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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Uncertainty prevails about the possibility of Fidel Castro returning to power. Dissident organizations denounce an increase in the levels of repression against oppositionists. The Provincial Committee of the Cuban Communist Party in the City of Havana addresses deficiencies in social plans related with health care. Several political prisoners, including independent journalist Oscar Mario Gonzalez, are released from prison. Fidel Castro says in a message that he is not well enough to attend a gala inaugurating celebrations of his 80th birthday. Presiding over commemorations for the 50th Anniversary of the Santiago de Cuba uprising, historical Commander of the Revolution Ramiro Valdés praises Raúl Castro as “the guardian” of Cuba’s communist government.

Economy: Biotechnology becomes one of the first ten lines of Cuban exports. Cuban authorities intensify campaigns for workplace discipline and against corruption. The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas is analyzed by the governments of Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba in Havana. Cuban minister of Foreign Trade says that the economy grew by 12.5% in 2006.

Exile Community: Surveys show a growing number of Cuban Americans believe South Florida residents should not return to Cuba.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba and China were excluded from the new International Trade Union Federation founded in Vienna. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage heads the Cuban delegation to the 16th Ibero American summit in Montevideo. UNDP’s Human Development Index 2006 places Cuba in the fifth place among Latin American countries. At the UN Human Rights Council, Cuba stands in support of Iran against Canada, and rejects a Canadian sponsored resolution.

US-Cuba Relations: US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice claims that transition away from a Castro-led regime has “clearly” started. Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon convokes a new solidarity campaign with the five Cubans jailed in the US. A report by the US Congress’ Government Accountability Office reveals the irregular use of funds allocated to promote political change on the island. The US director of national intelligence, John Negroponte, appoints a “mission manager” for Cuba and Venezuela.



Domestic Affairs

November 1: Cuba's top Olympic officer pleaded for baseball to be reinstated as an Olympic sport. Jose Ramon Fernandez, president of the Cuban Olympic Committee, said before the 11th World Sports for All conference in Havana that the International Olympic Committee's preoccupation with US-based professionals as the best players in the game was off base. Fernandez rejected arguments made by IOC president Jacques Rogge for dropping baseball. Rogge has said the Olympic Games need to be an arena for the best in sport. However, the Summer Olympics take place during the baseball season and many countries are deprived of their major leaguers. The Cuban Olympic boss questioned whether the major leagues represent the best after all. (*Globe & Mail*, 2/11/06)

November 1: The Cuban Foundation for Human Rights asked for solidarity as repression against dissidents increases. "The aggressiveness of the Cuban government against peaceful dissidents is extremely dangerous and worrisome, and we hold the Cuban government responsible for the life and health of the assailed dissidents and their relatives", said the FCDH. (*Cubanet*, 1/11/06)

November 1: Contributing to sports being more attractive for young and old alike and encouraging the practice of sports among minorities and developing countries are challenges facing the International Sport for All Congress, affirmed Jacques Rogge, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), in Havana. The sports official presided over the opening of the Congress together with Raúl Castro, Cuban first vice president. The IOC entrusted the organization of the Congress to Cuba "in recognition of a country that has made an extraordinary contribution to the international sports movement in recent years," Rogge commented. The Congress, sponsored jointly by the IOC, the World Health Organization and the General Association of International Sports Federations, featured the central theme of "Risks and Benefits of Physical Activity." José Ramón Fernández, president of the Cuban Olympic Committee, said that about 1,000 participants from 100 countries would participate in the event's discussions. (*Granma International*, 1/11/06)

November 1: Presided by the prima ballerina *assoluta* Alicia Alonso, the 20th International Ballet Festival of Havana opened with a gala to honor the 250th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's birth. The National Ballet of Cuba (BNC) staged the opening performance plus the premiere of Alonso's Mozart Divertimento, especially devoted to the magnificent Austrian composer. This year, the ballet festival will be hosted by different cities of the country, besides its traditional venues in Havana. Theaters in the central provinces of Matanzas and Cienfuegos will serve as venues for the 2006 festival. The Cuban audience will be able to enjoy world dancers such as Argentinean Julio Bocca and Maximiliano Guerra, Russian Natalia Osipova, and Italian Carla Fracci, who is premiering *Desnuda luz del amor* (Naked Light of Love), especially created for her by Alonso. (*AIN*, 1/11/06)

November 2: The president of the International Olympic Committee, Jacques Rogge, met Cuba's acting president Raul Castro for an hour as part of his visit to Havana for the World Sport For All Congress. "We spoke about doping in sport (...) sports in general and Cuba's unique position in athletics," Rogge told Havana reporters. (*Xinhua*, 3/11/06)

November 3: The latest Castro video aired on Cuban TV served as a "proof of life" of sorts. Rumors that he had died last week were churning so briskly that even Castro felt he had to respond. Yet the images released over the past three months show Castro in an apparent slow decline. He has acknowledged losing 41 pounds, but then said he regained about half of that. The latest video showed him doing what appeared to be walk-in-place exercises, slowly swinging his elbows as his slippered feet, set wide, marked time but did not move forward. That "is exactly what you would have expected for somebody who has been ill for an extended period of time, who has not been active," said University of Miami gastroenterologist Dr. Jeffrey Raskin. "You have a wide-based gait to steady yourself because you're weak (...) Probably in his own environment, he's walking around with a walker." Raskin and Dr. Charles Gerson, a gastroenterologist at Mount Sinai in New York, both said that Castro's three-months-and-counting recovery suggest a

serious illness, such as cancer. "Usually for a benign condition if you have surgery, after a month or six weeks you are back to normal," Gerson said. "Three months after surgery, he should be better." (*The Miami Herald*, 3/11/06)

November 5: The Provincial Committee of the Cuban Communist Party in the City of Havana, where the biggest social investment plans on the island are underway, pointed out deficiencies in the progress of the work, particularly in the health sector, reported the weekly newspaper "Tribuna de la Habana". The first secretary of the Communist Party in the City of Havana, Pedro Sáez, expressed the "urgency to modify the methods and styles of work of the Party, in cases where subjective constraints have prevented meeting the deadlines for the improvement and expansion of some hospitals", according to the source. Sáez presided over a meeting of the Provincial Committee of the PCC to examine the progress of the work of the so called "Battle of Ideas" program, aimed in particular at improving and expanding hospitals, cultural institutions and schools, among other social programs. (*EFE*, 5/11/06)

November 6: Cuba's foreign minister stepped away from an earlier assertion that Fidel Castro would return to power in December and declined to say whether the ailing Cuban leader would be well enough to attend the celebration of his 80th birthday on December 2, as was announced. Felipe Perez Roque said he couldn't discuss when Castro, who is recovering from intestinal surgery, will return. "It's a subject on which I don't want to speculate," the minister told the press in an interview. Castro's return, he said, "will come when it's the right moment." Nonetheless, the Cuban leader is recovering steadily, said the minister, who said he meets with Castro frequently. "He looks good. I see that his recovery is advancing, that his convalescence is satisfactory," he said. "We are optimistic, and happy. The only ones who are sad are our enemies, who were all prepared to celebrate (his death)." Perez Roque refused to speculate on when Castro might return, saying: "The important thing is his recovery, which he's doing in a serious and persistent manner." (*The New York Times*, *Toronto Star*, 6/11/06)

November 6: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said the US trade embargo is first to blame for scarcity of goods and lack of economic opportunity on the island, but he also acknowledged Cuban "errors" and "insufficiencies." "Does our economy require that we make decisions to change some things, to fix what is wrong? Yes," he said. "And it can be done, in the right moment." Observers have speculated that, under a more permanent leadership by Raul Castro, Cuba might adopt an economic model based on China, which is also communist but has increasingly opened markets. Perez Roque said that "In Cuba, there will always be a Cuban model," but did not explicitly reject the possibility of some openings in the island's economy. (*The New York Times*, 6/11/06)

November 6: In Cuba, alcoholism affects five percent of people over 15, including both clinical forms of alcoholism: binge drinking and heavy drinking on a regular basis. "In our country the proportion of men to women within that five percent figure is approximately three men to one woman", psychiatrist Ricardo González told the press. In his view, such comparative data justify the statement that alcoholism is not a health problem among women in Cuba, although preventive policies take it into account because of the enormous risk to unborn and breastfeeding children. According to González, the head of Addiction Treatment Services at the Havana Psychiatric Hospital, and president of the Cuban Society of Psychiatry, alcoholism is determined by "a mosaic of factors," in which hedonism (pleasure-seeking) and socio-cultural circumstances play an important part. In seeking the causes of alcoholism in women, "one must not lose sight of the higher frequency of depression among the female sex, worldwide, and the relatively frequent use of alcohol to alleviate symptoms." Women are also more susceptible to liver diseases caused by alcohol, in a shorter time and with a lower consumption than men. "I hit bottom when I decided I didn't want to carry on living like that and I threw myself off the balcony," a woman said. A few days after leaving the hospital, she found an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group in her neighbourhood that helped her reclaim her life. (*IPS*, 6/11/06)

November 6: Guillermo Espinosa Rodríguez of the Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental (APLO), an independent news agency, was sentenced by a court in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba to two years of house arrest for being a "danger to society." Espinosa was brought before the court after being held for 12 days at Department 21 of the state security police. The court also ordered Espinosa to get a state job and banned him from continuing his journalistic

activities or he would be sent to prison. Espinosa worked as a nurse until three months ago when he was fired because of his dissident views. (*RWB, Cubanet, 6/11/06*)

November 6: The Catholic Bishops of Cuba met in plenary assembly to discuss among other things, preparation for the 5th General Conference of CELAM (Council of Latin American Bishops' Conferences) in May 2007 at Aparecida, Brazil. After careful reading over the past months of the Document of Participation in various communities and representative sectors of the Church in Cuba, the Bishops will examine the results of this reflection in order to approve the national Church's contribution to CELAM 5. The Bishops will also examine a study undertaken by a special team with regard to Baptismal Pastoral. The bishops will be presented with recommendations and guidelines from which they will elaborate adequate pastoral for better attention to the opportunity for evangelisation offered by the baptism of children. Catholic presence in Cuban culture and suggestions for celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of the finding of the lost image of Our Lady of Charity are other themes on the Bishops' agenda at the meeting. (*FIDES, 6/11/06*)

November 7: The group organizing Fidel Castro's 80th birthday party said it was unsure the Cuban leader would attend the December 2 celebration that also will mark the 50th anniversary of the Cuban revolution's start. The group's statement was the latest signal about Castro's health since intestinal surgery in July forced him to temporarily cede power to his brother Raul. "In the opportune moment, in the midst of Fidel's disciplined process of recovery, he will decide the circumstances in which it will be possible for him to accompany those of us who will be here," said Alfredo Vera, coordinator of the Guayasamin Foundation in charge of the birthday events. Vera, reading from a statement at a Havana press conference, declined to elaborate. (*Reuters, 8/11/06*)

November 8: The Progressive Arch coalition urged the Cuban government to stop the "acts of repudiation" against dissidents and to fulfil the government's international commitments on terrorism. A written statement signed by the spokesman of the movement, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, calls such acts of repudiation a "particular form of State terrorism". (*AFP, 8/11/06*)

November 9: The mass media war and the use of the Internet as a new battlefield were the topics on the first day of an international gathering of war correspondents taking place at the "Jose Marti" International Institute of Journalism in Havana. The first session was attended by Orlando Fundora, President of the World Peace Movement. Jose Dos Santos, first vice president of the Cuban Association of Journalists (UPEC), addressed the meeting on behalf of the Latin American Federation of Journalists. (*Granma, 9/11/06*)

November 10: Ailing Fidel Castro is recovering and expected to return to power, but he may not be well enough to attend his 80th birthday celebration on December 2, the head of Cuba's National Assembly said. "I know he's doing well, that he continues to recover, fulfilling his rehabilitation program with discipline," Ricardo Alarcon told reporters at a journalism conference in the Cuban capital. "I am sure that process will go on in the proper way to having him fully back," said Alarcon, one of Castro's closest advisers. But Alarcon held open the possibility he may not make it. "It's in his hands, but it depends on the judgment of his doctors," he said. Castro turned 80 on August 13, but was not well enough for a celebration, so it was postponed to December 2. (*Reuters, 10/11/06*)

November 13: The second season of Male Sexual Diversity cinema opened its doors in Havana, aimed at preventing sexually transmitted diseases and to warn about the risks of HIV. In Cuba "there has been great progress towards accepting" gays, said Rubén de Armas, member of a group on HIV prevention and control, and organizer of the event. Local media has not publicized the event. (*AFP, 13/11/06*)

November 13: The eldest son of Cuban leader Fidel Castro said his father is recovering from an unspecified illness that has forced him to temporarily give up power he held since a 1959 communist revolution. But Fidel Castro Diaz-Balart, better known in Cuba as "Fidelito," did not answer when asked if his father would be well enough to attend a December

2 public celebration of his 80th birthday. "The only thing I can tell you is that he is recovering," the younger Castro told the press before quickly walking away. "Fidelito" Castro, who is 57 and a nuclear physicist, spoke to the press at a biotechnology conference in Havana. (*Reuters*, 13/11/06)

November 14: An epidemic of dengue fever that flooded hospitals and may have killed as many as 100 Cubans has been brought under control by a fumigation campaign involving 300,000 students, pensioners and healthcare workers. The outbreak of the mosquito-borne virus was the worst in a quarter of a century and appears to have afflicted thousands during its peak in September and October. The infection rate has slowed to only a few dozen new cases this month, said a senior doctor familiar with the scope of the epidemic, who added that the response was initially slowed by government secrecy. The physician complained bitterly about the veil initially imposed by Communist Party officials. The ostensible purpose was to avoid panicking the public, but the demand that the epidemic be treated as a confidential security matter was strongest in early September, when preparations were underway for the 14th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, to be held in Havana. "We were forbidden even to refer to it as dengue fever, because the official position is that dengue was eradicated in the 1980s," said the doctor, who has nearly three decades of experience in Havana hospitals. "We were compelled to call it 'fever syndrome.'" Cuba's Public Health Ministry later confirmed the outbreak, telling the Pan American Health Organization representative in Havana on October 13 that the country was suffering "a classic dengue outbreak" and that about 10% of the cases involved children. The ministry gave no count of the afflicted and said that an unspecified number of deaths were "associated with preexisting chronic conditions." (*Los Angeles Times*, 14/11/06)

November 14: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened a meeting of Cuba's 26 UNESCO-affiliated libraries in the northwest city of Matanzas. "The network of libraries (...) is a bastion of education, culture and information," said Blanca Patayo, a UNESCO representative to Havana, at the opening ceremony. "Human history is gathered and preserved in libraries, and they are essential institutions for the development of peace, and humanity's spiritual values," he added. This meeting, the fifth in a series organized by the Jose Marti National Library along with regional library institutions, will cover cultural activities in communities aimed at serving the disabled, caring for the environment and preserving cultural heritage. (*Xinhua*, 14/11/06)

November 15: Cuba has barred leading dissident Guillermo Farinas from travelling to Germany to receive a human rights prize awarded by the city of Weimar, a human rights group said. The Frankfurt-based International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) said Cuban authorities had cited medical grounds for refusing Farinas permission to travel to Europe. Farinas went on a seven-month hunger strike this year to demand unrestricted Internet access for Cubans. He was admitted to an intensive care unit and is in a wheelchair. The Cuban state security services told Farinas that photographs of him in a wheelchair "would damage the image of the revolution", the IGFM said. (*AFP*, 15/11/06)

