans. "Since Castro, you've heard about the Cuban situation in America over and over. But I've never heard a focus on the black Cubans, period," Meredith said. (Radio Marti, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** American hostility toward Cuba has reached "unprecedented levels" under the Bush administration, a senior Cuban official said. He predicted that the UN General Assembly will deliver a sharp rebuke of US policies in a resolution next November. Cuba's chief diplomat in Washington, Dagoberto Rodriguez, said the world assembly will denounce the US trade embargo against Cuba, as it has each year since the early 1990's. "The longest running and most

ruthless blockade ever known to mankind will be rejected again," Rodriguez said, noting that 182 countries voted to end "this cruel and genocidal policy" last year. (AP, 24/10/06)

**October 24:** Radio and TV Martí have officially launched their new aircraft-based broadcasts with a program sure to please their Cuban audiences -- baseball's World Series. The new G1 twin turboprop, based in Key West, is to be airborne between 6 and 11 every night except Sunday in an attempt to bypass Cuban government jamming of the stations' previously stationary broadcasting facilities. After several weeks of testing, the aircraft officially began beaming the regular Martí broadcasts, starting with Game 3 of the World Series between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Detroit Tigers. Although Cubans could rarely view the previous land-based broadcasts because of the government jamming, anecdotal evidence suggests some have been receiving the airborne transmissions, especially outside the Havana area. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/10/06)

**October 26:** The illegal flow of Cubans towards Florida maintained an unstoppable pace during the fiscal year 2006, when nearly 6,000 people reached or attempted to reach US soil by sea, according to official statistics. The 3,075 Cubans who managed to land on the South Florida coasts and the 2,754 intercepted at sea by US Coast Guard patrols during the fiscal period concluded last September 30 constitute the highest migratory statistical figures since the 1994 raft people crisis. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/10/06)

**October 26:** The ACLU asked a judge to suspend a state law that bans universities in Florida from allowing travel to Cuba so that professors and students can pursue travel plans for research and academic exchanges. In the hearing before US District Judge Adalberto Jordan, the American Civil Liberties Union argued that the law banning trips to Cuba and five other countries on the US terrorist watch list is unconstitutional and should be overturned. But attorneys for the state said Florida has the right to oversee all money managed by its universities. 'It's not the professors' monies; it's the universities'," said Louis Hubener, acting solicitor general for Florida. He argued the law applies to state universities as well as private universities in Florida that receive state funds. At issue: the law, approved by the Florida Legislature this year, seems to be inconsistent with federal law, which currently allows travel to these countries for academic research. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/10/06)

**October 27:** Japanese camera maker Nikon Corp. has been under fire for refusing to present a digital camera as a prize to a Cuban boy who was one of the winners of a UN painting competition, citing a US economic embargo on the Caribbean island state. Nikon, which co-sponsored the 15th International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment, provided cameras to all the contest winners except the 12-year-old boy, who was given art materials as an alternative prize at the awards ceremony in Algiers on June 5. Faced with protests, Nikon said it cannot present a digital camera to the boy because it contains US-made parts whose export to Cuba is banned. (*Kyodo News*, 27/10/06)

**October 27:** A man was extradited to the United States to face charges that he stole a private airplane from a Florida Keys airport and flew it to Cuba with his young son as a passenger. David Ray Franklin was charged with interstate transportation of a stolen aircraft and international parental kidnapping, the US Attorney's Office in Miami said. Franklin, 52, and his son took off in someone else's blue and white 1978 Cessna 172 Hawk from the Marathon airport on September 30. Later that same morning, Cuban authorities notified the US Interests Section in Havana that a plane matching that description had landed in Cuba. Authorities escorted Franklin back to Miami on a commercial aircraft to face the criminal charges, the U.S. Attorney's Office said. (AP, 28/10/06)

**October 27:** Cuba has jammed the latest anti-Castro television programming beamed over by the United States, according to an informal survey of Cubans who tried to watch the shows that included baseball's championship series. But the US agency that oversees the effort said it was "confident" Cubans were seeing the programs. "A friend told me they were going to broadcast the World Series, so I got together some people to watch and all we saw was static," Eduardo, a 33-year-old eastern Santiago resident who does odd jobs for a living, said. "I went next door where there is a better television and looked until 11 p.m. On Channel 20 it seemed like some signal was trying to get through, but it

was jammed," Havana resident Eddi Machin said. The Bush administration has pledged to strengthen TV Marti broadcasts in hopes of undermining Cuba's communist government, provisionally headed by Defense Minister Raul Castro while his brother, Fidel Castro, recovers from intestinal surgery. TV Marti, part of the US government's International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), officially began new aircraft-based broadcasts on October 24 to baseball-crazed Cuba, starting with game three of the World Series between the St. Louis Cardinals and the Detroit Tigers. (*Reuters*, 27/10/06)

**October 29:** A Cuban-American lawmaker said that recently released images of ailing Cuban leader Fidel Castro meant little for the island's future. Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said that Castro, who temporarily ceded power to his brother Raul in July following intestinal surgery, is "certainly around, and we don't think there's going to be a change, whether it's Fidel or Raul or anybody else who's part of the communist infrastructure." "What we want is free elections in Cuba, freedom for political prisoners and a multiparty system," the lawmaker said on CNN's "Late Edition." "There's no role for Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, in that scenario." (*AP*, 29/10/06)

**October 31:** The 4th Civil Society Forum against the Blockade and Annexation condemned the worsening of the US blockade on Cuba and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the island will have a new victory at the UN. The event was organized by the UN Cuban Association and attended by representatives from 138 non-governmental organizations that, in their final declarations, termed President George W. Bush's government "genocidal". About 10 panels deliberated and presented papers on several aspects of this issue, and there were speeches on the economic, trade and financial siege against Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/10/06)

**October 31:** A global press advocacy group is deploring attacks by China, Cuba and Gambia against independent online journalists who use the Internet to transmit news about their countries to readers around the world. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said governments in such countries as Cuba severely restrict their citizens from access to Internet outlets. But the Cuban Internet site, CubaNet, for example, has provided Cuban journalists with "unprecedented global reach," said the CPJ. In 2003, the CPJ said, Cuban authorities cracked down on Cuban journalists who used telephones, fax machines and occasional Internet connections to send local news and commentary to Web sites in the United States and Spain. Some 23 of the 24 journalists now jailed in Cuba were contributors to US or European Web sites, said the CPJ. (*Washington File*, 31/10/06)

**October 31:** A California-based sports agent was arrested, charged in federal court in Miami with financing and organizing a scheme to smuggle Cuban baseball players from the communist island to the United States. Baseball agent Gustavo "Gus" Dominguez of Total Sports International is accused of hiring four men to help him get 19 Cubans off the island on August 22, 2004, including several who are now US minor-league baseball players. The voyage also included three children only identified by their initials. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/10/06)