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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Public appearances by three former Cuban officials linked to harsh political purges in the cultural sector during the 70's arise protests of intellectuals and artists. Cuban dissident Manuel Valdés Tamayo, one of 75 activists jailed in a massive crackdown in 2003 and released a year later for health reasons, dies. The head of the Ideological Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee urges journalists to reflect the people's problems and concerns in the official media. Rumours and speculations persist about Fidel Castro's health condition.

Economy: The Cuban power industry eliminates electricity shortages by 90%. Cuba and Venezuela sign 16 agreements of cooperation in agriculture, finance, telecoms, energy, tourism, transport, oil drilling, and mining. In 2006, the number of tourists visiting Cuba dropped by 3.6 per cent. The number of foreign companies operating in Cuba has continued to decline.

Exile Community: Demonstrators clash with others in Little Havana over Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles. Controversies arise about an official celebration at the Orange Bowl whenever Fidel Castro dies.

Foreign Affairs: Panamanian President Martín Torrijos visits Cuba. An Oslo hotel owned by the US Hilton Hotel Corp. faced protests after refusing to book rooms for a Cuban delegation. The new government in Mexico seeks to improve relations with Cuba. Nicaragua joins Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. Raul Castro meets with Dr. Aristides Gomes, prime minister of Guinea Bissau, during Gomes' official visit to Cuba.

US-Cuba Relations: The number of undocumented Cuban migrants stopped at sea by the US Coast Guard dropped in 2006. Cuba condemns as "theft" the use of frozen Cuban assets in the United States to compensate the families of two Americans killed in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. The US is calling on Canada to take about 40 Cuban refugees housed at Guantanamo Naval Base. Republican and Democratic lawmakers say they would push hard to get legislation through Congress to ease restrictions on travel to Cuba.



Domestic Affairs

January 1: In separate and virtually competing new-year predictions, two groups of Cuban Santería priests are predicting a "funereal" future but also an "ideal" moment for an economic recovery. The island's "babalawos" have long been split into several groups, with one group relatively loyal to the government. But their annual predictions nevertheless are anxiously awaited by the many Cubans who practice the mixture of African and Catholic religions. The Yoruba priests who make up the relatively independent Commission for the Year's Letter announced that 2007 would be marked by wars and "military interventions" although the island will see an economic improvement based on the discovery of oil and mineral deposits. While they refused to speak specifically about Castro's health, babalawo Lázaro Cuesta, who read the year's prediction, made comments that seemed to be directed at the Cuban leader's ailment. "The panorama that presents itself to us is a little funereal," he said. "When one doesn't leave his place at its proper time, one runs the risk that unpredictable things happen." Meanwhile, the Cuban Council of Senior Ifá Priests, considered to be more loyal to the government, said its predictions "speak of legal problems and their repercussions, which could bring as a consequence an increase in corruption and crime." (*The Miami Herald*, 3/1/07)

January 1: The eastern Cuban province of Santiago de Cuba is celebrating the 65th birthday of the late intellectual Joel James with the longest drum jam. On January 13, Joel James' birthday, numerous traditional groups from all over the country will dedicate this tribute to James, who was director of the Casa del Caribe in Santiago up until his death in 2006. The drum jam will start in the western-most province of Pinar del Rio on January 12 with the groups '1802' and 'Tambor Yuca', who will be followed by other groups from the provinces of Havana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Ciego de Avila, Camaguey, Las Tunas, Guantanamo and Santiago de Cuba. The jam will finish with the group 'Barrancas', of Haitian origin, from the Santiago municipality of Palma Soriano. They will play by the tomb of Joel James, in the city's Santa Ifigenia cemetery. (*Granma*, 1/1/07)

January 2: The Gran Teatro de La Habana Award was granted to Cuban singer Pablo Milanes. This award is conferred to people or groups that have reached an "extraordinary importance," local media reported. Milanes received the award from Alicia Alonso, Cuba National Ballet director and president of the jury, who highlighted "the merits of the singer and his contribution to the Cuban and Latin American singing." (*Prensa Latina*, 2/1/07)

January 3: Cuba registered the lowest infant mortality rate in Latin America with 5.3 deaths for every 1,000 live births in 2006, only surpassed on the continent by Canada, local dailies revealed. Granma daily quoted sources from the National Statistics Department of the Public Health Ministry as saying that the Caribbean country reached its lowest mortality rate in under one-year old children in history, and was among the 30 world nations with best results. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/1/07)

January 3: Participants in the peaceful march for the National Unity of the Internal Dissidence arrived in the city of Camagüey. Rufina Velázquez and her parents, Ramón and Bárbara, began their march on December 10th, 2006 in Santiago de Cuba, with the intention of reaching Havana. The march attempts to attract national and international attention to human rights violations on the island (*Cubanet*, 5/1/07)

January 4: State Security and police forces arrested participants of the march for National Unity. Rufina Velázquez and her parents, Ramón and Bárbara, were thrown in police cars and taken to the province of Las Tunas. They were released after warnings that they would be sent to prison if they continued the march. The family had started a walk across the island to call attention to human rights violations in Cuba, and to encourage unity of the internal dissidence. (*Cubanet*, 7/1/07)

January 6: Over a hundred people were detained in Mayarí, Holguín, as part of an anti-drug operation conducted by the provincial police. The operation started in early November after a shipment of cocaine reached the coasts of the

region when foreign drug traffickers disposed of their cargo at sea for fears of being caught. The police operation focused on the localities of Nicaro, the Guatemala sugar-cane mill and the municipality of Mayarí. (*Cubanet*, 6/1/07)

January 6: About 30 children of Cuban political prisoners urged the communist government to free their fathers, nearly four years after they were rounded up in a crackdown against dissidents. The Ladies in White, a group of mothers and wives of political prisoners, organized a gathering at the home of one of their members and gave the children gifts to mark the Christian feast of the Epiphany, which marks the arrival of the three wise men, or Magi, to see the newborn Christ. The gathering took place in the home of activist Laura Pollan, whose husband, Hector Maseda, is also serving a 20-year sentence. The Ladies in White said they would continue their "peaceful" pleas until the "absolute liberation" of their husbands and sons. Pollan said the children came from across Cuba and that the event was organized without the help of the US government, which has an economic embargo against Cuba. European Union countries and organizations donated gifts, she said. (*AFP*, 6/1/07)

January 7: Cuba's official youth newspaper reported an increase in sales of children's toys this year but warned against a rise in consumerism on the communist-run island. In a two-page spread, the *Juventud Rebelde* reported on the revival of "Three Kings Day," a Latin American tradition of giving gifts to children on January 6, commemorating the arrival of three wise men who offered the newborn Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. "A tradition that seemed extinct in Cuban society rises again," the state-run newspaper said. "Although no one sees celebrating the millennial festivity of the Three Kings as heresy, the danger could be in (the holiday) accentuating consumerist habits and social differences." Christmas is a low-key affair in Cuba. The government discouraged holiday celebrations for religious and consumerist reasons for decades following Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, but made Christmas a holiday in 1997 ahead of a visit by Pope John Paul II in 1998. (*AP*, 7/1/07)

January 8: Cuba has called on its boxing authorities to stem the flow of talent that continues to quit the impoverished Communist nation. Every year, Cuba loses some of its top athletes, particularly boxers and baseball players, who choose to escape the country for pastures new. Many boxers, such as current WBC lightweight champion and 1992 Olympic gold medallist Joel Casamayor, find their way to the United States to start up professional careers that are banned under the regime of Fidel Castro. Cuba is now trying to find a way to hold onto its greatest talents and boxing bosses have been told to set up an elite national squad "inside and outside the ring" to fend off the vultures. Official state newspaper *Granma* said: "In various Olympic forums, such as the National Assembly of Olympic Committees and the Pan-American Sports Organisation, Cuba has denounced the harassment that its sports suffer at the hands of unscrupulous dealers, which it describes as a theft of talents." It singled out the United States as the prime importer of boxing talent. The Cuban denunciation of this phenomenon took place just over a week before the beginning of the national championships. (*AFP*, 8/1/07)

January 8: Residents of Havana took part in observances to mark the 48th anniversary of the arrival in Cuba's capital of the revolutionary army led by Fidel Castro. A procession made up of children dressed as guerrillas, and former revolutionary fighters re-enacted the triumphal entry of January 8, 1959. Retired Captain Arsenio Nestor Sosa, 68, who accompanied Castro on his entry into Havana and was the main speaker at the anniversary rally in the suburb of El Cotorro, recalled that "when we arrived here we didn't know what the revolution was, because we were very young." Now, he said, "we have to trust in the continuity of the revolution because when we triumphed we didn't have much understanding, but those charged with continuing (the revolution) are much better prepared and know what they're fighting for." (*EFE*, 8/1/07)