November 15: A new synthetic product with anti-tumor properties has been patented by a team of scientists from the Cuban Center of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB). The first phase of the clinical trials was completed with 31 patients with cervical cancer, *Granma* newspaper published. Silvio E. Perea Rodriguez, a doctor in Biological Sciences, presented the test results during the Biotechnology Havana 2006 convention. He explained to the audience that the product is a peptide that inhibits and kills the kinase CK2 enzyme, found in high levels in malignant tumors. (*ACN*, 15/11/06)

November 15: In San Luis, Santiago de Cuba, State Security agents arrested Cuban opposition activist Maura Iset González, president of the Latin-American Federation of Rural Women (FLAMUR). González was collecting signatures for a FLAMUR campaign demanding that the Cuban currency be accepted as the method of payment in every establishment in the country. (*EER*, 16/11/06)

November 16: An influential program on state-run Cuban television described plans for ailing Fidel Castro's 80th birthday celebration but did not mention whether he would attend and said his ideas were more important than his

presence. The nightly "Mesa Redonda" show, often used by the government to disclose news, was devoted entirely to the December 2 event, but its participants stayed away from the topic of Castro's health. Moderator Randy Alonso said in a closing statement that "more than the physical presence, the ideas of Fidel, the ideas of the revolution" were important to the celebration. His 80th birthday was August 13, but he was unable to celebrate in public and suggested it be marked on December 2. The highlight of the celebration will be Havana's first military parade in a decade, with art, music and literary events leading up to it. (*The New York Times*, 16/11/06)

November 16: At least one big French film star and a former first lady from that country will be on hand for the delayed celebrations of Fidel Castro's 80th birthday, though whether the ailing longtime leader himself will appear remains unknown. The Guayasamin Foundation, named for Ecuadorian painter Oswaldo Guayasamin, is organizing a series of round table discussions, concerts and art exhibitions between November 28 and December 1 as something of a postponed birthday party for Castro. Saskia Guayasamin, daughter of Oswaldo, said French actor Gerard Depardieu has confirmed his attendance, as has Danielle Mitterrand, wife of former French president Francois Mitterrand. Among others who have said they will come are Argentine Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel and Spain's Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former head of UNESCO. (*EFE*, 16/11/06)

November 16: Independent journalist Julio Aleaga Pesant was detained and handcuffed on the streets and taken to a police station in a patrol car. The incident took place minutes after the reporter, along with a group of colleagues, took part in a televised lecture on journalistic techniques sponsored by Florida International University, at the US Interests Section in Havana. (*Cubanet*, 21/11/06)

November 18: The Acting President of the Independent Movement for an Alternative Option, Juan Francisco Sigler Amaya, was forcefully arrested along with his son, Gulliver Sigler González. Juan Francisco and his son were thrown in a police car when they tried to cross a cordon of police forces and pro-government mobs that for several days impeded access to the block where some of their relatives live. (*Cubanet*, 25/11/06)

November 19: With one last chance to save face in an otherwise disappointing year, Cuba's national baseball team won the Inter Continental Baseball Cup. Cuba, long the dominant force in international baseball, had won all but one tournament this year, the Central American Games. When it had stepped out onto the larger world stage, Cuban teams had played well, but not well enough. The same Cuban national team, playing at home in Havana, lost to Team USA's roster of minor leaguers in the Americas Olympic qualifier in August, and Cuba's junior national and college national teams similarly had failed to win tournaments on Cuban soil. Cuba has now won back-to-back IC's, claiming the event the last time it was played in 2002. (*Baseball America*, 19/11/06)

November 19: The health of 62 year-old Cuban journalist Oscar Mario Gonzalez Perez has deteriorated considerably since he was detained and imprisoned in July 2005. Mr. Gonzalez has been held without trial and is being denied adequate medical treatment for serious health problems. Cuban prison authorities have refused to administer necessary medical tests despite pleas from his wife and a physician's diagnosis that such tests are needed. (*Cuba News*, 20/11/06)

November 20: Cuban official mass media admitted that the intense prevention and fumigation campaign carried out in the last several months has not managed to prevent the spread of *Aedes aegypti*, the mosquito that carries the dengue virus. The campaign has mobilized thousands of people across the entire country to spray every home. (*EFE*, 21/11/06)

November 21: Independent trade unionist Lázaro González Adán was sentenced to three years in prison after a trial held in the municipal court of Sibanicú, province of Camagüey. After two years in detention without charges or trial for the alleged crimes of disobedience and public disturbance, the court issued its sentence against González Adán. (*Cubanet*, 21/11/06)

November 21: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said he remains optimistic about the recovery of ailing leader Fidel Castro, and another senior Cuban official also said Castro was getting better after intestinal surgery four months ago. "He continues to recover, his health continues to improve," Lage said in a news broadcast on Cuban state television. "We are very optimistic about his recovery," Lage added in comments to reporters during a visit to the eastern province of Holguin. Ricardo Alarcon, a key figure in the communist-run government, was also optimistic about Castro's convalescence, telling reporters that the leader "is fulfilling his obligation to get better." (*The Herald Tribune*, 21/11/06)

November 21: The Cuban government released without explanation two dissidents who had been in prison since their arrests last year, an opposition leader said. The regime set free Oscar Mario Gonzalez and Santiago Valdeolla, who were arrested along with 20 other people on July 22, 2005, as they were organizing a demonstration in front of the French Embassy, the head of the illegal Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, or CCDHRN, Elizardo Sanchez, told the press. Ricardo Medina and Francisco Moure, who had been arrested at the French Embassy protest, were set free on October 25. The head of the CCDHRN said that at the beginning of the year the island's communist government freed Jesus Adolfo Reyes, another member of the embassy protest group, but still in prison without any formal charges against them are Rene Gomez Manzano, Julio Cesar Lopez, Raul Martinez and Miguel Lopez Santos. Sanchez said that in August and September there had been a general decline in "acts of political repression" by the communist regime, but he added that in October and so far in November there had been "dozens of arrests." "It seems that the government is replacing the repression ... (of) long-term imprisonment with low-profile political repression: short-term arrests, threats, interrogations, (and) physical or verbal attacks," he said. (*EFE*, 21/11/06)

November 22: After a tour around the country, a commission of the Cuban parliament announced that it would look at the national program for home building and repair, which according to one of the members of the group, has some problems and deficiencies despite considerable state financial support. The statements were made by Leonardo Martínez, president of one of 10 commissions of the Cuban National Assembly of the People's Power. (*WDS*, 22/11/06)

November 22: Dissident Oswaldo Payá called upon Cubans "to raise their voices" for the release of political prisoners on the island, two weeks after making a similar call of support to the United Nations Human Rights Council. "Once again we call upon all Cubans, inside and out of Cuba, to raise their voices in favour of the release of those subjected to suffering by cruel and inhuman imprisonment", said Payá in a statement of the Christian Liberation Movement, over which he presides. (*EER*, 23/11/06)

November 23: A member of the Ladies in White – wives and relatives of political prisoners -- was attacked with stones by a State Security collaborator while walking along the main street of the town of Palmarito de Cauto, in Santiago de Cuba. Ana Belkis Ferrer García said the local chief refused to recognize the allegations when she reported the attack to the police. (*Cubanet*, 23/11/06)

November 23: Dissident Alberto Hernández Suárez, in detention since midyear, was set free. Hernández Suárez, the director of an independent library in Pinar del Río, had been serving one year in jail at the Taco Taco prison, in Pinar del Río, since April 12, under charges of "dangerousness". (*Cubanet*, 23/11/06)

November 24: With a cultural gala at the Karl Marx Theater in Havana began the festivities in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the landing of the Granma yacht in eastern Cuba on December 2, 1956. The colorful event, broadcast on national television, was presided by commanders of the Revolution Juan Almeida, Ramiro Valdes and Guillermo Garcia —three of the 82 members of the expeditionary force who accompanied Fidel Castro on that historic voyage across the Gulf of Mexico. Among the guests attending the gala were members of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, participants in the 1953 assault on the Moncada Garrison in Santiago de Cuba, members of the Rebel

Army established in the Sierra Maestra Mountains after the Granma landing, participants in the defense of Cuba in the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, Cubans who fought abroad on internationalist missions, and officers of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and Ministry of Interior. Works of art were presented to the FAR from different Cuban political and mass organizations, received by Chief of Staff Vice-Minister, General Alvaro Lopez Miera. Army General and Minister of the Armed Forces Raul Castro did not attend the event. (*Granma, El Nuevo Herald*, 25/11/06)

November 25: Silvio Rodriguez, one of the icons of the Latin American political song, celebrated his 60th birthday along with a whole host of Cuban singer-song writers, friends and family. Some 40 Cuban singers from all generations joined the beloved purveyor of "nueva trova" for two concerts entitled "Te doy una cancion" (I give you a song) at the Pablo de la Torriente Brau Center in Havana. "We are gathered together to celebrate all these years of resistance. I would like to thank all the singer-song writers, those who learned my songs and those who didn't pay any attention to them," said Silvio in front of a multitude that filled the halls of the center. Vicente Feliu, Gerardo Alfonso, Alberto Faya, Charly Salgado, Duo Karma, Eduardo Sosa, and Samuel Águila were among the singers that performed Silvio's songs at the concert. (*Granma International, AIN*, 25/11/06)

November 26: An exhibition of photographs from Fidel and Raul Castro was inaugurated in Havana, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Armed Revolutionary Forces (FAR) and birthday celebrations for Fidel Castro. "Homage," title of the exhibition, was opened to the public at the Jose Marti Memorial, with 58 photographs by several Cuban artists, according to the official newspaper Juventud Rebelde. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/11/06)

November 28: The "Colegio Mayor San Geronimo de La Habana" was inaugurated as a branch of the more than two century old University of Havana at the same site where the first Cuban university was located. After a complex process or renovation undertaken by the Office of the City Historian of what was, until a few years ago, the venue of the Ministry of Education has been converted into a multifunctional installation in which the new university facilities will be sharing space with museums, a cinema and other facilities. This new institution is the second university campus in the municipality of Old Havana, and will be devoted to the training of highly skilled professionals in restoration, archeology and related fields. (*Granma*, 28/11/06)

November 28: Ailing Fidel Castro said that he was not well enough to attend a gala kicking off five days of celebrations of his 80 years. Castro, who has not appeared in public since he underwent intestinal surgery in late July, said in a message that was read out to 5,000 supporters and admirers from dozens of countries that doctors had not allowed him to attend the packed event in Havana's Karl Marx Theatre. "It was only in the Karl Marx Theatre that all guests could be seated but, according to the doctors, I was not yet ready for such a challenging engagement," he said in the message. "I bid you farewell with great sorrow for not being able to personally thank you and embrace every one of you," he ended. Attending the event were Cuban vice president Carlos Lage and Esteban Lazo, minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque, and the president of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón. Interim president, Raul Castro did not attend the gala at the Karl Marx Theatre. [[Mensaje de Fidel Castro](#)] (*Reuters, El Mundo*, 29/11/06)

November 29: Over 1,600 renowned international figures from more than 80 countries inaugurated the colloquium "Memory and Future: Cuba and Fidel". World Personalities from around the world stressed the role of Fidel Castro in the international struggle for global justice, during the first day of the Colloquium. Spanish journalist and writer Monserrat Poncha, Argentinean social activist Hebe de Bonafini, leader of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, and Chilean writer Volodia Teittelboim were among the speakers. A panel of Cuban professors briefed the audience on the latest changes in the Cuban education system and the positive impact of the literacy program "Yes I Can", implemented in several Latin American countries. Sponsored by the Guayasamin Foundation, the intellectual exchanges are part of the activities which kicked off the day before in Havana for the 80th birthday of Fidel Castro. (*Radio Habana Cuba, AIN*, 29/11/06)

November 29: Fidel Castro's absence from his belated 80th birthday celebration has reinforced suspicions he is too gravely ill to return to power he ceded provisionally to brother Raul on July 31. Questions about his health and fitness to govern have dominated the run-up to the week's events, which many have said felt more like a farewell to the bearded comandante than a celebration. Most analysts have basically written Castro off, saying even if he survives, he likely will be only a figurehead while his brother runs the government. (*Reuters*, 29/11/06)

November 29: Interim President Raul Castro made his first public appearance in weeks, as his brother Fidel remained absent from public celebrations marking his 80th birthday. Neither of the Castros was at the public events honouring Fidel's 80th birthday. However Raul Castro, 75, appeared at an open-air event in central Havana celebrating revolutionary folk singer and composer Silvio Rodriguez's 60th birthday. A group of schoolchildren at the event asked him to forward their greetings to his brother Fidel. "He's fine, today I'm going to see him," Raul Castro told the children, according to state television. Raul's last public appearance was on November 2, when he reviewed military equipment to be on display at a parade that marks both the 50th anniversary of a key event in the Cuban revolution and the culmination of five days of Fidel birthday celebrations. (*Reuters*, 29/11/06)

November 30: Acting president Raul Castro is the "guardian" of Cuba's communist government in the absence of his brother Fidel Castro and in the face of US threats, a hard-line member of the Cuban leadership said. "We recognize Raul as the firm guardian of the Cuban Revolution," Ramiro Valdes, a regime old-timer and current Communications Minister, told a 200,000 crowd of workers and students in a sea of red, white and blue Cuban flags, at a military-civilian rally in the eastern city of Santiago. His words added to the growing perception among Cubans that their ailing leader Fidel Castro, last seen in pictures on October 28 looking gaunt and frail, may be too ill to resume governing. Raul Castro often presides over military events in Santiago, about 900 kilometers (600 miles) southeast of Havana, and many Cubans expected he would take part there. Valdes, a veteran revolutionary who fought alongside the Castro brothers in their guerrilla force that seized power in 1959, said the future of Cuba depends on the unity of its people with the ruling Communist Party. In the four months since Fidel Castro stepped aside, "all our people, the Party, the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the Interior Ministry, the revolutionary cadre, have grown stronger, shoulder-to-shoulder with Raul," Valdes said. Cuban institutions have continued to function efficiently despite the "blockade" of US sanctions, Valdes said. "Never have we been so strong, so united, so alert," said Valdes, who was reappointed minister in August. "Yankee imperialists" are dreaming of political change that will not happen, he said, in reference to increased pressures by the Bush administration to undermine a Castro succession. Historic Commanders of the Revolution Juan Almeida and Guillermo Garcia were also present at the rally commemorating the Santiago uprising against Fulgencio Batista's regime in 1956. (*Reuters*, 30/11/06)

November 30: Fidel Castro's age and illness have prompted his family to urge him not to attend his 80th birthday celebration, and make his full return to power unlikely, the daughter of provisional Cuban leader Raul Castro said. Mariela Castro Espin told the press her uncle was still fragile after emergency surgery in July for intestinal bleeding and must take care of himself. Castro Espin, 44, said she had no inside knowledge, but thought that illness and age would prevent Castro from coming back as the full-blown leader of Cuba. "My impression as an ordinary Cuban is that we are going to have him in another role, as the wise 80-year-old leader that now is going to take care of himself," she said. "He's not going to the festivities because everybody is telling him, 'We don't want you to move.' We're going to celebrate, but he should stay away and take it easy," his niece said. She said Raul Castro was taking care his sick brother not try to do too much by making sure "each person assumes his responsibility without putting it on the comandante." "He (Raul) has a lot of confidence in the intelligence of the comandante, not only to direct the revolution, but also to cure himself," she said. (*Reuters*, 30/11/06)

November 30: Some 1,500 members of the Hebrew community in Cuba commemorated the 100th Anniversary of their presence on the island. In a conversation with the press, current Cuban president of the community, Adela Dworin, said that some 1,500 Jews currently live in the island. She remembered that the first group of Jews, who arrived in 1906 from the US, founded the first Hebrew temple and bought land to build a cemetery in the municipality of Guanabacoa,

east of Havana. During the Second World War, Cuba welcomed thousands of Hebrew refugees and it was at that time that the community reached over 20,000 persons living in the island, Dworin said. Visitors from Canada, United States, and Latin American countries joined the celebrations in Havana. The official newspaper "Juventud Rebelde" said a delegation of the New York based Appeal of Conscience Foundation, headed by its president, rabine Arthur Schneier, was welcomed by Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, and by representatives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry and of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. (*EFE*, 30/11/06)

November 30: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said Cubans "will keep on fighting for Fidel Castro's ideas and dreams, since they are our principles". Perez Roque made a presentation in a panel called "Homeland is Humanity", which was part of the colloquium "Memory and Future: Cuba and Fidel", that has brought together nearly 2,000 personalities from eighty countries. "All that Fidel wants to bequeath are his ideas, nothing else. Recovering and returning to the struggle, he will once again be defeating his enemies, those who are so full of hatred and mediocrity," Perez Roque asserted. He praised the Guayasamin Foundation for having convinced the Cuban leader to celebrate his birthday; otherwise, he said such celebrations might have been very intimate and modest. Perez Roque highlighted Fidel Castro's honesty and rejection of vanity, a value he has taught all those around him. He stressed the close friendly relations between the Cuban people and their historic leader, whom they see as a father, an older brother and part of their own family. (*AIN*, 1/12/06)

November 30: Cuban musicians and others from diverse latitudes came together for the All Voices Together concert with which the Oswaldo Guayasamín Foundation paid on artistic tribute to Fidel Castro for his 80th birthday. The concert took place at the José Martí Anti-Imperialist Tribunal by Havana's Malecón, an open-air venue filled by thousands of people. Uruguayan Daniel Viglietti performed three classical numbers from his repertoire, including "A desalambrar" (Cutting the wire). Beforehand Cuban Pablo Milanés had come out onto the stage to open the concert, in which "Acto de fe" (Act of Faith), a song/anthem composed by him and Silvio Rodríguez. Silvio came after Viglietti, bringing indispensable numbers like "La era está pariendo un corazón" (The Era is Giving Birth to a Heart), "Ojalá" (Maybe) and "El necio" (The Fool). From Ecuador came Margarita Lazo and the Pueblo Nuevo group; the lyrical beat of Andean music in a Paraguayan melody, filtered through the sweet timbre of Ricardo Flecha. His special gift for Fidel Castro was a version of the "Internationale" in Guarani, as he affirmed. (*Granma International*, 1/12/06)

Economy

November 1: Cuban unrefined nickel production may fall short of the 76,700 planned for the year due to a 3,000-tonne shortfall at one of three plants reported by joint venture partner Sherritt International. Sherritt said the joint venture Pedro Sotto Alba plant operated with state-owned Cubaniquel would produce 30,000 tonnes this year compared with the 33,000 tonnes it usually ships to the venture's Canada refinery. "Taking into consideration process bottlenecks experienced in prior quarters, full-year nickel production is expected to be approximately 30,000 tonnes," Sherritt said of the joint venture in its third quarter report. Sherritt also announced that plans to add 16,000 tonnes to the plant's capacity by 2008 had been postponed in favor of adding 4,000 tonnes by 2008, another 9,000 tonnes in 2009 and a final 3,000 tonnes in 2011. Sherritt said cobalt output would be unchanged from 2005. Cubaniquel operates two older plants in eastern Holguin province where the joint venture is located, exporting the product mainly to Europe and China. (*Reuters*, 1/11/06)

November 1: A varied range of Bulgarian dairy products (including yogurt) and iron materials attracted the attention of visitors at Havana's 24th International Fair, FIHAV 2006. Bulgarian commercial experts Virginia Todorova and Petia Stefanova told the press their company, LB Bulgaricum, is specialized in a wide variety of dairy products, such as cheese and yogurt. Bulgarian firm KCM 2000 SA's public relations specialist Mara Rusinova said her company produces iron material as well as 80,000 tons of zinc and 65,000 tons of lead -- and wants to make contact with Cuban and Latin American enterprises. Experts from both companies expressed their pleasure at participating in FIHAV 2006, and appreciated the possibilities offered by Cuban foreign trade. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/11/06)

November 1: Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, José Ignacio Piña Rojas, inaugurated the Mexico pavilion at the Havana International Trade Fair (FIHAV) and said that Mexico has many bilateral agreements with Cuba on investment, trade, tourism, energy and fishing, among others. The diplomat emphasized that Mexico's main objective for participating at the Fair is to foster and promote business opportunities. (*Mural*, 1/11/06)

November 1: Commercial exchange between Cuba and Brazil has continued to grow with 352 million dollars this year, said Cuban Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Pedro Luis Padron at Havana's International Trade Fair (FIHAV). During a visit to the Brazilian Pavilion at Expocuba exhibition grounds, Padron and Tilde Santiago, Brazilian ambassador to Cuba, highlighted the business potential of both countries and their increasing trade relations. The Cuban deputy minister underscored the presence of the South American Community of Nations (MERCOSUR) with its own stand at the Brazilian pavilion. Brazil is currently heading the regional organization. (*AIN*, 2/11/06)

November 2: Biotechnology has become one of Cuba's top ten exports with revenues of more than \$200 million a year, according to sector sources. The vice-president of the organizing committee of "Biotechnology Havana 2006", Gerardo Guillén, pointed out that "the health benefits are much more important than the money these exports may generate". (*EFEAGRO*, 2/11/06)

November 2: The Cuban government signed contracts and letters of intention for more than \$400 million during the XXIV Havana International Trade Fair (FIHAV 2006), said the Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade, Raúl de la Nuez. De la Nuez indicated that the contracts signed include one with Vietnam for the supply of rice to the island and an agreement with Turkey for the supply of pipe joints and accessories. Some 1,125 companies from 48 countries took part in FIHAV. (*EFE*, 2/11/06)

November 7: Cuba's state-run nickel producer, Cubaniquel, is in talks to reduce shipments to a Dutch company that buys around 50 percent of the island's nickel and perhaps divert the metal to China, diplomatic and banking sources said. Cubaniquel has told Rotterdam-based Fondel International B.V., through which it got about half of its \$1 billion in revenues in 2005, it wants to cut back on the amount of nickel it sends. "The only question now is how much less they plan to export to Rotterdam," a European diplomat said. The Cuban nickel industry is operating at capacity at around 76,000 tonnes of unrefined nickel plus cobalt per year. The ambassador's statement was confirmed by a western banker who said, "they are in negotiations with some, not all, of the product on the table." The diplomat and banker said they believed Cuba planned to send more of the unrefined metal to China, though China and Cuba had no immediate comment. (*Reuters*, 7/11/06)

November 8: Eleven executives from CIMEX, Cuba's main holding company, received sentences ranging from 4 to 20 years in jail for "fraud and corruption", in a case connected to a Spanish company, reported the official weekly "Bohemia". According to the story, the situation began in 2001 and was reported in 2003 by the Spanish manager of Provimar. The trial took place in November 2005 and the sentences were confirmed recently, after a process of appeal. (*AFP*, 8/11/06)

November 11: Cuban experts are studying the restructuring of Ecuadorian electric energy plants to facilitate the use of national fuel and thus contribute to the saving of millions of dollars in that nation. The Cuban technicians will assess the state of the plants in the province of Esmeraldas as well as in the cities of Guayaquil, in southern Ecuador, and Quito, confirmed the commercial office of the Cuban embassy to that capital. The restructuring project will allow the use of the heavy oil as fuel to generate electricity which will contribute to save millions of dollars as the country will not have to import diesel, expert Jose Padilla highlighted. The Cuban professionals arrived in Quito on November 6 and have worked at the Electricity National Council (CONELEC). (*Prensa Latina*, 11/11/06)

November 13: The 1,541 Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC) that exist in Cuba, formed by workers on state lands, are under "general reorganization". Thirteen years after their creation, only 44% are profitable, reported the

official weekly "Bohemia". The debt that credit co-operatives currently carry to start their activities will be forgiven in 2007. In Cuba's centralized economy the Co-operatives of Agricultural Production (union of small farmers' lands), with 721,000 hectares; the Co-operatives of Credit and Services (financial association and for collective use of machinery), with 858,000 hectares, and the independent small farmers who hold approximately 420,000 hectares coexist. The remaining 5.5 million hectares of farmland are in the hands of government companies. (*AFP*, 13/11/06)

November 13: Cuban authorities have intensified the campaign against corruption launched in 2005 by Fidel Castro and pursued by younger brother Raul Castro since becoming the island's "provisional" president in July. The official daily *Granma* published news of a new case of fuel theft from a state-run company that operates heavy machinery, along with specifics of the punishment being meted out to those responsible. *Bohemia* magazine also reported that 11 people, some of them directors of the giant state holding company CIMEX, were sentenced to between four and 20 years for fraud and corruption. Such reports by the official media - independent news outlets are not tolerated - have made irregularities like these a constant part of the daily news since November 17, 2005. (*EFE*, 10/11/06)

November 14: Cuba's labor minister is acknowledging a "breakdown" of workplace discipline on the Communist-ruled island and that problems exist that must be resolved with organizational measures. "Recently, there has been a breakdown in labor discipline due, basically, to the lack of requirements and control by the (workplace) administrations," said Alfredo Morales Cartaya in statements published by the official daily *Granma*. He said that the implementation - beginning in January - of two new labor ordinances to attack illegalities and lack of discipline in the workplace is part of a "necessary process (that is) indispensable in our current situation." He added that the solutions have to be accompanied by measures in other areas, referring to the excessive bureaucracy at the administrative level. "Despite the efforts of the National Assembly to (...) simplify procedures, this problem has not been solved. It's a matter that remains to be resolved with the appropriate organizational measures," Morales Cartaya said. (*EFE*, 14/11/06)

November 14: The number of tourists arriving in Cuba from Europe and Canada has fallen, according to a Tourism Ministry report. The number of tourists from Canada was down 1.9 percent in September from last September, the number of tourists from Spain fell 5.7 percent, Italy 15 percent, and Germany 9.8 percent and France 5.2 percent, with only Britain showing an increase of 5.7 percent. The report gave no reason for the drop. Industry sources said earlier this year that partly because of changes to exchange rates, Cuba was becoming increasingly costly and less profitable for foreign tour operators, some of whom were switching to other Caribbean countries. The Canadian Association of Tour Operators complained this year to the Cuban Ministry of Tourism about the lack of adequate service for tourists, theft at airports and hotels, and jet fuel costing 33 percent more than elsewhere. Canadians are the most numerous at Cuba's beach resorts, followed by Europeans. (*Reuters*, 14/11/06)

November 14: The Biotechnology Havana 2006 convention got underway at the Havana Convention Center with specialists from more than 40 countries and an inauguration address by Dr. Luis Herrera, director of the Cuban Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB). The eminent Cuban scientists told participants that the national biotechnology sector now has 38 products of proven effectiveness and quality that have been registered and are being sold in more than 45 countries, making a significant impact in the lives of people around the world. (*Granma*, 14/11/06)

November 16: Venezuelan airline Aeropostal and Cuban airline Cubana de Aviacion have extended their cooperation agreement, which entered into force in 1999, the Venezuelan press reported on November 15, 2006. The extended agreement enters into force as of 2007. The agreement envisages extending the code sharing agreement to such destinations as Lima, Bogota and Medellin in Colombia, Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as all national destinations. The code sharing agreement also includes all flights of Cubana de Aviacion between Venezuela and Cuba. (*Latin America News Digest*, 16/11/06)

November 16: The benefits for Bolivia of its alliance with Cuba and Venezuela in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas “are long in coming”, said an expert prior to a meeting of that group in Havana. The general manager of the Bolivian Foreign Trade Institute, Gary Rodríguez, questioned the effectiveness “in commercial terms” of the People’s Trade Agreement. Bolivia brought in only \$200 dollars in sales of “garments” to Cuba between January and September of this year, which reflects a sharp drop in relation to almost \$3,800 dollars during the same period in 2005. (*EFE*, 16/11/06)

November 17: With Cuban leader Fidel Castro ailing, the inequities created by the dual dollar-peso economy that Cuba established to overcome the catastrophic collapse of Soviet subsidies may well become one of the major challenges faced by his successors, experts say. Cubans say the unequal system is the single most exasperating issue facing them. So much of the economy runs on the dollar that the typical family needs in Cuba greenbacks to buy everything from razors to bedsheets to shoes -- items largely available only at government stores that price their goods in dollar equivalents. The average worker earns 250 pesos a month -- about \$10. With state salaries barely able to cover less than half a month’s living costs, those with dollars now live far better off than the rest. The dual dollar-peso economy is believed to be leaving Afro Cubans behind. Since lighter-skinned Cubans have migrated in higher numbers, their remittances mostly go to their lighter-skinned relatives on the island. Faced with the reality of too many things she could not afford -- and dollars she did not have -- before she moved to Hialeah, Lizette Fernández and a dissident organization that she ran, the Federation of Rural Latin American Women, launched the effort to demand that all establishments sell goods in pesos. She said 28 women around the island are organizing small cells of women who are gathering signatures backing the campaign, dubbed “With the Same Coin.” A dissident still in Cuba said people support the move, but are afraid to sign. “We can’t be second-class citizens just for being Cubans,” said Fernández. “We have no rights, just because we have no dollars.” (*The Miami Herald*, 17/11/06)

November 17: The significance of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) was emphasized before Cuban parliamentarians in a meeting in Havana. The Commission on Economic Affairs of the Cuban National Assembly listened to reports on progress in carrying out agreements signed by the countries that are participating in the integration effort –Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia--, noting the positive results that have been witnessed to date and discussing plans for the future. At the opening of the deliberations, commission president Osvaldo Martínez noted that in the past the nations of the area were not able to make progress around regional integration due in large to their dependence on foreign capital. In the plenary session, Vice Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Ramón Ripoll presented a general report on the state of agreements being executed by Cuba with both Venezuela and Bolivia, highlighting accomplishments in the fields of health, education and sports. (*Granma*, 18/11/06)

November 20: The Cuban minister of foreign trade, Raúl de la Nuez, said at the end of October that the economy grew by 12.5% in the first six months of 2006. This is higher than the official forecast of 10% GDP growth announced at the end of 2005. It suggests that a growth rate surge in 2005, to 11.8%, has been sustained into the current year. Cuban official GDP figures are calculated using a different measure from the standard international method, in that the valuation of freely provided services is higher than the cost. On the basis of the latest available official data, the Economist Intelligence Unit estimates that GDP growth in 2005 was 9.5%. The latest national accounts published by the Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONE, the official national statistics agency) show the engine of growth has shifted from tourism since the 1990s, to services and construction. (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, 20/11/06)