January 8: Juan Alberto Fernández, better known as "El Congo", a member of the Confederación Obrera Nacional Independiente de Cuba (CONIC), was beaten by two police officers in the Manatí police station in Las Tunas. They also insulted him verbally and threatened him with an "uncertain future". Juan Alberto said that he did not suffer further injuries thanks to the intervention of a lieutenant from the Technical Department of Investigations and other officials,

who prevented further beatings. "El Congo" suffered several fractures as a result of the beatings and was fined 30.00 pesos for peacefully opposing the government. (*Cubamet*, 8/1/07)

January 9: Respect for human rights has not improved in Cuba under interim leader Raul Castro, though the number of Cubans jailed for political reasons has fallen to 283, the country's main rights watchdog said. Cuba remains the Western hemispheric nation with the most political prisoners in proportion to its population, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said in its year-end report. The group, illegal but tolerated by Cuba's communist government, expects the civil liberties situation, from freedom of association and information to the right to travel and self-employment, to remain unchanged or deteriorate further because no reforms are in sight. "The provisional team designated by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro has done nothing to improve fundamental rights," said the commission, led by veteran rights activist Elizardo Sanchez. "Cuba's government continues to violate each and every civil, political and economic right," it said. Barring a "political miracle" short-term prospects for human rights are negative and there is little internal pressure on the ruling bureaucracy to change its policies, the commission's report said. "Due to the oppressive and repressive nature of the totalitarian regime and its enormous capability for social control, we cannot see any factors or components that are able to exert effective pressure on the government from inside Cuban society to begin a process of modernizing reforms," it said. (*Reuters*, 9/1/07)

January 10: Some influential Cuban intellectuals are laying plans for a more market-oriented approach to fortify the island's ailing communist economy. The debate over economic experimentation, squelched a decade ago by the Castro regime, offers a glimpse of what a post-Castro Cuba could look like. The Cuban economists' proposals would cut down on state interference in businesses and aim to wring more productivity out of the island nation's economy. Among the steps under discussion: decentralizing control, expanding the power of managers at privately owned agricultural cooperatives, extending private ownership to other sectors, boosting investment in infrastructure and increasing incentives to workers. None of the plans would shuck communism for capitalism or open the island further to foreign investment -- which economists outside Cuba say are critical for the island to prosper. But the fact that the government is permitting -- and perhaps even encouraging -- the debate suggests regime officials might find these kinds of changes acceptable, though it may take Mr. Castro's death to put them into action. "We are in the midst of a process of debate, which is cautious and controlled, but is happening for the first time in many years," said Pedro Monreal, a senior professor at the Center for Research on the International Economy in Havana. The disconnect between the Cuban government's claims and the Cuban's people's bleak living standards may increase popular pressure for change. "The Cuban people can believe that the economy is growing statistically, but it's not growing in their homes," says Rafael Hernandez, editor of the magazine "Temas" -- "Issues" in English -- a scholarly quarterly in Havana that writes about the Cuban political-economy and society. Mr. Hernandez says the government should pick up the renovation agenda that Mr. Castro and his brother Raul, now Cuba's acting president, shut down in 1996 for straying too far from socialist ideology and for potentially undermining political control. (*The Wall Street Journal*, 10/1/07)

January 10: Recent public appearances by three former Cuban officials linked to harsh political purges in the cultural sector during the 1960s and '70s has aroused the ire of some of the island's intellectuals and artists. The unusually public criticisms posted on the Internet include comments by three winners of Cuba's top literary prize, the National Literature Award, and several other well-known authors and artists. The intellectuals demand an urgent response from the government in view of the "political error" represented by the reappearance of the former officials, most of them now in their 80s and not seen in public for many years. The controversy arose after an appearance by Luis Pavón Tamayo, former chairman of the National Culture Council, on a Cuban television program on January 7. Pavón was in charge of the harsh cultural policy that alienated and censured hundreds of Cuban writers and artists in the early 1970s. The TV program -- devoted to Pavón as part of a series on Cubans who have influenced the nation's culture -- exalted him, displaying medals that he won and showing photos of him with high-ranking government officials. "There he was, dressed in white, the great arbiter of important artists," wrote Havana author and National Literature Award winner Antón Arrufat in a letter posted on the Internet. "He was the man who hounded them and expelled them from their jobs, the man who (...) took away their wages and jobs, condemned them to ostracism and social vilification." Also

signing messages of support for Arrufat posted on the Internet were authors and artists Miguel Barnet, Desiderio Navarro, Arturo Arango, Enrique Pineda Barnet, Jorge Angel Pérez, Ena Lucía Portela, Senel Paz, and Sigfredo Ariel. A Cuban TV program on December 13, 2006, included an appearance by Jorge Serguera, a former prosecutor in the trials that sent dozens of Fidel Castro opponents before firing squads in the early 1960s and later head of the Cuban Institute of Radio Broadcasting. In November, another Cuban television program interviewed Armando Quesada, a subordinate of Pavón's who in the 1960s was in charge of watching over the ideological purity of Cuba's theatrical world. The controversy arose a few weeks after the resignation of Carlos Martí as president of UNEAC, apparently for personal reasons. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 10/1/07)

January 10: Cuban dissident Manuel Valdes Tamayo, one of 75 activists jailed in a massive crackdown in 2003 and released a year later for health reasons, died, according to one of the island's leading activists. He was 50. Valdes Tamayo died of a heart attack, Martha Beatriz Roque, also among the original group of detained activists, told the press. He had been released from prison June 9, 2004, because of his health problems. Valdes Tamayo was among 75 dissidents rounded up in the spring of 2003 and sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 28 years. Sixteen of those prisoners, including Valdes Tamayo and Roque, had since been released for health reasons. Roque said the dissident had been waiting for government permission to leave the island. Cuban authorities have allowed two of the 16 activists -- poet Raul Rivero and independent journalist Manuel Vazquez Portal -- to leave. "He hoped to be able to go," said Roque, adding that Valdes Tamayo "was a very loved man" among Cuban dissidents. (*AP*, 11/1/07)

January 11: Cuban dissidents and wives of political prisoners paid their respects to activist Miguel Valdes Tamayo, who died of a heart attack at age 50. He was one of 75 government opponents jailed in a massive crackdown in 2003. Laura Pollan, whose husband, Hector Maseda, is one of 59 prisoners from the group still behind bars, urged the Cuban government to release all the men. Valdes Tamayo was sentenced to 15 years in prison, but was released after a year for health reasons. "He is the first, but there are others who are very sick who are going to follow him," Pollan said at the Havana funeral home, where he was taken ahead of burial at the Colon Cemetery. "They have to return our men to us." Pollan is a member of the Ladies in White, a group of wives and mothers of political prisoners who peacefully march every Sunday after church to demand their loved ones' liberation. "He was already sick when he arrived at prison, but he got worse there," said Carmelo Diaz, one of those released. "This loss is irreparable." (*AP*, 11/1/07)

January 11: A group of scientists exploring caves in Matanzas, Cuba, has astonished the island's scientific community with the discovery of fossil remains of a giant owl. The discovery by the Matanzas Speleology Group is considered an important source of evidence of the country's fauna and food chain over the last 20,000 years. The fossilized "eagle owl" was a bird of prey with small talons and a large beak, better adapted for running than flight, which made it easy prey for other species, thus reducing its population. A similar bird was found in the 60's, also in a Matanzas cave. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/1/07)

January 11: Cuba's new TV news channel ACN, a new information support with a dynamic vision of Cuban life, was presented at the 8th National Written Press Festival. Esteban Ramirez, general director of Cuba's National Information Agency (AIN), which heads this project, said they want to bring press material and messages from Cuba to Cuban collaborators abroad, mainly in Bolivia and Venezuela. ACN has an attractive design, with three application modules and is presently visible for 70,000 Cuban inhabitants living in mountainous zones. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/1/07)

January 11: "Journalism and loyalty to the Revolution" is the motto of the 8th Festival of the National Print Media taking place in Havana's Convention Center. During the event, some 450 delegates and guests will meet to exchange ideas and experiences with the hope of maximizing their work, Granma newspaper reported. A total of two panel discussions include one on "The effectiveness of the Cuban Print Media" and another on "The quality and Reach of Cuban Digital Journalism." Several other workshops will be held on other topics such as how to measure the impact of reporting, tools to improve digital design and the Internet as a source of consultation. The first print media festival took

place in November 1999, in response to a call from Fidel Castro to fight the "Battle of Ideas" both inside the country and abroad. (*AIN*, 11/1/07)