November 20: The rate of increase of tourist arrivals has fallen sharply in 2006: after a 13.2% increase in 2005, unofficial estimates suggest growth of only around 4% this year. In some important markets—notably the Canadian market, which is the largest source of tourists and accounts for 25% of the total—the number of tourists has fallen. Some of the slowdown can be explained by the appreciation of the Cuban convertible peso, which has damaged competitiveness relative to other tourist destinations in the region. It is also partly the result of the fact that the strong increase in 2005 was inflated by the thousands of Venezuelans arriving in Cuba as part of official bilateral programmes for education and healthcare. These trends imply that the slowdown is part of a more long-standing trend since the start

of the decade. It seems that the industry has started to reach maturity. Annual average growth of tourist arrivals in the 1990s was 25%; since 2000, it has fallen to less than 4%. Although tourism is an important source of employment—it directly employs more than 100,000 people—and has played a significant part in lifting hard currency demand for Cuban manufactures of consumer goods, it is no longer the main engine of growth. Other services have become more important in terms of driving hard currency income, and industry is diversifying towards production of construction materials and consumer goods for domestic consumption. This explains the shift in policy emphasis away from the expansion of tourism and towards other sectors. (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, 20/11/06)

November 20: Venezuelan oil experts Humberto Calderón Berti and José Toro Hardy rejected as "swindle" an oil agreement between Venezuela and Cuba, claiming the deal amounts to a mere "barter." According to Calderón Berti, under the agreement Venezuela originally undertook to provide 53,000 bpd of oil, a figure that now exceeds 100,000 bpd. "And Venezuela is receiving no payment for these volumes of crude oil exported." He added that Venezuelans were told Cuba would provide free healthcare services to Venezuela under the agreement, and so far the island has failed to meet this obligation. Calderón Berti stressed that out of the oil exports from Venezuela to Cuba so far -which amount to USD 2.2 billion- USD 555 million are long-term debt, with a three-year grace period and a 15-year term for repayment, which he described as a bad debt. "Venezuela will never get this money back. This debt is endorsed by promissory notes issued by the National Bank of Cuba at a 2 percent interest rate which mean nothing and have no value." He added that Cuba is supposed to pay the remaining USD 1.66 billion by providing free healthcare services in Venezuela. But according to Toro Hardy, and based on the first addendum to the agreement, dated January 1st, 2000, the institutions, agencies and companies of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have to pay for Cuban healthcare goods and services, which means that "Cuba is not giving anything." (*El Universal*, 20/11/06)

November 20: Spain is no longer Cuba's main supplier. Excluding oil, Spanish companies ranked first in sales to the Caribbean island for decades. However, China has become the island's number one supplier. Trade and economic councillor for the Spanish Embassy in Cuba, José Luis Lancho de León, said that in 2005 Spanish exports to Cuba grew 13%, up to \$605 million. But this increase was below the 95% growth of Chinese exports to Cuba, which reached \$630 million. (*El Correo Digital*, 20/11/06)

November 21: Vice President Carlos Lage, during a visit to the eastern city of Holguin with Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales, said the regime has made "significant investment" in reinvigorating the sugar industry. This year's "zafra," or sugar cane harvest, produced 1.2 million tons of the crop, a far cry from the several million tons per year of the 1960s and '70s, and the much-heralded and eventually failed national mobilization to reach the 10-million-ton mark in 1970. Authorities see good prospects for cane-derived products such as alcohol in the growing global market for alternative fuels. They have projected a 25-percent increase in the 2007 zafra, and a five-fold hike in production of cane alcohol. Recovery of the sugar industry follows the wholesale reorganization effected in 2002, when nearly 100 refining mills nationwide were closed and half the acreage dedicated to cane was given over to other crops. An estimated 350,000 workers are employed in the sugar industry in this nation of 11 million people. (*EFE*, 21/11/06)

November 21: "The year 2006 has been a year of accomplishments in different areas but also a year in which we could have done much better," said Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage at the end of a tour of state projects underway in the eastern province of Holguin. Referring to the ongoing national effort to conserve energy, Lage said "we are still a long ways away from the savings that are possible" and called for maximum efficiency in the use of fuels. (*Granma*, 21/11/06)

November 21: Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Gaisyonok has called on Belarus and Cuba to build strong economic relations on the basis of their "very warm and close" political ties. "Today we are above all interested in the stabilization of trade between Belarus and Cuba, the development of relations in the banking and finance spheres, cooperation in biomedicine and an increase in supplies of machines and equipment to Cuba," the official told reporters.

Mr. Gaisyonok led a Belarusian delegation to the seventh meeting of the Belarusian-Cuban commission on trade and economic cooperation, which wrapped up in Minsk. (*BelaPAN*, 22/11/06)

November 22: The Cuban Agriculture Ministry now works in 28 joint development projects in Venezuela, together with the Venezuelan agricultural authorities. A total of 1,092 Cuban technicians are involved in these projects, including 639 destined to Venezuelan mission Barrio Adentro, by means of which Cuban and Venezuelan doctors are taking care of whole communities with few financial resources for free. This information was provided by Venezuelan substitute Agriculture Minister Maria del Carmen Perez to the participants in the recently held Parliamentary Hearing on the programs of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) in Havana. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/11/06)

November 23: Cuba hopes to take advantage of improved weather to increase rice output and reduce record imports in the coming years, state-run Radio Reloj reported. "This year the state sector will harvest 61,000 tonnes of rice and the popular movement 141,000," the report said, similar to 2005. Cuba has nine large provincial state farms with a capacity of 250,000 tonnes and has been developing municipal level farm and cooperative rice production, the so-called popular movement, with technical assistance from China and Vietnam. "According to government plans output should triple by 2015 (...) unless there is an intense drought," the report concluded. Rice is the Caribbean island's main staple with its 11.25 million residents and 2 million tourists consuming around 1 million tonnes annually, according to the government, of which 500,000 tonnes is rationed to the population at subsidized prices. (*Reuters*, 23/11/06)

November 25: Vietnam and Cuba are ready to deepen formal cooperation after signing a memorandum of understanding for the construction of a biotechnology center with Cuban assessing in this Asian nation. The protocol was inked by Luis Herrera, general director of Havana-based Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB), and Nguyen Thu Van, general director of Company for Vaccines and Biological Production (VABIOTECH). Cuba will grant technical assistance for the designing of a center in Hanoi, and will train technical and specialized staff who will work in that institution. (*Thanhnie News*, 25/11/06)

November 25: Labor realignment and further productive efficiency in Cuba were highlighted by the member of the Cuban Communist Party's politburo Jose Ramon Machado Ventura. Upon a visit to the Central province of Cienfuegos, Machado Ventura praised union efforts to improve economic education and to reinstate labour discipline. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/11/06)

November 26: "Disorganization" and "inefficiency" seriously affect workplaces in Cuba, concluded an official inspection in which more than 55% of production and service entities perform "fairly" or "badly". The National Office of Workplace Inspection [Oficina Nacional de Inspección del Trabajo], which has conducted three reviews in the last two years, "rated 'good' only 904 of the inspected entities" (44.6%), of a total 2,027, last May and June. That means that the remaining 55.4% perform poorly. The last inspection included 3,502 companies, of which 59%, "showed unsatisfactory performance", "a tendency that is ongoing", said the general manager of the Office, Felicia Villarreal. (*AFP*, 26/11/06)

November 27: Cuba's recovery from an economic crisis caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union continued this year with double digit growth expected and good prospects for 2007, the state-run news agency said. "Cuba will register 12.5 percent economic growth this year, and the perspective for 2007 is promising," Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez was quoted as saying at a meeting of economists. Cuba reported growth of 11.8 percent in 2005 and 5 percent in 2004, based on a locally devised formula that estimates the market value of free social services and subsidized goods and services. It also includes massive medical and other services exported mainly to Venezuela. Independent sources such as the Economist Intelligence Unit and UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean estimate the formula overstates Cuba's gross domestic product by between three and four percentage points. The news agency did not give a reason for Cuba's 12.5 percent economic growth. (*Reuters*, 27/11/06)

November 27: Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko, gave his consent for the signing of a Belarusian-Cuban draft agreement on air traffic. The agreement would establish a legal framework for regular air services between the two countries, the Belarusian leader's press office said. It would allow "certain air enterprises" to fly over the territory of the other country without landing and also to land in the other country for "non-commercial purposes." The agreement specifies grounds for cancelling, limiting or suspending licenses to conduct flights, rules for exemption from the payment of duties and taxes, air safety requirements and the operation of agreed services on specified routes, according to the press office. (*BelaPan*, 27/11/06)

November 27: Power cuts have increased in several sectors of the City of Havana, reported an official of the provincial Electric Company. The official said that the interruptions were due to breakdowns in the electrical lines. The most affected municipalities have been Plaza de la Revolución, Cerro and 10 de Octubre. (*Cubanet*, 27/11/06)

November 28: Venezuelan Minister of Estate for Integration and Foreign Trade, Gustavo Márquez, said that his country's exports to Cuba exceeded \$1,250 million this year. Although he did not specify the value of Venezuelan exports to the island in 2005, the minister said that "foreign trade with Cuba this year will be greater than last year". (*El Universal*, 29/11/06)

November 29: Cuba's foreign-exchange earnings swelled by some \$3 billion this year due mainly to a jump in service exports, a government source with access to trade data said. The communist-run country's balance of payments will be in the black for the third year running as a result, he said, without saying by how much. "Increased nickel prices and pharmaceutical exports resulted in more than a \$500 million increase over last year's \$2 billion in exports, and service revenues jumped by over \$2.5 billion to around \$7.5 billion," he told the press, asking his name not be used. Cuba apparently has spent most of the increased revenue on infrastructure and machinery. This includes \$1 billion on an energy grid and hundreds of millions of dollars on waterworks and transportation. It also has boosted imports of food and some consumer goods. Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez recently said imports were up by more than 27 percent this year over \$7.5 billion in 2005. (*Reuters*, 29/11/06)

Exile Community

November 5: Captured during the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, more than 100 men and boys, some bleeding from battle wounds, were stuffed into a sealed semi-trailer bound for a prison in Havana. As they all filed onto the trailer on that scorching hot day, two boys -- Humberto Martinez, 16, and William Muir, 17 -- remember the chilling words of a man they later learned was Osmany Cienfuegos, a Cuban military commander: "If they die in there, that's fine; that way we'll save on bullets." Martinez, Muir and the others spent the next eight hours hunched together, shoulder-to-shoulder, in the dark with little air to breathe. Nine died, their bodies found sprawled on the truck's filthy floor. Today, the little-known story of what happened on April 22, 1961, to a group of men who survived the tragedy is the basis for a lawsuit now being prepared against the Cuban commander who ordered the prisoners into the trailer. "The time has come for Osmany Cienfuegos to pay for what he did to those men," said Mario Martinez Malo, member of the veterans of Brigade 2506, who is helping the legal effort abroad. Martinez Malo said the brigade has hired a Madrid attorney. They recently gathered survivors of the deadly semi-trailer ride to videotape their testimony of their experience that day -- and the role Cienfuegos played. Martinez hopes the lawsuit turns the spotlight on Castro's cruelty to Cubans who opposed his regime. (*The Miami Herald* 5/11/06)

November 5: While Cuban officials insist that former owners will return to evict residents, a growing number of Cubans in South Florida believe residents should stay in their homes, surveys show. As new generations of Cubans move to Florida motivated more by economics than politics, they're less likely to support calls to dislodge residents still suffering economically under communism. Older émigrés who may have dreamed of recouping their former homes are dying off or have built new lives in Florida, said Fernand Amandi, executive vice president at Coral Gables-based researcher Bendixen & Associates. "You hear a lot of propaganda coming out of Cuba that people in South Florida are

going to come back and take away their homes," Amandi said. According to a poll by Bendixen & Associates in South Florida, 67 % of the people who answered the question "should homes in Cuba be returned to former owners", said "no". While 47 % answered "not likely" to the question, would you return to Cuba to live under a democracy? (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/11/06)

November 8: Actor-director Andy Garcia said that he hoped for a revolution of democracy in Cuba as his movie about the communist-run island opened a film festival in the Dominican Republic. Garcia, who starred in his own directing debut, "The Lost City," was joined by President Leonel Fernandez and Dominican slugger Sammy Sosa at the Dominican Global Film Festival, which is run by the president's think tank, the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development. Asked what he hoped would happen in his native Cuba over the next year, Garcia said, "I could only have the hope we have all had for 47 years: that the promise of a revolution of democracy will come true. That's what the revolution was about until it was betrayed." (*AP*, 8/11/06)

November 8: In a typically south Florida end to a dispute between a Connecticut sculptor and Miami's often-tempestuous Cuban exiles, a giant head of ailing Fidel Castro was relegated to "the dustbin of history." The clay sculpture of Castro that artist Daniel Edwards originally intended to display in New York's Central Park was dumped in a garbage truck in a mock send-off of the Cuban leader in "Little Havana," the heartland of anti-Castro sentiment. "Fidel Castro is where he belongs," exile and activist Ninoska Perez told about 200 people gathered for the ceremonial trashing of the sculpture, an event promoted on a popular local Spanish-language radio station. "He's gone from the street to the dustbin of history," Perez said. (*Reuters*, 8/11/06)

November 15: Cuban exile leader Marcelino Miyares was elected first vice-president of the Christian Democrat Organization of America (ODCA), during that organization's XVIII Congress held in Santiago de Chile. Miyares is the current president of the Christian Democratic Party of Cuba, with headquarters in Miami. The Congress approved the change of status of observer members to permanent members for the Cuban dissident groups Christian Liberation Movement (MCL), Cuban Democratic Project (PRODECU) and the Cuban Democratic Directorate. (*EER*, 15/11/06)

November 20: Hugo Cancio, President and CEO of Fuego Entertainment, Inc., a public media and entertainment company, announced that he will establish an exploratory group called the US-Cuban Investment Committee for assisting the reconstruction of his native country, Cuba, and in the process, play a key-role in its transformation to a free-economy. "Mixed with the exotic aroma of coffee and tobacco leaves, the Cuban people can almost begin to feel the winds of freedom (...) freedom from its failed political and economic system, and freedom from over 45 years of an economic embargo imposed by the US government," stated Mr. Cancio. "Cuba is already experiencing a soft and passive transition in its government ... one that will have no choice but to open its arms to the world. I want to be there and help Cuba rebuild itself, brick by brick, if necessary. It's not only a genuine desire, it's my obligation." For now, the US-Cuban Investment Committee will have 10 members who are leading professionals in business and finance and convene twice a month. Eventually, the committee will explore the possibility of pooling together its own private investment fund to provide financial capital for Cuba's economic growth. (*Business Wire*, 20/11/06)

November 27: José Antonio Llama spends much of his retirement stewing in his art-filled Miami home about one incomplete mission: the death of Fidel Castro. But the 75-year-old Cuban exile is haunted by another obsession: Recovering nearly \$1.5 million that he says his former allies owe him for his purchase of planes, boats, a helicopter and explosives. Llama, who once owned an air-conditioning business, claims he put up all that money for a secret "war council" that consisted of members of a powerful exile lobbying group, the Cuban American National Foundation. He further alleges they reneged on their spoken promise to share the cost of paramilitary activities against the Cuban government and its communist leader. Llama filed a complaint with Miami police in the hope of sparking a criminal investigation. But police said that Llama should pursue a lawsuit if he wants to resolve his financial dispute. "As far as I know, all of Mr. Llamas, allegations are false," said Francisco "Pepe" Hernández, president of the Cuban American National Foundation. "Let him present his case in a court of law. That is his right." (*The Miami Herald*, 27/11/06)

November 30: A new report by the Cuban Democratic Directorate shows the number of acts of civil disobedience on the island is on the rise, revealing growing discontent with the quality of life in Cuba. From candlelight vigils to hunger strikes and even a mountain hike, Fidel Castro opponents logged more than 3,300 acts of civil disobedience in Cuba last year, nearly twice the number of the year before, according to a report. As Castro's government continues a campaign of reprisals against dissidents that began with a wave of arrests three years ago, members of the opposition movement say more people are speaking up and joining up. "Repression generates rebellion," said Janisset Rivero, executive director of the Cuban Democratic Directorate, an exile organization that published Steps to Freedom, the report to be released at the University of Miami. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/11/06)