January 12: A recent episode of a Cuban television detective serial portrayed the Abakuá secret society in an unusually favourable light, after more than a century of discrimination and calumnies in Cuba against this sect of African origin. In an intentionally didactic manner, the programme made a clear distinction between this mutual-aid religious brotherhood and criminals, with whom it was formerly identified in Cuba, and stressed the ethical and moral values demanded of those who wish to join it. In an interview with the press, Cuban anthropologist and expert on religious affairs Jesús Robaina said that at present, Cuba "has shifted from merely tolerating, to accepting and living with" this particular sect. Unlike other Afro-Cuban religions, Abakuá or Níñiga, as it is also known, is selective and only for men, and it maintains rigorous silence about the mystery of its beliefs. In Robaina's view, the members of the Abakuá religion "became essential and fundamental components of Cuban nationality, because of the cultural resistance that was the basis of their action." That is why "there is now political understanding of the need for this religion as part of our national values, and a participative process with Abakuá practitioners is being developed, to contribute to demolishing the negative legends that surround them," he added. There were 120 recognised lodges in 2005, and in 2006 there were 147, with a membership of more than 20,000. This number may already have increased because after Jan. 6, Abakuá Day on the island, new initiations always occur. Robaina said a study of eight lodges in 2004-2005 found "an increase in membership, including graduates and university students." (*IPS*, 12/1/07)

January 12: The 8th National Festival of the Cuban Print Media came to a close with a call for stepped up training of journalists in the new computer technologies and more effective use of the Internet to circulate Cuba's reality and positions to combat the hostile international mass media. Rolando Alfonso Borges, head of the Ideological Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee, gave the closing speech. "We need a press at the same height as the major transformations and needs of the Revolution," said Alfonso adding, "People must see their problems and concerns increasingly reflected in the media. For that to happen we need investigations, a wealth of language, and creativity with professional and political responsibility." The final session opened with a presentation by Eliades Acosta, director of the National Library, who suggested a richer use of language in tune with daily life in Cuba to achieve a better communication with the population. He also emphasized the need to make increased use of the numerous sources available like archives, libraries and the Internet to back up journalist's arguments and unmask distortions of history that he said take place on a regular basis. Several presentations were made on the quality and reach of the Cuban online press. The island's media currently has 128 Internet sites, 34 of which belong to newspapers and local and national magazines. In graphics, the need was shown to seek ways to increase the visibility of the Cuban websites. (*Granma*, 15/1/07)

January 13: Fidel Castro's eldest son said that his ailing father was on the mend and in good spirits. "He is recovering, I see him recovering," Fidel Castro Diaz-Balart, 54, told reporters in the southern Chilean city of Valdivia. "He is in good spirits and optimistic." Castro Diaz-Balart, a nuclear scientist, was in Chile for the inauguration of a scientific research center. He attended a dinner hosted by President Michelle Bachelet. (*AP*, 13/1/07)

January 14: Cuba's ambassador in the Dominican Republic said that, due to his condition and the fact that he's 80 years old, it's very unlikely that Fidel Castro will return to that nation's presidency. Juan Astiasarán Ceballos said however that the revolution and socialism will remain in the Caribbean island-nation with or without Castro's physical presence. The diplomat, speaking in a televised program, discarded that Castro's possible disappearance would lead to the formation of political parties different from the organization which rules in the Cuban state today. "At the moment most of the provincial and municipal ministers and officials are young people who are not over 40 years of age and are the people in charge of giving continuity to this process headed by our commander Fidel Castro," said the Cuban ambassador in the country. Interviewed in the program D'Agenda on Channel 11, Astiasarán said that during the revolutionary process which is more than 40 years old, Castro sought to create a political-state structure able to maintain the revolution beyond his death. (*Dominican Today*, 15/1/07)

January 16: Fidel Castro has had at least three failed operations and complications from an intestinal infection and faces "a very grave prognosis," a Spanish newspaper reported. The newspaper El Pais cited two unnamed sources from the Gregorio Marañón hospital in the Spanish capital of Madrid. The facility employs surgeon Jose Luis García Sabrido, who flew to Cuba in December to treat the 80-year-old Castro. The Spanish newspaper said that Mr. Castro, who has not been seen in public since July 26, had suffered from diverticulitis, a serious ailment caused when the bulges that sometimes form in the colon of older people become infected. El Pais said: "A grave infection in the large intestine, at least three failed operations and various complications have left the Cuban dictator, Fidel Castro, laid up with a very grave prognosis." El Pais' report, which could not immediately be confirmed, was a rare detailed description from a major media outlet about Castro's condition. A Cuban diplomat in Madrid said the reports were lies and declined to comment. "It's another lie and we are not going to talk about it. If anyone has to talk about Castro's illness it's Havana," the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of official policy. Quoting an unidentified diplomat from a country with close relations to Cuba, Reuters said Mr. Castro was taken to the operating room seven times in a single day in December to deal with the problem. (*AP, Reuters, Globe & Mail, Toronto Star, 16/1/07*)

January 16: The latest rumor whispered on the crumbling streets of Havana is that ailing leader Fidel Castro cannot appear in public because he lost his hair -- and his famous beard -- to chemotherapy for cancer. Cubans searching for reasons for the almost six-month public absence of the 80-year-old revolutionary can only speculate about what's wrong with him, for lack of official word. They do not know what he has or even where he is being treated. Cuba's communist leadership has kept water-tight secrecy around Castro's health crisis and told Cubans nothing other than reiterations that the "comandante" is recovering slowly and will be back. There have been no leaks from Castro's inner circle and his doctors have reportedly been sequestered since his emergency surgery in late July. Cuban officials decline to comment on news reports from abroad, the only source of information about Castro for the few Cubans who have access to Internet or get to watch Miami television stations on illegal satellite dishes. Cubans, whether they support Castro or not, are worried about their country's future in the vacuum he will leave. Some are angry they are not being told the full story. (*Reuters, 16/1/07*)

January 17: Fidel Castro himself told surgeons not to perform a colostomy, opting instead for a course of surgery that produced a complication leaving the Cuban leader in far worse condition, according to a newspaper report. The shortcut involved sewing the colon to the rectum but did not heal properly and broke apart, releasing gastric fluid with feces that caused serious infection, El Pais said. The newspaper reported a day earlier that Castro's prognosis was "very serious" and that he is being fed intravenously after three failed operations for diverticulitis, or pouch-like bulges in the large intestine that get infected. "It sounds like they tried to spare him the colostomy, which would have been the safer and more conservative approach," said Dr. Meyer Solny, a gastrointestinal expert at New York Presbyterian Hospital. (*AP, Reuters, 17/1/07*)

January 17: Reports by a Spanish newspaper about Fidel Castro's health were based on rumors, and the Cuban president is in fact showing "some progressive improvement," said the Spanish surgeon who examined him last month in Cuba. "The only truthful parts of the newspaper's reports are the name of the patient, that he has been operated on, and that he has had complications," said the surgeon, Dr. Jose Luis Garcia Sabrido. "The rest is rumors." The doctor disputed reports by El Pais that Castro was in serious condition following surgery. The paper cited unnamed medical sources at the Gregorio Marañón hospital in Madrid, where Garcia Sabrido is the chief surgeon. "According to my information, there is even some progressive improvement in Castro," Garcia Sabrido said, adding "that is normal for a patient who is recovering and where there are no incidents." (*CNN, 17/1/07*)

January 18: Communist Cuba's official guild of writers and artists has expressed its solidarity with intellectuals who criticized the air time given recently to the regime's most stringent censors from a generation ago, figures now generally discredited for their persecution of homosexuals and anyone who deviated even slightly from the party line. The creative professionals' union, known as UNEAC, issued a communique seconding the "just indignation" expressed

by authors and filmmakers in Cuba at seeing the heavy-handed cultural gatekeepers from the 1970s taking part in several programs broadcast by the government. Particularly galling to the artists was the participation of Luis Pavon Tamayo, who presided over the National Cultural Council from 1971 to '76. Culture Minister Abel Prieto, other high-ranking members of the Communist Party, and authorities of the Cuban Broadcasting Institute (ICRT) met with a score of upset intellectuals in an effort to calm the waters. Among the local creative figures angry at seeing Pavon on the tube were writers Anton Arrufat, Reynaldo Gonzalez, Cesar Lopez, Reina Maria Rodriguez and filmmaker Senel Paz. The polemic spread via Internet, and the local artists received the support of exiled intellectuals including Abilio Estevez and Eliseo Alberto. The UNEAC said in its communique that, during the conciliatory meeting, the ICRT acknowledged that it was "a mistake" to broadcast the programs refloating discredited figures from the past. But the official union also lamented that "this intense exchange of opinion" was being taken advantage of by exiles "who obviously are working for the enemy." (*EFE*, 18/1/07)

January 18: Juan Carlos Herrera, a political prisoner sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2003, denounced the harassment and threats by prison authorities at the Kilo 8 prison in Camagüey. Herrera was interrogated by a State Security agent who told him that "people who act like him could be found hanged or murdered in their cells". (*Cubanet*, 18/1/07)