Foreign Affairs

November 1: The human rights branch of the Organization of American States condemned Cuba for jailing 75 dissidents and swiftly trying and executing three hijackers during a 2003 crackdown on dissent. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recommended that Cuba free the prisoners, compensate the victims and their families and modify its laws to ensure the independence of the judiciary and the rights of its citizens. The opinion, stated in two separate reports, likely will have little immediate impact because Cuba has long refused to recognize the commission's decisions. But human rights lawyers say it might lay the groundwork for future legal actions, including suits for reparations, if there's a change of government. The Cuban American Bar Association and the rights group Cuban Democratic Directory acted as plaintiffs for the jailed dissidents. The hijackers, Lorenzo Copello, Barbaro Sevilla and Jorge Martinez, were executed by firing squad on April 11. The family members were never informed of the trial and weren't allowed to see their bodies afterward. (*McClatchy Newspapers*, 1/11/06)

November 1: Cuba's Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon arrived in Russia after visiting Minsk, Belarus, as part of an extensive working tour of Europe that began in Spain. Alarcon was received at Moscow's Sheremetievo Airport by the president of the Russian Duma's Friends of Cuba group, Vitali Sebastianov, and other officials from the lower house. The Cuban Parliament president will meet with Russian Prime Minister Mijail Fradkov and other Duma leaders. He will also meet with Russian Vice Foreign Minister Sergei Kislyak and the Orthodox patriarch of Russia, Alexey II. (*AIN*, 2/11/06)

November 1: The Cuban dissident group Assembly to Promote Civil Society, led by Martha Beatriz Roque, called upon governments and international democratic institutions to not "cooperate" with Cuba's "dictatorial system". "The governments and democratic institutions of the world should not cooperate with a dictatorial system that has oppressed its people for more than 47 years", says Martha Beatriz Roque in a letter addressed to the heads of state and of Government attending the XIV Latin-American Summit, which will take place in Montevideo. (*EFE*, 1/11/06)

November 1: London's mayor is making a surprise trip to Cuba, flying to the capital Havana as part of a week-long tour around Latin America. He is due to attend the 11th World Sport For All Conference in Havana, an event sponsored by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It is part of a continuing effort to improve links with Cuba, both in sport and in business, despite the country's diplomatic isolation and continuing US trade embargo. The British Embassy in Havana has not been given full details of Mr Livingstone's itinerary but he is a guest of the Havana municipal authorities and is likely to have meetings with senior officials. (*BBC*, 1/11/06)

November 2: Cuba attaches great importance to its relations with Pakistan and wants to consolidate these relations. These views were expressed by the Cuban ambassador to Pakistan, Gustavo Machin Gomez while addressing a press conference in a local hotel at Islamabad. The Cuban ambassador said that both countries have had diplomatic relations for the last six months and "we want to improve these relations in all fields", he added. (*Pakistan Tribune*, 2/11/06)

November 1: Cuba and China were excluded from the newly created International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), founded in Vienna with the objective of "speaking with one voice" to tackle the challenges of globalization. The

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the former World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and other national trade unions united to form the ITUC. Speaking to the media, secretary general, Guy Ryder, indicated that "where democratic trade unionism does not exist, like in China or Cuba", these countries are not represented. (EFE, 2/11/06)

November 2: Brian Dijkema, a representative of the Christian Labour Association of Canada, said that "those who gloss over the Cuban government's violation of human rights often portray Cuba as a socialist utopia", one in which "diminished freedom is merely the small price paid for cradle-to-grave care by the state". CLAC is an independent Canadian union founded in 1952, and representing 40,000 members across the country. "Why does the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) -- a body that professes to be a defender of workers' rights and the "voice of labour" in Canada -- remain one of the last union organizations to support Cuba's one-union, one-party system?", Dijkema asks. Together with its affiliated unions, the CLC will be hosting an event in Toronto in support of the Cuban government. "The rights of Cuban workers sitting in jail for starting an independent union is not on the agenda". "When it comes to a choice between human dignity or socialist ideology, the CLC sides with ideology, believing workers are best served by one central authority -- whether in Cuba or in Canada". (National Post, 2/11/06)

November 3: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage leads his country's delegation to the 16th Ibero-American Summit taking place in Montevideo, Uruguay, at a level of Heads of State and Government. The Cuban representation is also made up of Deputy Foreign Ministers Abelardo Moreno and Alejandro Gonzalez, and Cuba's ambassador to Uruguay Marielena Ruiz Capote. According to the approved agenda, the Summit will debate issues like Migration for a Shared Development. (Prensa Latina, 3/11/06)

November 3: Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II said that he might pay a visit to Cuba in 2007, to consecrate the opening of a Russian Orthodox Church in the Caribbean country. After a meeting in Moscow with the head of Cuba's parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, the Russian Orthodox leader said: "The president of the National Assembly of Cuba informed me that the construction of an Orthodox Church in Cuba is developing actively." "The construction could be completed by the end of next year," Patriarch Alexy II said. "Because of this, I have been invited to visit Cuba for the consecration and the opening of this church." The Cuban official, widely considered a possible successor to Fidel Castro, is currently on an official visit to Russia on an invitation from Boris Gryzlov, the speaker the lower house of parliament. He met with Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov and discussed the implementation of bilateral agreements reached during the premier's visit to Cuba in September. Alarcon will address lawmakers in the State Duma on the United States' economic blockade of Cuba. (Novosti, 3/11/06)

November 3: The UNESCO "King Sejong" Literacy Prize 2006 was formally handed over to the Latin American and Caribbean Cuban Pedagogical Institute (IPLAC in Spanish). An international jury from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on literacy and education for young people and adults has given the prize as recognition to the creation of the literacy teaching method Yes, I Can (Yo Sí Puedo). This Cuban method is already applied in a number of countries where the results have been exceptionally good. Its values and effectiveness were also recognized in the last session of the Executive Board of UNESCO. (Granma, 4/11/06)

November 3: Cuba's most prominent dissident said in an open letter issued in Havana that it is regrettable that the people of this Communist-ruled island are excluded from the annual Ibero-American Summits. "The people of Cuba are excluded from these summits because there is no recognition at (the meetings) of their right to their rights," Oswaldo Paya, the 2002 recipient of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, said in the document released to coincide with the gathering of leaders from Spain, Portugal and Latin America getting under way in Montevideo. According to the dissident, "there has never been an agreement in favor of the rights of Cubans (at these meetings); indeed the lack of freedom and democracy in Cuba has never even been discussed." [[Mensaje de Payá a la Cumbre Iberoamericana](#)] (EFE, 3/11/06)

November 4: Emigration is a right that must be respected, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said at the 14th Ibero-American Summit. The main topic of the Summit was Migration and Development. "It is unfair and cruel to be forced to emigrate and leave homeland and family behind in order to provide food, healthcare and education to your children", Lage said. [[Address by Carlos Lage](#)] (AP, 4/11/06)

November 4: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage blasted US moves to build a new fence along the border with Mexico in the harshest of a series of criticisms aimed at Washington during the 16th annual Iberoamerican summit. "The wall on the Mexican border and the hunting of immigrants is proof, if any at all is needed, of the disdain of the mighty for those who are not," said Lage, who led the island's delegation at the summit that included Spain, Portugal, Andorra and 19 Latin American countries. Lage said barriers are being erected to keep unwanted migrants out of the developed world, but added that "there are no forced repatriations" of doctors, technical experts and teachers who are lured away for higher wages unattainable in their homelands. "On the contrary, there are plans and programs to draw them in," said Lage, adding that the flood of illegal migration will always continue from poor to rich countries as long as "neoliberal" free market policies are in force. Lage also said the European Union and the United States had the "most restrictive" migratory policies in the world. [[Address by Carlos Lage](#)] (AP, 4/11/06)

November 5: The Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Governments, held in Montevideo, Uruguay, reiterated its opposition to the US economic blockade of Cuba, just three days before the UN general assembly was scheduled to vote once again on a Cuban resolution demanding the lifting of the unilateral measure. The Summit's rejection of the US measure was stated in its Final Declaration, which opposed the implementation of legislations and actions that run contrary to international law. (ACN, 6/11/06)

November 5: Uruguayan officials met Cuban vice-president, Carlos Lage Davila, at the University of Montevideo to express their solidarity with the island. Mr. Lage brought a message of Fidel Castro to the Uruguayan people. He also said the leader of the Cuban Revolution is recovering quickly and will keep on his fight for justice across the world. University President Rodrigo Arozarena said that his school cultivates Latin America solidarity and thanked Cuba for its contribution to the Uruguayan healthcare system. The secretary of the Uruguayan Students Federation, Marino Exposito, and Dr. Valeria Lavie, a graduate from the Havana-based Latin American School of Medicine, were also on hand. (ACN, 6/11/06)

November 5: The UK can learn from Cuba's Olympic achievements, Mayor of London Ken Livingstone said. Mr Livingstone visited Cuba as part of a Latin America tour. He said he wanted to find out how the Caribbean island "engaged their young people in sport". "Though Cuba's only got a fifth of the population of Britain, it gets as many medals in the Olympics as we do," he told a sports congress in Havana. He also attended a cricket match as part of a drive to develop the sport. "Clearly they're doing something right here about engaging their young people in sport, and that's what I'm really interested in finding out about." (BBC, 5/11/06)

November 6: The 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), launched by Transparency International (TI), points to a strong correlation between corruption and poverty, with a concentration of impoverished states at the bottom of the ranking. Countries with a significant worsening in perceived levels of corruption include: Brazil, Cuba, Israel, Jordan, Laos, Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and the United States. Countries with a significant improvement in perceived levels of corruption include: Algeria, Czech Republic, India, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Mauritius, Paraguay, Slovenia, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uruguay. [[2006 Corruption Perceptions Index](#)] (AP, 6/11/06)

November 7: Cuba likes the idea of leftist Daniel Ortega back in the presidency of Nicaragua, an outcome that appeared likely as ballots were counted in the Central American nation. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said a victory by Ortega, a Sandinista former revolutionary and ex-president of Nicaragua, represents both a triumph for Latin America and a defeat for the United States. "This is a victory of great transcendence for Nicaragua, for Latin America and it is a political defeat" for the government of the United States, Lage said. The Cuban said only "spectacular fraud"

could keep Ortega from winning in the first round. He said a Sandinista presidency in Nicaragua reinforces "the trend in favor of progressive forces" in Latin America, which has seen several leftist or left-leaning governments win power in recent years. Some of them, such as President Evo Morales' Bolivia, are aligned with Cuba and leftist-governed Venezuela on many issues against the United States. (*EFE*, 7/11/06)

November 8: The Internet enemies list numbers 13: Belarus, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. These are the countries singled out by the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders as the worst culprits for systematic online censorship. "No one should ever be prevented from posting news online or writing a blog," said the Paris-based group, Reporters Sans Frontieres in French, which taps more than 100 journalists who are "keeping us informed." (*The New York Times*, 9/11/06)

November 8: Cuba honoured the 89th Anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution with a ceremony at the International Soviet Soldier Mausoleum in Havana, Granma daily reported. With a military ceremony, Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces paid tribute to the troops that rose up against the Russian Czar 89 years ago. Wreaths in the name of the Revolutionary Armed Forces Ministry, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples and the embassies of Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Kazakhstan were laid at the International Soviet Soldier Mausoleum. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/11/06)

November 8: Cuba celebrated Daniel Ortega's return to Nicaragua's presidency. Fidel Castro, a key backer of Ortega's radical Sandinista government in the 1980s, sent congratulations published on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma, saying the Nicaraguan election "fills our people with joy, at the same time filling the terrorist and genocidal government of the United States with opprobrium." (*AP*, 8/11/06)

November 8: The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to urge the United States to end its 45-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. It was the 15th straight year that the 192-member world body approved a resolution calling for the US economic and commercial embargo against Cuba to be repealed "as soon as possible." Delegates in the General Assembly chamber burst into applause when the vote in favor of the resolution flashed on the screen — 183 to 4 with 1 abstention. That was a one-vote improvement over last year's vote of 182 to 4 with 1 abstention. Joining the United States in voting "no" were Israel, Marshall Islands and Palau, while Micronesia abstained. (*AP*, 8/11/06)

November 8: The UN General Assembly voted against an Australian amendment to the UN Secretary General's report on the US embargo against Cuba. The assembly adopted a resolution to take "no action" on the Australian amendment, which meant it could not be added to the Cuban draft. The "no action" resolution was adopted by a vote of 126 to 51 with 5 abstentions. The Australian amendment called on Fidel Castro's government to free political prisoners and respect human rights. Australia's UN Ambassador Robert Hill said his country has consistently voted to oppose the US embargo while expressing "concerns about the state of human rights and political freedoms in Cuba." But the embargo continues, and Australia proposed the human rights amendment in hopes that if Cuba met its obligations, "we would not need to return to this issue every year," he said. Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Perez Roque called Australia the "lackeys" of the United States for introducing the amendment, which he claimed was drafted in Washington. He said Australia "does not have the moral authority to attempt to refer to the human rights situation in Cuba," calling the Australian government "an accomplice to US imperialism." He cited Australia's readiness to follow Washington's lead in the Pacific and its deployment of troops to support the US during the Vietnam war. Hill retorted that "the price of speaking up and asking for nothing more than is reasonable is to be abused by the Cuban minister with false allegations and offensive language." "It's no wonder others are not prepared to take such actions but it does underline the necessity for an amendment of this type," he said. (*AP*, 8/11/06)

November 8: The efforts to strengthen bilateral relations between Qatar and Communist Cuba is on an accelerated pace. A joint high committee, set up for cooperation between Qatar and Cuba, signed six separate agreements on behalf of the two countries in Havana revealed Ernesto Soberon Guzman, Third Secretary of the Cuban embassy at Doha.