January 19: Fidel Castro is making a "slow but progressive" recovery although his condition is serious due to his advanced age, a Spanish doctor who has examined him said. Castro, 80, has suffered complications after undergoing surgery on his digestive system but could return to normal activities if he makes a full recovery, Dr. Jose Luis Garcia Sabrido told the press in an interview. "I have recent information that his recovery is slow but progressive," said Garcia Sabrido, who examined Castro in Havana late last year and is a consultant to his medical team. Castro has not been seen in public since July, fuelling speculation he is so ill he may never return to power. The surgeon largely dismissed other reports in *El Pais* that Castro had undergone three botched operations for diverticulitis or bulges in the large intestine. "They are full of inaccuracies -- they are fundamentally rumours, and in some extreme cases absolutely false," said the doctor, who regularly visits Cuba for medical conferences and medical consultations. He said he did not know who *El Pais*'s sources were, but recommended scrutiny regarding reports on Castro's health. "Good, good information, comes from few sources, the rest you can consider rumour and in some cases speculation," he said. Ana Alfageme, one of the *El Pais* reporters who wrote the stories, told the press Garcia Sabrido was not their source. (*Reuters*, 19/1/06)

January 21: A debate over economic reforms that flourished inside Cuba in the early 1990s, until a crackdown in 1996, appears to be reemerging under the presumably more pragmatic rule of interim leader Raúl Castro. "There is a debate," said Rafael Hernández, the editor of the quarterly Cuban magazine "Temas" ("Issues"), and one of the country's leading intellectuals. Hernández said the debate taking place at different levels of Cuba's government and society focuses on proposals such as decentralizing the highly centralized economy, forming cooperatives in areas outside of agriculture, and creating openings for more small and medium-size private enterprises. "In Cuba, no IMF formula is foreseeable," said Hernández, referring to the International Monetary Fund and its free-market economic policies. Another proponent of reforms, prominent Cuban economist Pedro Monreal, recently told *The Wall Street Journal* that Cuba needs an overhaul to inject motivation and innovation into the economy although the direction of the debate is difficult to follow. "It's a kind of black-box process," he said. Reached by telephone in Havana, Monreal said he told *The Wall Street Journal* what he wanted to say and would have no further comment. (*The Miami Herald*, 21/1/07)

January 21: Many Cuba watchers were shocked to see that there were no protests, not even a peep of public dissent, in the months following the announcement that Fidel Castro had undergone surgery and ceded power to his younger brother, Defense Minister Raul Castro. But to Dagoberto Valdes, a 51-year-old Roman Catholic layman who has spent more than a decade quietly working to change Cuba, the collective silence came as no surprise. "The art of thinking has been damaged tremendously [among Cubans]. During this half-century, we have been forced to think like one person,"

said Valdes, referring to Fidel Castro. "Now we are teaching people again to think with their own head." While experts focus on whether Cuba is poised for large-scale economic and political changes, Valdes believes that change must start with the average Cuban citizen. Working out of a cramped office in the Catholic Archdiocese in the western city of Pinar del Rio, Valdes conducts workshops and publishes a magazine aimed at introducing Cubans to such alien concepts as free speech and freedom of association. "We believe at the bottom of all these limitations, isolations and closures, there is fear," he wrote. "A fear of the truth, a fear of debate (...) a fear of losing control." Valdes says his efforts are like "a drop in the ocean," but he is optimistic about Cuba's future given the recent change in leadership and what he describes as the resilience of the human spirit. "I believe in the capacity of the Cuban people to recover," he said. "The secret is (...) freedom." (*Chicago Tribune*, 21/1/07)

January 22: Cuba's vice president said that Fidel Castro continued to recover from intestinal surgery and the country was operating normally in his absence. Vice President Jose Ramon Fernandez indicated the leader is recovering and added that "after six months of his convalescence the nation is functioning with normality," the official Prensa Latina news agency reported. Cuban authorities deny Castro suffers from terminal cancer, as US intelligence officials have claimed. Cuban officials have nonetheless stopped insisting Castro will return to power. (*AP*, 23/1/07)

January 22: With power transferred to Fidel Castro's brother Raul, Cuban dissidents have begun testing the island's political waters after decades of ironclad rule, but found little hope of fundamental changes. "I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel," said Martha Beatriz Roque, the "iron lady" of Cuban dissidents. The almost six months since Raul Castro, 75, was named acting president by his ailing brother, were marked by "a continuation of the totalitarian regime," she said. "We are still waiting to see what happens, but after six months of ups and downs, the tension is still there," said Elizardo Sanchez, a leading opponent of the communist regime. He said nothing short "of a true political miracle" would bring about an improvement in the human rights situation on the Caribbean island. Sanchez admits there has been a drop in the number of political prisoners last year, but claims this is just a new strategy by the government, which now favors short but frequent detentions and intimidation rather than long prison terms. "We still face days of tension, particularly for us since our husbands are still prisoners of 'Doctor Castro' and nobody dares do anything with them until his fate is decided and Raul definitely takes power," says Laura Pollan, of the "Ladies in White" group. For now, the prisoners "as well as the entire country, will remain in a limbo, that is why we don't expect any to be released," said Pollan. Moderate dissident Manuel Cuesta is among the few members of the fractious opposition who sees improvements, saying "a relative drop in repression" has slightly eased tension, facilitating efforts to strengthen "cohabitation between the government and the opposition." (*AFP*, 22/1/07)

January 23: A Jewish couple finally got married in Havana under a Chuppah canopy according to Jewish custom. It was no ordinary ceremony. Twenty other couples of all ages took their marriage vows in a ritual officiated by three visiting Argentine rabbis. It was the largest wedding members of Cuba's depleted Jewish community can remember and a sign of a revival of Judaism in a country where there has been no resident rabbi since an exodus of Jews fleeing Fidel Castro's communist government in the early 1960s. The mass nuptials at the restored conservative Beth Shalom synagogue, the largest of three in Havana, were preceded by 70 conversions, including whole families, and dozens of young Cubans. When Castro took power in 1959, there was a flourishing and prosperous Jewish community of 15,000 in Cuba. Within a few years, as the new government nationalized businesses and steered Cuba toward communism, 90 percent of them left for southern Florida, Mexico, Venezuela and Israel. Cuba became an atheist state and the synagogues emptied. Congregations fell below the quorum for prayer ceremonies as Jews that stayed assimilated into the new status quo, stopped teaching their children Hebrew and lost their customs. Things changed after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and Cuba struggled to survive a severe economic crisis. Cuba became a secular state and allowed religious worship even by card-carrying Communist Party members. Impoverished Cuban Jews began to receive aid from abroad, especially the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which has helped rebuild a community of 1,500 people. Community leaders say their numbers have doubled, but many young Cuban Jews have immigrated to Israel. "People have left for different reasons, but there has been a constant renewal. This is a crucial moment in our revival," said Annette Eli, a young architect. (*Reuters*, 23/1/07)

January 23: Acting President Raul Castro is pressing for a reorganization of Cuba's state-dominated economy to extend the "enterprise perfection" model that was pioneered by the island's business-minded armed forces, official media reported. Thirty-two percent of the country's firms operate under the enterprise perfection model, launched 20 years ago within the military and extended 7 1/2 years ago to civil firms, said the executive secretary of the Governmental Group for Enterprise Perfection, Col. Armando Perez Betancourt. At the end of 2006, a total of 844 firms were employing the model, including 77 managed by the armed forces, while another 500 were in the process of applying to use it, according to Communist Party daily Granma. "If we want the entire economy to function better, and it is shown that with the perfection (model) this can be achieved, even if everything is not perfect, the issue is for more firms to enter into the system," Perez added. With the extension of the enterprise perfection model, Cuba is trying to increase productivity and efficiency and reduce the serious problems existing within the island's industrial network, from the lack of on-the-job discipline to labor organization problems. (*EFE, Granma, Reuters, 23/1/07*)

January 23: Dolia Leal Francisco, one of the founders of the "Ladies in White", made a desperate appeal for the life of her husband and political prisoner, Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, in an open letter to world leaders. "Nelson is living in a terrible hell", says Dolia in the letter addressed to presidents and heads of democratic governments, Pope Benedict XVI, UN Secretary-general, the International Red Cross and human rights organizations in the world. (*Cubanet, 23/1/07*)

January 25: Ailing Fidel Castro, who dropped from public view six months ago after undergoing emergency surgery, is recovering and is still in charge of Cuba, a senior government official said. "He is still at the helm," Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, told reporters. Alarcon said the 80-year-old Cuban leader was out of sight because he was following strict doctor's instructions for his recovery "which is going very well." Alarcon said the timing of Fidel Castro's return to public life would depend on his recovery and indicated that skeptics were in for a surprise. Alarcon dismissed as "speculation by gossip mongers" a Spanish newspaper report that Castro had had a series of three failed operations on his large intestine since last July that caused severe infection. (*Reuters, 25/1/07*)

January 25: Cuban writer Alberto Abreu received the Casa de Las Americas 2007 Award in the category of artistic-literary essay. Abreu, a narrator and art critic, won the award unanimously for his essay "Los juegos de la escritura o la (re) escritura de la Historia" (The games of writing or re-writing history). Likewise, Argentinean writer and journalist Susana Silvestre took the prize for her novel "Mil y una" (A thousand and one), while his compatriot Rafael Spregelburd was awarded in the category of theater. Uruguayan Edda Fabbri was recognized in testimonial literature with "Oblivion"; Brazilian Ana Maria Goncalves, was also acknowledged for her novel "Um defeito de cor". (*AIN, 25/1/07*)

January 27: Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez told Guatemalan reporters that the health of his country's president, Fidel Castro, shows progressive improvement and announced his prompt return to power. "I can say that his recovery is progressive," the Cuban deputy foreign minister told reporters, adding that Castro is convalescing acceptably, but through "a natural process that is necessarily slow." According to the deputy foreign minister, the Cuban president is following doctors' orders "and will return to the full exercise of his responsibilities as soon as the doctors think it appropriate." Rodriguez said that Fidel Castro is keeping up to date on events in Cuba and is being consulted on the important decisions being taken in the country. (*EFE, 27/1/07*)

January 27: Josefina Mendez, world renowned as one of "the four jewels" of the Cuban National Ballet (BNC), passed away in Havana after a four-year battle with cancer. Her death brings sorrow not only to the Cuban dance stage, but to all of the island's culture, since she was one of its most valuable exponents. A ballerina of the highest quality, she brought glory to an entire age of the Cuban ballet, with her solid technical and artistic training, her stylistic ductility. Possessor of a complex and charismatic personality, in which perfectionism, good taste, sense of humor, refined irony and almost tragic sobriety coexisted, she knew how to use all these features for the successful portrayal of the most varied characters. (*Granma, 27/1/07*)

January 28: The Cuban newspaper "Juventud Rebelde" urged drivers of the new Chinese buses "Yutong" to be more careful as they were involved in 437 traffic accidents from July 2005 to the end 2006. Of the 437 accidents, 313 were considered minor, 88 less serious, 11 serious and 25 fatal. (*EFE*, 28/1/07)

January 28: Dissident doctor, Darsi Ferrer, was besieged by over a dozen government supporters who gathered in front of his house to prevent visitors from going in or out of the house. The group were mostly individuals over fifty years of age, pensioners and militants of the Communist Party. Some neighbours expressed to Ferrer their disapproval of the constant harassment to which he and his family are subjected. (*Cubamet*, 31/1/07)

January 29: With the production of 79,000 doses of recombinant streptokinase in 2006, Cuba upped manufacturing of this life-saving medicine 50 percent over initial 2003 production, Cuba's National Bio-preparedness Center reported. Recombinant streptokinase is used to treat thrombosis and heart attacks, given intravenously as soon as possible after the onset of a heart attack to dissolve clots, BIO-CEN active ingredients plant chief, chemical engineer Dervis Llopiz, explained. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/1/07)

January 29: Cuban writers who believe in democracy and freedom of expression joined a "Quixotic" and dangerous - to themselves - project to publish fiction, poetry and essays that have no chance of dissemination on the Communist-ruled island, and their collected work was hailed here as "a gesture of love." The Pan America Development Foundation has sponsored a book which, under the title "Voices of Change: New Cuban Literature," offers a collection of works by 21 authors living in Cuba but opposed to the Fidel Castro regime. The anthology, published in Miami and presented in New York, includes essays, journalism, poetry and short stories that unanimously express the desire for change in Cuba on the part of the authors who, in some cases, are prisoners on the island. "This book is a civil-society project that comes out of a literary contest unique in all the world, one in which those participating risk their liberty just by taking part," said Marc Wachtenheim of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba/ICDC at the presentation of the anthology in New York. "Voices of Change" is the result of the fourth edition of the El Heraldito contest, organized by the Independent Libraries of Cuba, a project that puts in circulation books that have been banned on the island. It was preceded in 2003 by the acclaimed "Eyes Open: New Voices in Cuban Literature." (*EFE*, 29/1/07)

January 29: ETECSA, state-run telecom entity, will introduce as of next May 26 numbers of seven digits in the capital's telephone system. This measure will ensure service capacities in this city by expanding the access availability adding 6 as prefix to all numbers south of the city and 7 to those east of the capital. Jose Antonio Roche, deputy Manager of Institutional Communication of ETECSA, explained to local media that capital municipalities like Boyeros, Arroyo Naranjo and 10 de Octubre, are among those with the changes in benefit of users who only have to add a 6 before the usual numbers. He said in the case of Guanabacoa and Eastern Havana, located east of the capital, residents will have to dial 7 before the rest of the number. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/1/07)

January 30: Cuban state television showed a video of Fidel Castro meeting with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and saying his recovery was "far from a lost battle," in the first images of the ailing leader in three months. Castro stood and appeared alert in the 10-minute video clip, which state TV said was shot during Chavez's previously unannounced visit to Havana on January 29. Castro looked heavier than in previous images that showed him much more thin and frail. He stood in most of the images, but at one point he seemed to be reclining on a high chair. He mumbled some of his words and seemed to gasp for air in between sentences, and overall looked frail and still ailing. Dressed in a red, white and blue track suit, the 80-year-old was shown sitting and drinking juice. "This also is far from being a lost battle," Castro said of his current health problems. Later in the video, Chavez was even more optimistic, saying Castro had already won the battle to recover his health. The Venezuelan president's brother, Education Minister Adan Chavez, was also seen in the video visiting Castro. (*AP*, *The Miami Herald*, 30/1/07)

January 30: The papal nuncio in Cuba, archbishop Luigi Bomazzi, called on the unity of all Christians during the closing of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Along with the nuncio, the liturgical celebration was presided over

by the bishop of the Anglican dioceses of Cuba and Uruguay, reverend Miguel E. Tamayo Zaldívar. Also present were representatives from different denominations of the ecumenical world with representation in the country. (*OCB*, 30/1/07)

January 30: Writers and publishers are gearing up for the Cuban International Book Fair 2007 that takes place in Havana from February 8 to 18 before extending throughout the island until March 11. Argentina is this year's international guest of honor at the popular event in its 16th edition. Tribute will also be paid to Cuban poet, essayist and literary critic Cesar Lopez (National Prize in Literature 1999) and Cuban essayist and researcher Eduardo Torres-Cuevas (National Social Science Award 2000). All together, 82 foreign book sellers are set to staff stands representing 550 publishers from 28 countries along with 53 Cuban publishing houses, said Maria Mederos, vice president of the Cuban Book Institute and Book Fair general manager during a press conference in the capital. Argentinean Ambassador to Havana Dario Alessandro announced at the press conference that his country's booksellers will be housed at a 516 square meter pavilion and that a large delegation led by Argentinean Secretary of Culture Jose Nun will participate in the event. (*Granma*, 31/1/07)

January 31: More than 400 Cuban writers and artists met for an unprecedented debate on censorship of Cuban culture in the 1970s. Attendance was by invitation only. Organized by the Magazine "Criterios", the conference titled the "Dark Quinquennium" was held at the Casa de las Américas in the wake of the controversial reappearance of former censors on television in early January. About one hundred young people who wanted to participate in the conference chanted "Desiderio: hear my opinion", "Desiderio: I want to express my opinion," in reference to intellectual Desiderio Navarro, one of the promoters of the meeting. "The group of young people here knows they will not let us in but we want them to see that we are here," said Lizabel Mónica, a 25-year-old writer. "We do not plan to stand by quietly," she added. (*Reuters*, 31/1/07)

Economy

January 2: The Dominican Republic branded as "very positive" the growth in trade with Cuba. Dominican ambassador in Cuba Daniel Guerrero said that numerous of the hotels there consume foods produced in Dominican soil, as well as construction material and furniture manufactured in the Dominican Republic. Guerrero pointed out that, notwithstanding the difference in the political and economic realities, Cuban firms and investors there "are interested in assessing Dominican products." Among others, the Dominican Republic and Cuba exchange medical, agrichemical and food products. (*EFE*, 2/1/07)

January 3: Cuba estimates to have achieved record-high sales of its rum brand Havana Club of over 2.6 million cases of Havana Club rum for 2006, Havana Club brand director, Manuel Arias, said. Domestic sales represent 900,000 cases of the total. At the beginning of January 2007 Cuba will open a plant for the production of Havana Club rum in San Jose de las Lajas, Havana province, northern Cuba. Cuba targets to sell five million cases of Havana Club rum in 2013. (*Latin America News Digest*, 3/1/07)

January 4: The Central American airline TACA announced that it will operate a direct flight between San Jose and Havana, replacing the existing flight to the island through El Salvador. The flights between Costa Rica and Cuba will have connections to El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico. (*EER*, 4/1/07)