Speaking to the press, Guzman said the agreements include the promotion of education and scientific knowledge, broadcasting, aviation, sports and amendments in taxation and customs law. The joint high committee will also discuss possibilities of tapping Cuba's emerging tourism sector and food processing industry, Guzman said. Qatar and Cuba also have plans for cultural exchange. (*The Peninsula*, 8/11/06)

November 9: Cuba is the fifth Latin America country with respect to human development, ahead of countries like Mexico and Brazil, according to the Human Development Report 2006 released in Cape Town, South Africa, by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). [[UNDP Human Development Report: Cuba](#)] (*EFE*, 9/11/06)

November 9: Cuba's best-known dissident urged member nations of the UN Human Rights Council to demand the release of all Cuba's political prisoners, a day after the world body's General Assembly voted against a similar measure. Oswaldo Paya, whose signature drive for democracy in 2002 gained him international attention and prompted the government to declare socialism in Cuba "irrevocable," said he was lodging letters urging the motion at several Havana embassies for countries on the 47-nation Human Rights Council. "It's scandalous that this is not a scandal," he said of Cuba's imprisonment of political activists. Paya said his Christian Liberation Movement is against the trade embargo, and glad the world is pressuring the United States to lift it. But just as important for Cubans, he said, are freedom of expression and the right to choose their political and economic systems. "They are denying Cubans the right to have rights," he said of countries who fail to recognize this need. "We need international solidarity, and moral support." (*AP, El Nuevo Herald*, 9/11/06)

November 9: The Ladies in White movement, made up of women relatives of "the 75" dissidents sent to prison in the spring of 2003, informed the vice-president of the European Parliament, Edward McMillan-Scott, of the problems that prisoners of conscience face in Cuba. In a communiqué, the Ladies in White expressed the "horrible prison conditions to which political prisoners and prisoners of conscience are subjected". (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/11/06)

November 9: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez inaugurated the Second Venezuelan International Book Fair (FILVEN) with Cuba as its guest of honor. In the large outdoor space of the Parque del Este where the fair is taking place, the Venezuelan leader was presented with a collection of newly published titles released by the Bolivian Alternative for the Americas Cultural Fund. These included a biography of Venezuelan National Hero Francisco de Miranda written by historian Carmen Bohorquez, an essay by Cuban historian Francisco Pividal regarding the anti-imperialist ideas of Simon Bolivar, *The Golden Age* by the Cuban National Hero Jose Marti, an anthology of Marti's essays on the Americas, and an essay on the life and work of Marti by Cintio Vitier. (*Granma*, 10/11/06)

November 11: Cuba's Foreign Ministry urged the UN Security Council to condemn the "criminal act" committed by Israel against Palestine civilians in Gaza Strip and the West Bank, it was reported. A note issued by the Cuban chancellery and published in Granma daily reads Cuba "has been following, with deep concern and indignation, the atrocities committed by the Israeli government in Gaza and the West Bank" since June. [[Declaración del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 11/11/06)

November 12: Spanish lawmakers Guillermo Mariscal Anaya and Carlos Salvador Armendariz met in Havana with members of the Ladies in White, a group formed by the wives and relatives of imprisoned Cuban dissidents. The Spaniards are on a private visit to the communist island and met with the Ladies in White after the group's traditional walk down the Cuban capital's Quinta Avenida to demand the release of their incarcerated loved ones, the organization said in a communique. "The Ladies in White are grateful for the great encouragement represented by the moral support for the Cuban prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, and their relatives, and they asked (the Spaniards) to relay to the Spanish people the affection of their Cuban brothers," read the communique. (*EFE*, 13/11/06)

November 13: Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing reiterated in Beijing his country's will of reinforcing friendship and cooperation with Cuba. The minister made these statements after welcoming Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister

Marcos Rodriguez, who arrived in China on an official visit. According to diplomatic sources, Li Zhaoxing also expressed satisfaction at how bilateral relations and the strengthening of the Cuban economy are continuing. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/11/06)

November 14: During the Congress on Biotechnology Havana 2006 that took place in the Cuban capital, the 1988 German Nobel Prizewinner for Chemistry, Robert Huber, expressed interest in maintaining an active relationship with the island, in order to promote scientific and business opportunities in the development of medicines to treat autoimmune diseases. The Congress, which has generated a lot of expectations in the scientific community as it is attended by over 600 delegates from at least 40 countries, has been a window on Cuba's efforts in research and development in the field of tropical and autoimmune diseases. (*Global Insight*, 14/11/06)

November 15: Cuba and Venezuela recently signed an agreement on mutual representation for the collective management of royalties of writers, which was named as a very important step in the integration of the region. The document is part of the integration mechanisms fostered by the Venezuela-led Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA), said Francisco Sesto, the culture minister in the South American country. The agreement grants the two countries with the full authority to manage the promotion, representation and the administration of royalties of their respective writers, who will be able to become members of the Latin-American Literary Agency and its Venezuelan counterpart. (*ACN*, 15/11/06)

November 15: Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, head of the International Relations Department of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee, met with Spanish political leaders. Ramirez de Estenoz arrived in Madrid from Portugal, where he took part with 63 delegations in the International Meeting for Communist Parties in Lisbon. His agenda in Spain included meetings with the president of the Spanish Communist Party, Felipe Alcaraz, and with the coordinator of the Spanish political party Izquierda Unida, Gaspar Lamazares. Ramirez de Estenoz is accompanied by Cuban Ambassador to Spain Alberto Velazco San Jose. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/11/06)

November 15: Eight Cubans who left from the southern coast of Havana on board a makeshift raft arrived in Panama, after an ordeal at sea that took them to the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico, where they were picked up by a German cargo ship. The cargo ship that brought them to Panama "saved them from dying" in Mexican waters, the Cubans highlighted. (*AFP*, 15/11/06)

November 16: Zanzibar's President Amani Abeid Karume arrived in Cuba on an official visit. Karume's agenda includes talks with Cuba's Council of State Vice President Esteban Lazo and top officials from the Agriculture and Culture Ministries. During his first day on the Caribbean island, the visitor met with Deputy Foreign Minister Yilian Jimenez, to whom he expressed admiration for the country's development. Karume praised Cuba's collaboration with his nation in the health field, terming as "excellent" relations existing between both states, which date back to 1982. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/11/06)

November 16: The President of the Cuban parliament Ricardo Alarcon highlighted the friendship and cooperation ties between his nation and the Panamanian people. In his intervention at the 10th Inter-parliamentary Meeting of both countries taking place in the Cuban capital, Alarcon pointed out that Panama carries the idea of the Latin American unity and solidarity in its blood. He recognized the Panamanian National Assembly for the support to the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States and also referred to the recovering of the Canal as an overwhelming victory. For his part, Elias Castillo, president of the Panamanian National Assembly, expressed confidence on upcoming measures to strengthen the inter-parliamentary relations, demanded the end of the US blockade and thanked the Caribbean nation for its support. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/11/06)

November 16: The European Parliament decided to send a delegation to Cuba to deliver a prestigious human rights award to a group of women - wives, mothers and daughters of political prisoners - who were barred by the Communist

regime from traveling to France to receive it. Last year's Sakharov Prize was awarded to the Women in White. When the Castro regime denied the activists permission to travel to this city that is the seat of the EU legislature, the women asked the body to send representatives to Havana to give them the prize there. The decision to do so was made during a conference of the heads of parties represented in the body. (*EFE*, 16/11/06)

November 16: The Paraguayan government decided to take in seven Cubans who requested to remain in the country as refugees, said the foreign ministry. The Cubans arrived in Asunción on board a flight from Sao Paulo. (*Reuters*, 17/11/06)

November 17: Cuba ratified a motion on behalf of the Non Aligned Movement that rejects and condemns the selectivity and double-standard policy in the promotion and protection of the human rights. Cuban Delegate Luis Alberto Amoros, representing the country chairing the NAM Coordination Bureau at the UN, highlighted the position of the Movement at the Third Commission of the General Assembly. The intervention of the Cuban diplomat was encouraged by the presentation of projects of resolution against the NAM by the US, the European Union and others. (*Granma*, 18/11/06)

November 20: The Cuban Workers Union (CTC), the only legal union on the island, accused the newly created International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) of being "exclusive" and of being a supporter of neoliberalism. The Cuban union's reaction came after the ITUC's decision not to include the Cuban union in that organization. (*EFECOM*, 20/11/06)

November 20: Panama's parliamentary leader Elias Castillo highlighted the level of bilateral links between the top legislative body of Cuba and that of his country. Castillo praised his meeting in this capital with his Cuban counterpart Ricardo Alarcon and the island's top legislative members, and stressed that as a result of those talks, an accord was inked to reinforce inter-parliamentary relations. Alarcon, who is in Panama, is due to meet President Martin Torrijos, First Vice President Samuel Lewis Navarro and the Panama-Cuba Parliamentary Group, as well as visit the Latin American Parliament sub-regional office, among other activities. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/11/06)

November 21: Most of the 35 nations at a key meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog agency have agreed to deny Iran technical aid for a plutonium-producing reactor, diplomats said. Four participating diplomats said that Tehran's requests for International Atomic Energy Agency aid on seven other nuclear projects would be approved under the tentative agreement, but help building the Arak heavy-water reactor would be denied. The board hopes to reach consensus. But in the event of a vote forced by Iranian allies such as Cuba, the four diplomats said, the necessary majority of IAEA board members -- 18-- support the agreement. One diplomat said that more than 20 had agreed to the plan. (*The New York Times*, 21/11/06)

November 21: The Spanish Secretary of State for Latin America, Trinidad Jiménez, declared herself in favour of maintaining relations based on respect and "permanent and free-flowing" dialogue with Cuba, "as the only way of being where Spain must be, in the event that changes come about". (*EFE*, 21/11/06)

November 21: Cuban Permanent Ambassador to the UN Rodrigo Malmierca called unbearable Security Council failure to react to Israeli attacks on Palestine and Lebanon. At a debate on the situation at the Middle East, including Palestine, Malmierca criticized Security Council passivity towards such flagrant violations. He reaffirmed Cuba's support to a just, peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Palestinian people's right to a sovereign and independent state with East Jerusalem as capital. Malmierca recalled that since the Security Council meeting on October 19 the situation in the Middle East further deteriorated, namely in the Palestinian occupied territory. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/11/06)

November 23: Advisor to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and ex Minister of Foreign Affairs Alí Rodríguez submitted his credentials as the new Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba. According to a report issued by Cuban official daily Granma, Rodríguez was welcome during a ceremony on the eve by Vice-President Juan Almeida Bosque, a high-ranking military usually responsible for diplomats' accreditation. A 69-year-old economist, the Venezuelan chief of mission is also an expert in hydrocarbons. He will succeed Adán Chávez. The brother of President Chávez had been in charge of the embassy since 2004. (*El Universal*, 23/11/06)

November 23: The 7th session of the Cuba-Belarus Joint Cooperation Commission wound up in Minsk with the signing of a document aimed to protect accords on higher education, civil aeronautics, and radio and television. The commission gave particular attention to issues linked to transportation and current negotiations on the production of vaccines and medicines as well as Cuba's experiences in the field of biotechnology. A Byelorussian delegation is expected to travel shortly to the Caribbean island to conclude negotiations on this last topic. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/11/06)

November 23: Bolivia's President Evo Morales is scheduled to kick off a world tour on November 26, which will take him to The Netherlands, Nigeria and Cuba, the Bolivian Foreign Ministry announced. The Bolivian head of state is scheduled to arrive in Cuba December 1st to take part at national celebrations, on December 2nd, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the 80th Birthday of Fidel Castro. (*ACN*, 23/11/06)

November 23: European mayors, NGO representatives and members of solidarity-with-Cuba groups agreed to carry out cooperation projects with Havana province after concluding a four-day meeting in solidarity with the Cuban region. The nearly 200 delegates from the Iberian Peninsula, the Canary Islands and Italy, who attended the 13th Conference in Solidarity with Havana, pledged to make material donations to be used in fields such as education, healthcare, culture, and water resources. The donations will be used to repair schools, healthcare centers, homes and aqueducts. (*RHC*, 24/11/06)

November 23: The Cuban government announced a donation of four ophthalmological hospitals to Honduras. An agreement on this donation was signed by Honduras's Health Minister, Yeny Meza, and by the Cuban Ambassador to Tegucigalpa, Elías Alberto Polanco González. According to the agreement, the clinics will be located in Tegucigalpa, in El Progreso —department of Yoro—, Juticalpa —in Olancho— and San Marcos de Ocotepeque. (*Notimex*, 23/11/06)

November 24: Guyana's Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation Henry Jeffrey thanked Cuba for having cancelled his country's foreign debt with the island. During the final session of the 23rd Cuba-Guyana Joint Commission held in Havana, Henry Jeffrey and Marta Lomas, Cuban minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, penned an accord exempting the English-speaking South American nation from paying its debt to the Cuban government. (*ACN*, 24/11/06)

November 24: Some of the countries most popular with Canadians as holiday destinations have refused to help Ottawa fight off a bid by Iran to condemn Canada's record on human rights. In a showdown at the United Nations, Cuba joined Iran and four other countries supporting Tehran's call for the world body to censure Canada over its treatment of native Canadians and immigrants. Against the backdrop of the US trade embargo against Cuba, Canada has provided considerable political and economic support for Cuba over the years, despite the island's internationally documented lapses in respecting human rights. Canadian tourists have made Cuba one of their top five destinations. Statistics Canada figures show 517,900 Canadians visited Cuba last year, spending more than \$457-million. "That's almost a quarter of all the tourists Cuba received last year," said Maria Werlau, a Cuban exile who runs the human rights Free Society Project from New Jersey and has written on the importance of tourism to Cuba. "For Cuba to take this stance on a measure even they know is politically motivated is a cheap shot, and Canadians need to be informed about how Fidel Castro's government is repaying them for their indirect support of his regime." Cuban officials could not be reached for comment. But in a speech at the UN last month on Canada's draft resolution condemning Iran, Jorge

Cumberbatch of the Cuban mission suggested Ottawa was doing Washington's bidding. "Canada has become an accomplice in the war of adventures of its imperial neighbour," he said. (*National Post*, 24/11/06)

November 25: Government Minister Ricardo Cabrizas Ruiz received the Secretary General of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group, ACP, Sir John Kaputin, who arrived in Cuba for an official invitation. During his stay, Sir Kaputin will exchange opinions with Cuban authorities on the 84th Minister Council Session and 5th Head of States and Governments Summit of the ACP Group, which will take place December 4-8 in Khartoum, Republic of Sudan. Sir Kaputin will also meet with Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, with Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez, as well as with the vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodriguez, and the director of the National Economy Research Centre Osvaldo Martinez. (*AIN*, 25/11/06)

November 25: Yerodia Abduolaye Ndombasi, vice president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, arrived in Cuba to attend the celebrations for Fidel Castro's 80th birthday. Abduolaye was welcomed by Ivan Mora, head of the Sub-Saharan Africa Department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. The Congolese leader highlighted he traveled to Cuba to honour the important role of the Caribbean island in the liberation of Africa, especially in Congo-Kinshasa. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/11/06)

November 27: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez told a "red tide" of hundreds of thousands of supporters that he will dedicate his expected re-election victory to the communist island of Cuba. Chavez, a close ally of Fidel Castro, noted that the vote will be held at the same time that Cuba celebrates the 50th anniversary of the landing of the yacht that carried Castro and his armed band to Cuba to launch their guerrilla war. "This victory on December 3 (...) we're going to dedicate it to the 50 years since the arrival of the revolutionary boat Granma led by Fidel Castro to the coast of Cuba," Chavez said to cheers. "Fidel, applause from Venezuela! Long live Cuba! Long live revolutionary Cuba!" (*AP*, 27/11/06)

November 28: The United Nations Human Rights Council rejected an attempt to hold the Sudanese government responsible for halting atrocities in Darfur, opting instead for a less-pointed resolution calling on all warring parties to end abuses. The council is dominated by African and Muslim countries that have sided with China, Cuba and with other countries in preventing criticism of any government but Israel. The council voted 22-20 against a resolution from the European Union and Canada demanding the Sudanese government to prosecute those responsible for killing, raping and injuring civilians in the Darfur region of western Sudan. (*Globe & Mail*, 29/11/06)

November 29: Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicolás Maduro is heading a Venezuelan delegation attending a celebration in Havana on the occasion of the 80th birthday of Cuban ruler Fidel Castro. Maduro "will attend the events scheduled for the occasion and will be welcomed by Cuban leaders," said official newspaper Granma. The minister took part of the opening ceremony hosted by Guayasamín Foundation as part of a homage that will finish with a military parade on December 2. (*El Universal*, 29/11/06)

November 29: Canada's ambassador to Cuba, Alexandra Bugailiskis, presented the director of the National Institute of Oncology and Radiobiology, Dr Alberto Céspedes, with a donation of 47,000 Canadian dollars. In Cuba, as in Canada, medical care is free, and we are proud that this donation can be used for cancer research, expressed the diplomat. Ambassador Bugailiskis took the opportunity to announce that the 10th Terry Fox Run would take place on March 17, 2007, an event that in Cuba is the most massive after the one in Canada. (*Granma*, 29/11/06)