January 4: Cuba fulfilled its plan to produce 3.9 million tons of oil and natural gas in 2006, and it continues exploration activities at 30 wells operated by foreign firms and state-owned Cubapetroleo, officials said. That production is equivalent to 69.6 million barrels of crude and represents a nearly sevenfold increase over the figure for 1990. It is also sufficient to meet half of Cuba's demand for oil and natural gas. In addition, it means savings of \$260

million for the communist-ruled island, according to estimates by Vice President Carlos Lage and published in the latest edition of the weekly newspaper Opciones. State television reported that in 2006, specialized brigades worked at 30 oil wells, six of them currently operated by Cubapetroleo, or Cupet. A spokesman for the state oil firm said that it planned to drill 12 new wells in 2007, guaranteeing the country an annual crude production level of 2.2 million tons. (EFE, 4/1/07)

January 4: Cuba's coffee harvest was winding down with output estimated by Reuters up by around 30 percent at between 180,000 and 225,000 60-kg bags, based on local media and sources reports. Reuters estimated the 2005/2006 crop at around 140,000 60-kg bags, one of the lowest in 50 years, due mainly to hurricane damage to eastern Santiago de Cuba, responsible for close to a third of national production, where output was halved. Above-average rainfall has broken a three-year drought in eastern and central Cuba, where almost all Cuban coffee is grown, and the area was spared hurricane damage this season. "Santiago surpassed 1,950,000 cans of coffee collected, doubling what was collected last year," the official daily Granma reported, attributing the improvement to "more resources, better labor organization and normal rainfall." The state increased by up to 100 percent what it pays for beans this harvest. (Reuters, 4/1/07)

January 9: Cuban sugar mills were opening on time this month as the season began, with 11 in operation and another 15 to open this week, according to a sugar ministry statement published in the official weekly "Trabajadores." Cuba is banking on this season marking the start of a new era for what was once its most important industry, after a 15-year decline from 8 million raw tonnes of sugar produced in 1990 to just 1.2 million tonnes in 2005. Rising sugar and ethanol prices led to a government decision last year to invest once more in the industry after a downsizing that closed more than half the country's mills and reduced plantations by 60 percent. "The number of mills grinding cane increased to 11 (...) during this week around 15 more mills will begin operations, with the remainder of the 50 mills opening as scheduled," the statement said, adding while a few mills opened late due to rainfall, others opened early to compensate. Cuban Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro told a parliament commission in December there was 28 percent more cane to grind and greater mill efficiency meant total raw sugar output would increase by 32 percent this year to around 1.6 million tonnes. (Reuters, 9/1/07)

January 10: Havana Club, the rum maker owned by French drinks company Pernod Ricard SA, said it is opening a new factory just outside Havana, Cuba. In a statement, Havana Club said the move is aimed at meeting rising demand for its rum. The plant will have a capacity of 12,000 bottles an hour. Havana Club wants to lift sales of its rum to 5 million crates a year by 2013. (Dow Jones, 10/1/07)

January 10: Vice President Carlos Lage toured several important production centers in the province of Havana including the Conrado Benitez Electrical Cables Production Plant. New investments at the plant that operates under the trademark ELEKA have doubled the industry's production of copper wire and pre-processed aluminum bars for making electrical conductors to supply the countries needs. The vice president asked questions about the work environment, labor discipline and control measures against workplace theft. At the national warehouse for Cuban and imported pharmaceuticals, manager Jorge Carballo reported that the number of products considered in low availability (products with a limited 30-day supply) had dropped to 41 and that there are only 3 products that are currently not available at all of a total of 849 medicines required by the ministry of Public Health. He said that adding the state of the raw materials and the production of pharmaceuticals to the database are still pending in order to complete a comprehensive product inventory. The Cuban vice president appealed to permanent vigilance against theft in this entity, where every month about 700 tons of medicine is handled. Lage also visited the Vita Nova Pastas Production Plant that represents an investment of \$4.3 million USD. (Granma, 10/1/07)

January 11: Belize's Minister of Agriculture Vildo Marin and Chief Agriculture Officer Eugene Waight are presently on a one week visit to Cuba. While in Cuba Minister Marin will meet with his counterpart Maria del Carmen Perez to discuss possible areas of cooperation. A Government press release said special areas of interest will be visits to urban

and peri-urban cooperative agriculture production areas. Belize has expressed interest in getting technical assistance from Cuba in the area of biological control of pests and diseases. Cuba has developed a number of commercial products that is used in organic and sustainable agriculture production systems. Belize has also initiated with Cuba the preparation of an M-O-U for cooperation in plant health. Once agreed upon, Belize will be able to exchange plant genetic material with Cuba. (*LoveFM News*, 11/1/07)

January 12: The Cuban power industry produced the economy's most outstanding achievement in 2006: the elimination by 90 per cent of damaging and annoying electricity shortages. In less than a year, over 1,000 Megawatts of generating capacity have been installed. The electrogen groups responsible for the increase were distributed in 116 of the 169 municipalities of the island. Investment in the diesel power generators (for 1,311 MW) is practically completed. They will supply all the needed electricity in the hours of highest demand. The annual report of the Ministry of Basic Industry confirmed that 6,301 electrogen groups have arrived in the country. Of that figure, 3,798 generators are already in operation. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/1/07)

January 16: About 300 businessmen and specialists from 23 countries from Latin America, Europe and Asia gathered in Havana to talk about the production and commercialization of honey. The First Meeting of Latin-American Beekeepers, was attended by delegations from Brazil, Cuba, Canada, Jamaica, Granada, Trinidad and Tobago, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Germany, Spain, Argentina, Guadalupe, Mexico, Bolivia, India, Italy, among other nations. (*EFE*, 16/1/07)

January 16: Cuba is forecasting a 32 % increase in sugar production this year as a result of higher volumes of sugar cane as well as improved industrial practices that will lead to better processing, said sector sources. According to unofficial figures, the island produced 1.2 million tons of the product last year, much lower than historical figures, and four years after a major restructuring of this traditional industry. (*AP*, 16/1/07)

January 18: A Quebec company is offering to arrange speedy health-care services for a fee in Cuba, but patients have to book their own flights. Services Sante International charges \$200 per medical file and patients must make their own flight and insurance arrangements. President and founder Lucie Vermette said that hip replacements cost between \$5,000 and \$6,000 and cataract operations cost \$2,000 in Cuba. The Cuban doctors also do esthetic surgery. (*Canadian Press*, 18/1/07)

January 18: Cuba celebrated the first anniversary of the energy revolution being undertaken across the island which has made a remarkable progress in the development of clean sources of energy and in the increase of power generation. The ceremony was attended by Cuban vice-president Carlos Lage and Minister of Basic Industry, Yadira Garcia, who highlighted the success of the policies implemented in the island since 2006 to save energy. Garcia said that in two years Cuba will have a more efficient electric system thanks to its modernization. (*AIN*, 18/1/07)

January 24: President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage strengthened relations between their friendly governments, by sealing 16 agreements harbouring promises of co-operation and greater joint efforts in agriculture, finance, telecoms, energy, tourism, transport and industry. The meeting, which took place in the Miraflores presidential palace in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, was largely unexpected. One of the accords will translate into the construction of a 1,552-km fibre-optic connection between the two countries to secure rapid telecom access to Cuba. Commitments to future mixed companies on maritime, railway, insurance and tourism sectors were also ratified. They aim in particular to bolster Venezuela's tourism to Cuba and improve parts of the island's infrastructure. Another mixed company should also be created to ensure the supply of nickel to Cuba. Additionally, and as part of the mixed-company plan, Venezuela's Basic Industry and Mining Minister José Khan confirmed that US\$240,000 will be invested in iron and steel and US\$280,000 in stainless steel. All of the subscribed accords fall within the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), which Chávez has promoted in Latin America as an

alternative scheme to the Free-Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) led by the US administration in Washington. [[Discurso de Carlos Lage en la firma de los acuerdos](#)] (*Prensa Latina, Global Insight, 25/1/07*)

January 24: Venezuela and Cuba took a new step toward expanding their economic alliance, with Caracas joining efforts to find possible petroleum reserves in Cuban waters of the Gulf of Mexico. With daily deliveries of 98,000 barrels of oil, leftist-led Venezuela is not only the communist-ruled island's top supplier but also its most important trade partner and the pillar on which a good portion of the foreign trade sector rests, with bilateral trade reaching \$2.6 billion last year. With the assignment to PDVSA of four of the 59 exploration blocks into which Havana has divided the offshore area, Venezuela entered into competition with six foreign oil companies to find petroleum in the gulf. Cuba opened its portion of the Gulf of Mexico's waters to foreign oil companies in 1999. Spain's Repsol YPF, Canada-based Sherrit, India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Norway's Norsk Hydro and Malaysia's Petronas have signed exploration contracts with state-owned Cuba Petroleo, or Cupet. A sixth company, whose name Cuban authorities have not revealed for fear that the United States might retaliate against it under Washington's economic embargo against the island, also signed an exploration deal. (*EFE, 25/1/07*)