November 30: Fidel Castro's birthday bash is being attended by hundreds of personalities from Latin America and beyond. They praised Castro's revolutionary achievements in a colloquium entitled "Memory and Future: Cuba and Fidel" at Havana's convention center. But with Castro absent, it seemed at times more like a memorial service. Tomas Borge, a founder of Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front, denied the birthday celebrations have turned into a goodbye to Castro, even as he stressed that his legacy is more important than his physical presence. "We will never say goodbye to Fidel," Borge told reporters. "He will exist forever (...) so this is not a goodbye. Friends of

Fidel Castro, from writers to a film star had opinions on the ailing Cuban leader's health, but no word on whether he would sit out his own party. Asked about Castro's recovery, French superstar Gerard Depardieu said: "I have hope that he will pull it off." He did not say if he had met with or planned to see Fidel. Franco-Spanish author and journalist Ignacio Ramonet also said Fidel was "much better". "I think he is recovering well because we have been working by email in recent weeks, and he has done serious work, which you will see in the book's third edition ("One Hundred Hours with Fidel")," Ramonet said. "He has worked hard, so there is no doubt he is doing much better." Miguel Bonasso, an Argentine writer, lawmaker and personal friend of Fidel, meanwhile said he did not believe Castro had cancer, as reported in some US media. But he declined to speculate on whether Fidel would attend a military parade in his honor. "It would be rash to predict" whether Castro will show up, he said, adding: Castro "always has shown great dignity and wants to show himself fully fit." Nobel laureate and writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez arrived in Cuba for the festivities. (*Chicago Tribune, EFE, AFP, 30/11/06*)

Security

November 2: Cuba's First Vice President Raul Castro appraised the readiness, living conditions and work of the Rescate de Sanguily combat unit in western Cuba, accompanied by high military chiefs. Raul Castro, also Chief of the Cuban Armed Forces received detailed information on the state of the unit from its chief, Brigade General Eliecer Velazquez Almaguer, and reviewed preparations for the military parade for December 2. The also defense minister visited classrooms and viewed simulators used for personnel preparation as well as for reviewing the effectiveness of communication media trainers. (*Prensa Latina, 3/11/06*)

November 3: Unconfirmed media reports alleged that the acting president of Cuba, Raúl Castro, would have ordered - through general Julio Casas Regueiro - the withdrawal of Cuban military personnel from Venezuela. According to Venezuelan press reports, neither confirmed nor denied by Caracas or Havana, several flights carrying Cuban military personnel have taken off from Ramp 4 of the Maiquetía airport, Barquisimeto, and from the Oro Negro Airport in Cabimas. (*EER, 3/11/06*)

November 4: Troops marched in the streets and fighter jets streaked across the skies of Havana rehearsing a December 2 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the start of the Cuban revolution and the 80th birthday of its leader, Fidel Castro. The military parade will be the first in a decade in the Cuban capital and may bring Castro's first public appearance since he had intestinal surgery in July that forced him to cede power temporarily to his brother Raul. The rehearsal included the reading of a script over booming loudspeakers that contained several references to "our undefeated and invincible commandante Fidel Castro Ruz," giving no indication he would not show up. After the Granma replica passed the reviewing stand, about 2,000 soldiers and marines marched past. Earlier, three fighter jets and two military helicopters made a practice run over Havana. The actual parade will include tanks and heavy weapons, said an organizer who identified himself only as Lt. Col. Rodriguez. "We're not going to fill the plaza with all the planes, tanks or all the arms we have, only what is necessary for the enemy to know that we are prepared," he told the press. (*Reuters, 4/11/06*)

November 19: More than 300,000 people will take part in a military parade marking Fidel Castro's 80th birthday, as well as the 50th anniversary of the start of the Cuban revolution, according to press reports. The weekly newspaper Tribuna de La Habana reported that the massive December 2 display would feature tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft weapons and other military hardware parading through Revolution Square. The December 2 date was picked because it marks the 50th anniversary of the day Castro and 81 bearded rebels -- including brother Raul and Argentine-born revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara -- returned from exile in Mexico aboard a yacht named Granma, launching a military campaign that would topple US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Castro turned 80 in August, but birthday celebrations were postponed because of a reported intestinal operation and recovery. (*AFP, 19/11/06*)

US-Cuba Relations

November 1: Glum US vendors find themselves fewer in number and fading in importance at Havana's annual international trade fair, a plight they blame on a 44-year-old Cold War trade embargo that they say is handing the Cuban market to other countries. Of the 50 or so vendors who bothered to show up this week, many sit on plastic chairs in drab booths, looking like they need a pack of cards to pass the time in the absence of serious deal-making. "Unfortunately, there aren't that many buyers. Lots of tire kickers but that's about it," said Roberto Fernandez of Bunge Shortening and Oils. Five years ago, after the US Congress allowed agricultural exports to Cuba, there was a separate trade fair just for US companies that drew about 800 vendors. But at last year's international trade fair, that dropped to 150 US firms. This year's further slide reflects what the vendors said were President George W. Bush's efforts to steadily toughen enforcement of the trade embargo that dates back to October 1962, as it tries to pressure one of the world's last communist states to change. Sellers complained that the United States under Bush has made trade with Cuba more expensive and imposed financial terms that limit their ability to compete. (*Reuters*, 1/11/06)

November 1: Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque termed as excellent the massive debates held across the island about the US embargo against Cuba. In statements to the press, Mr. Perez Roque pointed out that some 200,000 Cuban citizens participated in those debates and that the number of conferences increased this year thanks to the incorporation of more than 500 university students as speakers. More than 30 meetings were carried out in the western province of Pinar del Rio. (*AIN*, 1/11/06)

November 1: A Cuba government official told a United Nations summit in Greece that the US government was to blame for the poor Internet access that its citizens enjoy. Juan Fernandez, a Cuban government official in the Commission of Electronic Commerce, assailed the US government's economic embargo and argued that as a result poorer countries are "financing" the Internet. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Fernandez to a high-level working group two years ago. Fernandez's only problem was that a longtime Internet engineer and researcher was present and challenged those claims. Bill Woodcock, research director of the non-profit Packet Clearing House who has set up Internet exchange points in Latin America and other developing nations, replied by saying that the Cuban government's problems stem from its own telecommunications monopoly and its official censorship policies. (*CNET News.com*, 1/11/06)

November 1: A Florida cattle broker who organized the sale of Vermont cattle to Cuba two years ago said Cuban officials were eyeing more of the state's animals. "In the spring, Cuba intends to buy more dairy cattle," John Parke Wright IV said. The 76 Vermont Holstein and Jersey heifers purchased two years ago are adapting to the country's hot and humid weather, officials said. The officials are happy with the cows' milk output and offspring. "They are animals with very good genetic potential," said Roberto Hernandez Antunez, manager of Nina Bonita Farm, where the cattle were sent. (*Rutland Herald*, 3/1/06)

November 2: Havana denounced that the US thwarts Cuba's access to the Internet wide band, while accusing the Island of limiting the service in the country. As the result of US restrictions, the wide band allowed for the entire country of Cuba to connect to the network of networks is almost the same as the one granted to private or corporate users in other countries, Juventud Rebelde daily reported. In Australia, Bangladesh, Great Britain, Italy, or the US, an internet user can access a high speed service with chances of direct transfer of up to 24 megabytes per second. In Norway or Japan, that figure tops 100, the publication revealed. However, Cuba, a country with over 11 million people, can use, through satellite, only 65 megabytes of wide band for output and 124 for input. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/11/06)

November 2: Cuba's ambassador to Spain warned the United States government against any military invasion of Cuba in its bid to pursue regime change in the communist-run island. US officials have repeatedly said they will not invade Cuba, and only wish to see democracy on the island, but fears of such an invasion have been prevalent in Cuba. "A military adventure in Cuba (would not be) a military joyride," Ambassador Alberto Velazco San Jose told reporters. "We are prepared for a popular war. Behind each tree there could be a Cuban man or woman and that could cost many lives for both Cuba and the US," he added. Velazco said recent reports written by the US Commission for Assistance

for a Free Cuba, appointed by US President George W. Bush, contained what he described as "a secret plan" to overthrow a government in Cuba. (*AP*, 2/11/06)

November 5: Scholars at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, are researching the options for settlements and preparing a blueprint for Cuba, based largely on the experience of ex-Soviet states. The project is financed by a \$750,000 grant from the US Agency for International Development, which provides money for a variety of pro-democracy projects related to Cuba and is often accused by the Castro government of trying to foment opposition on the island. Any settlement in Cuba certainly will take imagination and time, experts agree. "We're looking at a giant bankruptcy off our shore when the government changes," said Michael Kelly, a law professor and researcher at Creighton. "So, you have to be a little bit creative." (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/11/06)

November 6: Twenty Cubans and four Haitians were detained after police spotted them trying to land their boat on Culebra, a tiny island off Puerto Rico's east coast. The group had traveled from St. Maarten, 150 miles to the east, according to the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Also, US immigration agents arrested 24 Cubans in St. Thomas, which is part of the US Virgin Islands. The group had paid smugglers to bring them directly from Cuba, authorities said. (*Orlando Sentinel*, 7/11/06)

November 6: US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice claimed on US television that the transition away from a Castro-led regime had "clearly" started in Cuba. She also rejected a power transfer from Fidel Castro to his brother Raul, or any other current governmental /Communist figures. "Clearly a transition is under way in Cuba one way or another", the US Secretary of State said. "I don't have any information on the health of Fidel Castro. I think we don't know. But a transition is clearly under way, and what has been a long-standing dictatorship is obviously going to come to an end sooner or later", she added. "Our role and our goal has to be to insist that the Cuban people will have a real opportunity for a true democracy, that there wouldn't be just the transfer of power to another member of the regime, but that the Cuban people will get to do what people throughout the Western Hemisphere are now doing: They'll get to select their leaders. There will be free and fair elections in which they can select their leaders", Rice said. "I think what there cannot be is simply the transfer from one to another". (*Fox News, Global Insight*, 7/11/06)

November 6: Stepped up enforcement of US sanctions on doing business in dollars with communist Cuba is forcing governments to change how they finance embassies in Havana, diplomats said. The practice of wiring money to US banks and sending US bank checks to Havana embassies to cash has become more difficult due to US tightening under the Bush administration, they said. The changes are forcing many to abandon the dollar and convert to euro accounts to conduct their daily business. Foreign governments were sent scrambling in September when state-run Banco Metropolitano, the only Cuban bank that accepts checks from US banks, informed clients its traditional intermediary, the National Bank of Canada, would no longer process checks without an attached US license that was no more than two years old. "We recommend you look for other ways and a currency other than U.S. dollars to transfer money to our country, as in the future we could face new difficulties in dealing with these checks," the memo concluded. "We asked our embassy in Washington to confirm the validity of our license (...) However we were told that issuing checks from a US bank itself was a violation," an Asian diplomat said. "Once our routine way of transferring funds from a US bank to Cuba was denied, we had no choice but to look for an alternative and after a month worked out to send euros from a bank in Spain to our dollar accounts in Cuba," he said. (*Reuters*, 6/11/06)

November 7: Pernod Ricard, the world's second largest wines and spirits group, said United States constitutional rights may have been infringed in its dispute over US rights to the Havana Club Cuban rum brand. A United States government agency denied in July an application for a licence to renew the brand's registration in the US, opening the way for competitor Bacardi Limited to launch a rival "Havana Club" made in Puerto Rico. "We will make use of the fifth amendment (of the US constitution)," Pernod Ricard Chairman Patrick Ricard told the company's annual shareholders meeting, saying Pernod's marketing partner had launched a legal challenge to the decision. (*Reuters*, 7/11/06)

November 8: Weary of navigating the Treasury Department's stringent rules on money transfers to Cuba, MoneyGram International called it quits. Starting mid-September, the cash transfer company stopped serving the island. "It was too complicated," said Cathy Rebuffoni, a spokeswoman for the Minneapolis-based firm, "and we weren't getting any volumes." MoneyGram was the latest big-name financial services company to cut back or end its dealings with Havana under a US crackdown that appears to be hitting Cuba hard, severely disrupting the government's ability to make and receive international payments. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/11/06)

November 8: The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the two-year house arrest handed down by a Cuban court to a journalist who reported on a dengue fever outbreak that the authorities censored. Journalist Guillermo Espinosa Rodríguez of the independent agency Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental (APLO) was convicted by a court in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba on the uniquely Cuban charge of "social dangerousness." The authorities often use this vaguely worded charge to silence critics. Under article 72 of the Cuban Penal Code, "any person shall be deemed dangerous if he or she has shown proclivity to commit crimes demonstrated by conduct that is in manifest contradiction with the norms of socialist morality." It is punishable by up to four years in prison. "It is outrageous that the Cuban authorities would seek to censor an outbreak of a deadly disease and punish a journalist for performing a vital public service by exposing it," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon. (*CPJ Press Release*, 8/11/06)

November 8: Calling the Cuban military one of the most respected and strongest of the island's institutions, the former head of the Miami-based Southern Command said the US military is ready to work with, train and supply Cuban soldiers when democracy prevails there. Army General Bantz J. Craddock, the four-star general who now runs NATO operations in Europe, made the points in an academic article outlining the ways the US and Cuban armed forces could work together in humanitarian, counterdrug, counterterrorism and disaster relief operations. The article mirrors US policy toward Cuba, and in particular the recent Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba report, but was unusual in that such a high-ranking Army general helped write it. The article published in Cuban Affairs, a University of Miami online journal, was co-authored by Major Barbara Fick. Craddock ran US military operations in Latin America and the Caribbean as Southcom chief from 2004 until last October, and Fick serves as Army special assistant to the head of Southcom. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/11/06)

November 12: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon convoked a new solidarity campaign with the five Cubans jailed in the US, to spread awareness of the case and press for their release. Alarcon bewailed that after eight years of prison and struggle, the issue remains out of the big media and is largely unknown by the US people. The call was launched for December 12-27, on occasion of the fifth anniversary of the trial for Fernando Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Rene Gonzalez in Miami. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/11/06)

November 12: The US government believes Fidel Castro's health is deteriorating and that the Cuban dictator is unlikely to live through 2007. US government officials say there is still some mystery about Castro's diagnosis, his treatment and how he is responding. But these officials believe the 80-year-old leader has cancer of the stomach, colon or pancreas. He was seen weakened and thinner in official state photos released in October, and it is considered unlikely that he will return to power or survive through the end of next year, said the US government and defense officials. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the politically sensitive topic. With chemotherapy, Castro may live up to 18 months, said the defense official. Without it, expected survival would drop to three months to eight months. American officials will not talk publicly about how they glean clues to Castro's health. But US spy agencies include physicians who study pictures, video, public statements and other information coming out of Cuba. (*AP*, 12/11/06)

November 12: Swiss banks Credit Suisse and UBS said they have severed relations with Cuba and are not conducting any business dealings with the country. UBS said it had not had any dealings with Cuba since 2005 while Credit Suisse said it adopted a similar policy at the start of the year but would consider handling non-dollar payments although this was difficult. "UBS does not maintain any relations with Cuba-domiciled individuals and also UBS does not execute

any payments to Cuba. The policy, which was instituted in 2005, concerns a number of sensitive countries, including North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Sudan," a spokesman for UBS said. Rival bank Credit Suisse said it had also decided not to enter into new business with sensitive countries since the start of the year. "We do not do payments in US dollars but payments in other currencies are possible if we can find a correspondent bank. But this is very difficult," a spokesman for Credit Suisse said, referring to Cuba. (*Reuters*, 12/11/06)