January 25: President Hugo Chávez' Government said Cuba, jointly with Venezuelan state-run oil conglomerate PDVSA, is participating in the quantification of oil reserves in heavy-crude oil Orinoco belt. In a press release, they explained that both countries are taking part in joint projects of prospecting and certification of hydrocarbon reservoirs at the Orinoco oil belt and in Cuban waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Under these two agreements, initialed by PDVSA and Cubapetroleo (Cupet), both countries are to conduct prospecting and reserve certification at Boyacá Norte Block of the Orinoco oil belt, as well as in blocks N53, N54, N58 and N59 in Cuban waters of the Gulf of Mexico. (*El Universal, 26/1/07*)

January 25: In Havana, representatives from Cuba and Mexico began the 30th Annual bilateral meeting of Fishery Authorities to assess the operation of the Fishing Agreement they have had for more than thirty years. Among the topics for discussion is the formalization of an agreement that will apply for the 2007 fishing season. (*EFE, 25/1/07*)

January 25: The number of tourists visiting Cuba dropped 3.6 per cent last year due to high prices and not political uncertainty over Fidel Castro's illness, travel industry sources said. An outbreak of mosquito-borne dengue fever also scared some visitors away, they said this week. A tour operator in Havana reported only one cancellation – by a group of Russian tourists – due to fears of political turmoil if and when the ailing Castro dies. Cuba's cash-strapped economy relies heavily on tourism for foreign currency earnings. But visitors fell to 2.2 million last year from 2.3 million in 2005, the Cuban government said. It was the first drop since the September 11 attacks on the United States hurt the travel industry worldwide in 2002. Canadian tourism, source of 27 percent of Cuba's arrivals or about 600,000 a year, dipped for the first time in years, according to Cuban government figures. "Cancun and the Dominican Republic offered better deals," a Canadian diplomat said. Tour operators said Cuba lost its competitive edge when it revalued its currency by 8 percent in 2005. They said tourists get more quality for their money elsewhere. The Canadian Association of Tour Operators warned Cuba last year that it was losing out to other Caribbean destinations due to the lack of adequate service for tourists, theft of luggage at airports and hotels, and a failure to attend to complaints. (*Reuters, 25/1/07*)

January 28: A Quebec travel agency is offering clients a \$300 discount on its travel packages to Cuba in exchange for taking a suitcase full of personal items into the country. The company says it is simply acting as a middleman for expatriate Cubans wishing to send hard-to-find everyday items to Cuba. Montreal-based Antillas Express offers clients a rebate if they take a suitcase past Cuban customs. A spokesperson who did not want to be identified said the practice is legal and that the company assumes full responsibility for what's inside the luggage. "We check all the merchandise because it's in our interests that it reaches its destination," the spokesperson told the press. "It's not in our interest that the merchandise be confiscated at the Cuban border." She said relatives often use the service to send such items as

Aspirin, clothing and pens to family members back home. Company representatives pick up the suitcase at the airport, and then deliver the items to their intended recipients. (*Canadian Press*, 28/1/07)

January 29: The number of foreign companies operating in Cuba has continued to decline and a new investment expected from China has not materialized, a Cuban cabinet minister said. Joint ventures between Cuba's communist state and foreign investors fell to 236 at the end of 2006, down from 258 a year ago and 313 at the end of 2004, Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Minister Marta Lomas told the press. "We ended the year with 236," she said after a meeting with Prime Minister Aristides Gomes of Guinea Bissau. "We are not interested in doing too many (joint ventures), we are only interested in those that have an impact on the economy," she said. (*Reuters*, 29/1/07)

January 29: A senior Cuban official said Venezuela had replaced China in local plans to produce ferro-nickel at a partially completed plant in eastern Holguin province. "The Chinese are not continuing, we are redoing the project with Venezuela," Cuban Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Marta Lomas, told the press, when asked about the Camarioca nickel works. "We are forming a joint venture with Venezuela for Camarioca," Lomas said. China's state-owned Minmetals Corporation signed an agreement in 2004 to invest in Camarioca, but nothing has happened since then, according to western businessmen who supply the industry. Venezuela's taking over of the project should allow Cuba to start up the unfinished Las Camarioca plant, which has been mothballed since the demise of the Soviet Union 15 years ago. The two countries announced plans to produce stainless steel in Venezuela using Cuban ferro-nickel. Plans call for \$500 million to be invested in the ferro-nickel part of the project and \$600 million in the steel plant. Cuban officials have said in the past Camarioca could produce 68,000 tonnes of ferro-nickel annually (21,000 tonnes nickel). Ferro-nickel is an iron-nickel combination mostly used in steel-making. (*Reuters*, 29/1/07)

January 30: In Cuba, where the state controls 90 percent of the economy and the average wage is 367 pesos (\$17) a month plus full benefits, residents are complaining bitterly about food prices. As the country enters a period of transition due to Fidel Castro's illness, authorities are well aware they must quickly reverse a food production decline in the last two years that has caused many produce prices to double. Acting President Raul Castro, who temporarily took over the communist government from his brother six months ago, has put food supplies at the top of his agenda. At a session of Cuba's legislature in December, he criticized the state bureaucracy for arrears in payments to private farmers who provide 60 percent of Cuba's produce and called for economists to study the food supply problem. (*Reuters*, 30/1/07)

Exile Community

January 9: From Hialeah to Westchester, Cuban Americans wonder what the recent changes in leadership -- in both Havana and Washington -- will mean for the communist island. Some hold out hope for a thaw in Cold War-era US-Cuba relations. Democrats took the leadership posts in Congress for the first time in more than a decade -- just five months after Fidel Castro temporarily ceded authority to his brother, Raúl Castro. In Hialeah, the local political beachhead for Cubans who have recently arrived from the island, many new arrivals think Democrats should lift tight restrictions on travel and remittances, which prohibit visits to family in Cuba more than once every three years and to send more than \$100 a month to close relatives, such as a parent or spouse. Those restrictions were imposed by the Bush administration in 2004, just a few months before the president's reelection. But older, more established exiles, who arrived decades ago, are more likely to be registered to vote and believe the restrictions help strangle the Castro government. Many of them don't have close family left in Cuba -- or when they did, the Cuban government didn't allow travel there. Most vote Republican. Alberto González, a retired truck driver shopping for groceries at a Winn-Dixie in West Miami-Dade, mistrusts Democrats. "We will never forget what Kennedy did with the Bay of Pigs invasion, with the October crisis with the Russians and with Elián González," said González, 67. "Those are three stabs in the back

that the Democrats did to my generation of Cubans, and we will never forget that. The younger generations might feel differently." (*The Miami Herald*, 9/1/07)

January 11: The Cuban Committee for Human Rights criticized the increased harassment of dissidents. In Miami, the president of the organization, Ricardo Bofill, said that this condemnation is part of the extensive annual report on the situation on the island issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. "What is happening (...) is a rise in violence sanctioned by the government undertaken by citizens (...) who take justice into their own hands", said Bofill. He also added that he fully agrees with the report issued by the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN). (*EER*, 11/1/07)

January 16: Cuban exiles in Paris conducted a peaceful protest in front of the Cuban embassy, organized by the French Colectivo Solidaridad Cuba Libre presided over by Lorenzo Muller. The objective of the protest was to denounce the constant violation of human rights on the island and to demand the freedom of political prisoners. (*OCB*, 16/1/07)

January 21: Demonstrators who clashed with others in Little Havana over Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles said they intend to press charges against people they said attacked them during the rally. On January 19 a fracas unfolded when about 100 people gathered at the Bay of Pigs memorial at Southwest Eighth Street and 13th Avenue to show support for Posada, charged in El Paso with lying about how he sneaked into the United States in 2005. Michael Martinez, 24, of the Bolívarian Youth group, said he and three other friends showed up with a four-foot-long banner that read, "Terrorists to Jail," referring to Posada. Martinez said Miguel Saavedra, leader of the Cuban exile group Vigilia Mambisa, and other pro-Posada demonstrators attacked anti-Posada protesters. Saavedra said he is going to wait to see what -- if any -- charges are filed before commenting. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/1/07)

January 21: The Cuban exile community has evolved, says Joe García, a member of the Board of Directors of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and director of the Hispanic Strategy Center of the New Democrat Network (NDN). "A significant number of Cuban American leaders in the United States are more inclined toward dialogue". When Fidel Castro dies, García believes there will be gradual changes in the short and long term, "because extremist elements on both sides are not physically able to do anything". Extremes do exist, but according to García the Cuban American community must decide whether it fights the struggle of years gone by or the current one, which is in the hands "of a generation who has lived through the failures of an exile community" that has tried to impose policies detached from the Cuban reality. (*La Opinión*, 22/1/07)