November 15: Two longtime anti-Castro activists convicted of plotting to possess illegal weapons were sentenced to between three and four years in prison in Fort Lauderdale federal court. Santiago Alvarez, a wealthy Miami developer who has supported Cuban exile causes, must serve about four years in prison and pay a \$10,000 fine. His colleague, Osvaldo Mitat, must serve three years, but does not have to pay any fine. Both men, who pleaded guilty in September on the eve of their high-stakes trial, avoided the possibility of spending the rest of their lives in prison. Alvarez, 65, and Mitat, 64, had cut plea deals on one count each of conspiring to possess illegal weapons. The other charges, including possessing illegal weapons, were dropped. Those offenses, coupled with the conspiracy count, carried a maximum of 20 years in prison. US District Judge James Cohn, who imposed the sentences, had rejected bids by the pair's legal team to move the men's trial to Miami federal court and also opposed an 11th-hour proposal to include Cuban Americans from Miami-Dade County in the Broward County jury pool. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/11/06)

November 15: Two congressmen who oppose sanctions on Cuba said they will push for an investigation of US programs to promote democracy on the island after a report uncovered poor oversight and indications of wastefulness. "The conclusions are disturbing, to say the least," Representative Bill Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts), said of a report by the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress. The GAO report said more than 95 percent of US Agency for International Development programs for Cuba were handed out without any competitive bids and were then subject to only perfunctory reviews. It cites questionable purchases of items like cashmere sweaters and crab meat for dissidents on the island. Delahunt is set to become chairman of the Oversight and Investigations panel of the House Committee on International Relations when the Democratic-controlled Congress reconvenes early next year. He also is co-chair with Arizona Republican Representative Jeffrey Flake of the Cuba Working Group, a bipartisan caucus that opposes many US sanctions against Cuba. The two lawmakers requested the GAO study. (*Chicago Tribune*, *The Miami Herald*, 15,16/11/06)

November 16: A confidential USAID memo from March 22, 1996 -- less than one month after the Brothers to the Rescue planes were shot down -- notes the agency supported sending as much as \$400 at a time to "victims of repression" in Cuba. The memo says USAID's Latin American and Caribbean Office, the US Interests Section in Havana, the State Department and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee supported direct cash assistance of up to \$10,000. The Office of the Inspector General, citing an inability to track the money because auditing the program from Cuba was difficult, left the decision to USAID. Larry Byrne, an assistant USAID administrator from 1993 to 1997, decided to ban sending cash. Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Miami, said USAID-financed groups should be allowed to send cash to the dissidents: "I have always advocated for such measures." (*The Miami Herald*, 16/11/06)

November 16: Cubans fleeing their communist homeland are reaching US shores in increasingly large numbers as more brave the trip and new smuggler routes make it easier to land. Traditionally, Cubans have used makeshift boats, rafts and even inner tubes to ride the currents toward the Florida Keys and Florida's southeast coast. But the Coast Guard and Border Patrol agents are heavily focused on the eastern shore, so more smugglers driving high-speed boats are popping up on Florida's less-populated, less-patrolled southwestern coast. "Authorities tied it up so tight near Miami that it's gotten hard for them to get in," said Captain Thom Carr of the police department on Marco Island, located west of Miami on the other side of the state. "Because of that, they told us (Cubans) might start heading this way, and now they are." A group of 28 Cubans reached land in Naples. The previous day, 17 landed on Sanibel Island. And in August, 20 Cubans landed near Marco Island, according to *The News-Press* in Fort Myers. That trend forced the Border Patrol to shift a special unit to southwest Florida this year to help law enforcement track down the smugglers. (*USA Today*, 16/11/06)

November 16: Havana charged that US aid to dissidents in Cuba invites corruption, pointing to a recent US congressional probe, which showed that the funds have been used to buy luxury items. "The program, which is corrupt, breeds corruption," the Communist Party daily Granma said in a front-page article titled "Wasted Money". "As Cuba has said, these payments prove the political and financial ties that the majority of the supposed 'opponents' of the island's government have with the United States," the official website Cubadebate said. The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report showed that poor monitoring of millions of dollars intended to support Cuban dissidents has led to the purchase of Godiva chocolates, Sony PlayStations and other luxury items at US taxpayers' expense. (*AFP*, 16/11/06)

November 16: Cuba's dissident movement has responded with conflicting reactions to the recent controversy over the irregular use of US funds allocated to promote political change on the communist island. Marta Beatriz Roque, the head of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, said that the dissidents do not receive money from the US but rather "the means" to pursue their activities. She told the press dissidents had received from the United States books, medicine and radios, among other "things having to do with the possibility of bringing democracy to the people," and she acknowledged that they accepted anything that Washington wanted to send them. Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the outlawed Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said that the US help is "necessary and positive." The US aid, Sanchez said, comes with no "conditions ... (because) the Commission opposes the (US economic) embargo and when they have been able to send us aid we accepted it willingly and we will continue accepting it." On the other hand, Manuel Cuesta Morua, the spokesman for the social democratic Arco Progresista, said that the United States "must not finance the Cuban dissidence." Also Miriam Leyva, one of the founders of the Ladies in White, said that "there must be no funds from any government allocated to the dissidents". "I'm against any funds from the American government and I think that if it wants to help the Cuban people it should lift the embargo and allow trade, tourism (and) academic exchanges, and Cubans should be allowed to travel without restriction to the United States or send money to their family" on the island, said Leyva, the wife of one of Cuba's roughly 300 political prisoners. (*EFE*, 16/11/06)

November 16: Florida Governor Jeb Bush took a view on ailing Fidel Castro, and made clear his desire to see democracy established in the Communist country. The Governor referred to a TV interview the 80-year-old Cuban leader had given recently. Calling Castro "frail," and mentioning the Bush Administration's support for pro-democratic supporters in Cuba, the Governor suggested furthering the opening for political change in Havana. Ricardo Alarcon, the leader of Cuba's National Assembly, took the comments as a call for an invasion of Cuba. "You have, first of all, those in Miami that are calling for even a military action against Cuba, including the governor," Alarcon told the Cuban American National Foundation. While the Governor's political team denies the allegation as an insult, they point out that Bush's position on Cuba has not changed and he does not support Castro's oppressive regime. (*AHN*, 16/11/06)

November 16: Cuba's central bank blasted Swiss banks UBS and Credit Suisse for cutting off business dealings with Cuba, saying they had bowed to US pressure. In a statement, the central bank said the United States' long-standing economic embargo against the communist nation led to the banks' "pitiful" decision. "The actions of these two banks have nothing to do with respect of the law or looking after their banking transactions. It is simply an act of submission to the US, which they don't dare confess," the Cuban bank said. The Swiss banks said in response to a published report they had stopped doing business with "sensitive" countries, "including Cuba, citing the difficulties and expenses involved. Despite the pullout of UBS and Credit Suisse, Cuban bank said a growing number of countries and organizations are refusing to follow "an empire whose constant failures in recent weeks are just the tip of the iceberg of its irreversible decline." (*Reuters*, 16/11/06)

November 17: William Lee Brent, a member of the Black Panthers who hijacked an airliner to Cuba in 1969 and later wrote a gritty account of his life, died on November 4 of bronchial pneumonia at his home in Havana. He was 75. After years of crime, prison and low-paying jobs, Mr. Brent joined the Black Panthers in 1968 and quickly rose in the ranks of the radical black-power organization based in Oakland, California. To avoid trial for his role in a shootout with San

Francisco police, Mr. Brent hijacked a TWA flight and spent the rest of his life in Cuba. He chronicled his life in his 1996 autobiography, "Long Time Gone: A Black Panther's True-Life Story of His Hijacking and Twenty-Five Years in Cuba." Although he came to miss the United States and had reservations about life in Cuba, he said he never regretted the actions that separated him from his family and his homeland. (*The Washington Post*, 17/11/06)

November 17: The families of two men executed by Fidel Castro's government will receive more than \$90 million in Cuban assets held in the United States, a federal judge ruled. Howard Anderson was arrested in April 1961 and accused by the Cuban government of smuggling guns to anti-Communist rebels a few days before the Bay of Pigs invasion by some 1,500 US-backed expatriates. During the attack, Cuban troops shot down two B-26 bombers operated by the CIA in support of the landing at the Bay of Pigs on Cuba's southwestern coast. Thomas "Pete" Ray, 30, a CIA contractor, was one of four B-26 airmen killed in the attack. Ray, a pilot with the Alabama National Guard, was shot by Cuban troops after his plane crash landed. Anderson was executed by a firing squad in the days following the invasion. "I just wish this had come a month earlier," Anderson's daughter Bonnie Anderson said. (*CNN*, 17/11/06)

November 21: Human Rights First welcomed the release of Cuban journalist Oscar Mario Gonzalez Perez, who had been held without trial since his arrest in July 2005. A week before, the New York-based advocacy group mounted a campaign for Gonzalez's release, following reports from his wife that his health was drastically deteriorating in prison and that he was being denied medical care. More than 1,000 Human Rights First supporters sent emails and letters to Cuban authorities urging that Gonzalez be freed. (*PRNewswire*, 21/11/06)

November 21: Cuban dissident Camilo Cairo Falcon was picked up by the US Coast Guard while fleeing the island on a raft and taken to the US base in Guantanamo Bay, where he requested political asylum, dissident sources said. "His family told me he jumped into a raft and was arrested and taken to the military base. He's asking for asylum from there," said Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) president Elizardo Sanchez. Falcon was arrested for demonstrating against the Cuban government in July 2005 and was released recently from jail for health reasons, a CCDHRN statement said. (*AFP*, 21/11/06)

November 22: A US music company lost its bid for rights to more than dozen songs from the golden age of Cuban music, ending a six-year legal battle against the island's government in a London court. After a protracted legal dispute that included moving the entire trial to Havana for a few days to take testimony there, a British judge decided not to give New Jersey-based Peer Music rights to 14 songs -- but he didn't give the rights to the Cuban government music publishing company either. The litigation was considered a critical test case that could have affected up to 600 of Cuba's most cherished oldies. Having successfully fought off Peer's claim, the Cuban music publishers declared themselves winners in the case. It is likely to result in more litigation, since it is still unclear who has full rights to each song. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/11/06)

November 23: Janet Ray Weininger finally won a battle against Fidel Castro when a court ordered she can collect \$23.9 million in frozen Cuban funds in compensation for her executed father. But Weininger said the long-fought victory in a wrongful death lawsuit against the Cuban government won't make her forget what she sees as Castro's cruelty. For years she had written Castro, seeking information on the fate of her father, a CIA contractor whose plane was shot down by Cuban anti-aircraft guns during the US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961. "He answered me by sending me a bloodied back-and-white photo of him," Weininger told the press. The photo sent in 1978 showed the lifeless body of Thomas "Pete" Ray in a coffin. In a note, Castro wrote, "I have your father's body, I've kept him in a morgue." "This was Fidel Castro's trophy," Weininger, 52, said, adding that Castro's note to her was initially given to author Peter Wyden while he was in Cuba doing research for his book "Bay of Pigs, The Untold Story" in the late 1970s. (*Reuters*, 23/11/06)

November 24: Perhaps a sign of the imminent post-Castro times, a small but official congressional delegation will be taking a quick trip to Cuba next month for a look-see. Helping to round up some interesting folks for the lawmakers to

talk to is Sarah Stephens, a policy activist who has been trying for years to foster dialogue with the United States' communist neighbor. Stephens, who had been working to free up travel to the island, recently opened the Center for Democracy in the Americas, which will expand her work to the Southern Hemisphere, particularly Venezuela. Formerly at the Center for International Policy, Stephens arranges for informal groups to visit Cuba to talk to a wide range of people. "She's good at appreciating all the perspectives that people bring to bear," said Lance Walker, an aide to Representative Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona). Flake, who is heading the trip, and Representative William D. Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts.), who is also going, are leaders of the congressional Cuba working group. "She's probably left of center, and we're on the right somewhere," Walker added. (*The Washington Post*, 24/11/06)

November 24: Several high-profile Cuban dissidents asked that the United States end its restrictions on sending aid and traveling to the Communist-ruled island on the grounds that they are not helping the strategy of the internal opposition there. The statement was signed by prominent opposition leaders Martha Beatriz Roque, of the Assembly To Promote Civilian Society, Gisela Delgado Sabi3n, of the Independent Libraries Project, Elizardo S3nchez, who heads the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, and Vladimiro Roca, of the Social Democratic Party of Cuba and spokesman for All United. In the communique, the dissidents regretted the improper use of funds provided by the United States to help organizations opposing the Fidel Castro regime and underscored the need to "achieve greater efficiency in the use of said funds." One possible way of doing it, they said, would be eliminating a series of restrictions on sending aid and traveling to Cuba which, they said, "in no way help the pro-democracy struggle" being waged inside that country. "We hope that the mistakes made are corrected and that a greater amount of aid reaches pro-democracy activists so they can more swiftly achieve economic, political and social freedom in our country," the brief communique said. Roque's signature was by far the most surprising because of her long-standing support for travel restrictions. Roque is controversial even among Cuban dissidents, particularly for her hard-line stances and close relationship with Cuban-American legislators. (*EFE, The Miami Herald*, 24/11/06)

November 27: The US director of national intelligence, John Negroponte, appointed a conservative specialist on links between national security and economics to head a kind of one-stop shop for the intelligence community on Cuba and Venezuela. As "mission manager" for the two countries, Norman A. Bailey will oversee three to five staffers who will pore over information from 16 US government agencies to spot information gaps, help craft intelligence strategies and track the implementation (of those strategies). The administration has five other mission managers specializing in Iran, North Korea, counterterrorism, counterproliferation and counterintelligence. Bailey is well-known in Washington's community of Latin American specialists as a conservative Cold War expert well-versed on regional affairs and a frequent participant of the seminar and conference circuit. Most recently he served as senior fellow at the conservative Potomac Foundation and taught courses on economics and conflict at the Institute of World Politics at the Graduate School of National Security and International Affairs. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/11/06)

November 27: The US State Department applauded a group of global press advocacy organizations for criticism of the Cuban regime's continued human rights violations against independent journalists in the Caribbean nation. In a statement to USINFO, the State Department's Office for Cuban Affairs praised the Global Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations for deploring the lack of press freedoms in Cuba and for what the office termed the "unjust jailing of journalists" throughout the island nation. In a resolution adopted at its meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, November 21, the committee called for the "immediate" and "unconditional" release of all imprisoned journalists in Cuba and an end to government reprisals against the media in that country. The committee also demanded that the Cuban government "end its selective policy regarding the issuance of visas to foreign journalists." (*USINFO*, 28/11/06)

November 29: Washington showed no sign of accepting Raul Castro's leadership. During a daily briefing with the press, Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman for the State Department said that the transferring of power to Raul Castro is no solution for the Cuban population. "The creation of some sort of Castro dynasty simply by transferring power to Raul Castro and having him continue to operate the same undemocratic, repressive policies as his brother is certainly not a

solution that we think is viable," Casey said. "We think the Cuban people need to be given the opportunity to see and have democratic change". "We believe that is what the Cuban people would like to have and we very much believe that what is important for us is to be able to aid the Cuban people as they move through any potential transition so that those kinds of democratic aspirations could be realized", he added. (*Reuters, Washington Files, 29/11/06*)