January 23: Six months after Fidel Castro handed power to his brother Raul, the parties planned by exiled Cubans in anticipation of the regime's collapse have been shelved, as the younger Castro consolidates power, experts said. Initial euphoria upon hearing of Castro's illness, including celebrations for what was believed his imminent death, have waned over the past half-year among anti-Castro Cuban-Americans, heavily concentrated in southern Florida and the Miami area. Ramon Saul Sanchez, leader of the anti-Castro Democratic Movement (MD), said the tension is palpable. "We never thought that this uncertainty would drag out so long," he said. "We often do not have time to sleep. I always keep the phone by my bed." "Every report about what is going on in Cuba pricks a lot of interest," Sanchez said. However, experts and exile groups have accepted that Raul, 75, is in charge, and that Fidel, 80, will probably not return to power. Jaime Suchlicki, of the Cuba Transition Project at the University of Miami, said that, for all intents and purposes, "Fidel died, but everyone is afraid to tell." Alfredo Mesa, director of the Cuban-American National Foundation, the most strident of the Cuban exile groups, admitted that the transition of power "has been accomplished," and that Fidel "is history." "Whether Fidel is alive or dead does not change the fact that the people deserve change," Mesa said. "Whether change that comes from those (now) in charge is something that remains to be seen," he said. (*AFP*, 23/1/07)

January 29: The city of Miami is planning an official celebration at the Orange Bowl whenever Fidel Castro dies. Discussions by a committee appointed earlier in January by the city commission to plan the event have even covered

issues such as a theme to be printed on T-shirts, what musicians would perform, the cost and how long the celebration would last. Such a gathering has long been part of the city's plan for Castro's death, but firming up the specifics has been more urgent since Castro became ill last summer and turned over power to his brother, Raul. City Commissioner Tomas Regalado, a Cuban American, came up with the idea of using the Orange Bowl, noting the stadium was the site of a speech by President Kennedy in 1961 promising a free Cuba. In the 1980s the Orange Bowl served as a camp for refugees from the Mariel boatlift from Cuba, he added. "Basically, the only thing we're trying to do is have a venue, a giant venue ready for people, if they wish, to speak to the media, to show their emotions. It's not that we're doing an official death party," Regalado said. (*AP*, 29/1/07)

January 30: Responding to an international media blitz and outrage from some members of the Cuban-American community, Miami city leaders vowed to tone down a proposed large-scale, city-organized public event in the Orange Bowl when Fidel Castro dies. And despite preliminary plans that included the possibility of musical acts and themed T-shirts, the city stressed that it had never -- ever -- intended to respond to a man's death by holding a party. The goal was to provide a place for an informal, friendly get-together, officials said. "Our past experience has shown us that the local community has strong emotions tied to any significant issues relating to Fidel Castro," the city's Office of Communications wrote in an official statement on the subject. "The Orange Bowl has been designated by the county, as well as the city of Miami, as a possible site for people and community leaders to gather peacefully, if necessary. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/1/07)

January 31: The news that Miami city officials are planning on throwing a big bash to dance on Fidel Castro's grave went over like a lead balloon in Havana. The idea of reserving the Orange Bowl, selling souvenir tee shirts and dancing to salsa bands is being construed as both inappropriate and insensitive. And no matter how hard Miami officials insist the Orange Bowl event is meant to ensure people's safety and won't be a party, Cubans don't believe it. Lester Ramos, a cab driver, listens to Miami disc jockeys that bleed onto Cuba's AM dial. That's where he learned his near-perfect English. "The guy's not even dead," said Ramos, shaking his head. "It's unbelievable." For historian Tomas Diaz the news reinforces all his prejudices against the city of Miami, home to tens of thousands of Cuban exiles. "It's inhuman to celebrate someone's death, but what can you expect? That's Miami politics — an exercise in bad taste!" Miriam Leyva, a leading dissident and one of Fidel Castro's fiercest critics, found the idea of a party "inappropriate," cautioning that it will drive a further wedge between Cubans and the diaspora in the United States. "Death is not something to celebrate. You can understand that some people will feel good about the news, but we should be working on reconciliation between all Cubans living on and off the island. The time to hold a party is when there's democracy in Cuba." Reverend Juan Ramon de la Paz, who presides over the Episcopal Cathedral in Havana, agreed. "To organize these parties is anti-Christian, anti-Evangelical, and anti-religious. There is no religion that celebrates someone's death, even your enemy's death." (*NBC*, 31/1/07)

Foreign Affairs

January 2: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez sent an edition of the complete works of South American liberator Simon Bolivar to Fidel Castro on the occasion of the 48th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, Cuban state-run media reported. The leftist Venezuelan leader also sent Castro "Venezuelan carvings and artesanal works," biographies of Bolivar and of national hero Francisco de Miranda, and several books on Venezuelan geography, according to Granma, the newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party. The gifts were sent "together with wishes for (Castro's) rapid recovery and big congratulations to him and the Cuban people" for Monday's anniversary, the daily said. (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 2/1/07)

January 2: Panamanian President Martin Torrijos began an official visit to Cuba, aimed at improving bilateral relations. Torrijos, who arrived in Havana accompanied by his wife and children, was welcomed at the Jose Marti International Airport by the secretary of the Council of State, Jose Miyar Barruecos, and Deputy Foreign Minister Alejandro Gonzalez. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/1/07)

January 3: The Panamanian President Martín Torrijos met the president of the Cuban national assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, as part of a four-day visit to Havana intended to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. Panama has recently taken up its temporary seat on the United Nations Security Council, where it emerged as the consensus candidate after a fierce contest between Guatemala and Venezuela over the seat failed to produce a winner. The Cuban and Panamanian governments will enlarge and deepen the scope of their bilateral co-operation, claimed Panama's President Martín Torrijos during his formal visit to Cuba. Torrijos clarified that the areas on which to focus will include genetics, agricultural, and forestry co-operation, along with the continuation and improvement of current schemes in ophthalmology, education and social programmes. The Panamanian leader, in power since 2004, also wished ailing Cuban President Fidel Castro a speedy recovery. (*Latin News*, 3/1/07)

January 3: First Vice President Raul Castro Ruz met with Panamanian President Martin Torrijos Espino, who arrived in Cuba for a working visit to the island. The two leaders discussed topics related to the development of bilateral ties including the state of the Operation Miracle eye surgery program in Panama, where an ophthalmologic center is soon to be inaugurated in the province of Veraguas with the cooperation of Cuba. High ranking Cuban government officials also participated at the meeting, among them, Carlos Lage Davila, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers; Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party and Head of its International Relations Department; Felipe Perez Roque, minister of Foreign Relations; Carlos Eloy Garcia Trapaga, Cuban ambassador to Panama; and Rogelio Sierra Diaz, director of the Latin America and Caribbean desk at the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The Panamanian delegation included Carlos Vallerino, the minister of Economy and Finances; Anel Omar Rodriguez, Panama's ambassador to Cuba; and presidential advisers Efebo Diaz and Luis Gomez. (*Granma*, 4/1/07)

January 5: An Oslo hotel owned by the US Hilton Hotel Corp. faced protests, a boycott and a police complaint in Norway after refusing to book rooms for a Cuban delegation because the United States boycotts their homeland. The Cuban delegation, set to attend a travel fair in Oslo, planned to stay at the Scandic Edderkoppen Hotel in the city center, as they had on five previous visits. However, the 140-hotel Scandic group was bought by Hilton in March, and the Cubans were informed in December that they would have to find another hotel due to the American boycott. The 300,000-member Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees announced that it was boycotting all Scandic hotels in Norway, joining a wave of protests that started when the ban on Cuban guests became news. Christina Karlegran, regional spokeswoman for the Hilton and Scandic group, said Hilton is an American group and is bound by the Cuba boycott. "We have to follow American law," she said by telephone from Stockholm, Sweden. "We can't see that we have broken any Swedish or Norwegian law (...) If it turns out to be illegal, we will address that." (*AP*, 5/1/07)

January 5: Norway and Cuba deplored the decision of a US-owned hotel in Oslo to deny lodging to a Cuban delegation in compliance with US trade sanctions against Havana. "These actions from Scandic managers are totally unacceptable," deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johansen told the press. "In Norway we are based on Norwegian law and Norwegian practices, not those of any other country," he said. Cuba accused Europe of bowing to American pressure. "Helms-Burton rules in Europe," the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said in a front-page story that slammed the Norwegian hotel for what it said was kowtowing to Washington. (*Reuters*, 5/1/07)

January 6: A wide range exchange program takes place in the city of Camaguey between the local youth and members of the Quebec Brigade of Solidarity with Cuba that are visiting the island. Since its arrival, at the end of December, the Canadian group voluntarily works in the areas of the Pioneers Palace and of the Polytechnic Institute Álvaro Barba, both in this eastern city. Coordinated by Colette Laverger, the project of solidarity is made up by secondary schools

students from Quebec, and has been exchanging experiences with youngsters from Camagüey for over ten years. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte, 6/1/07*)

January 8: Pope Benedict XVI called for negotiations to end fighting in Somalia, and warned that democracies must not be transformed into dictatorships in Latin America. In a speech to diplomats about global issues, Benedict also urged nations to open up to Cuba and more efforts to restore security in Colombia, including an end to the frequent kidnappings. He reiterated the stance of his predecessor John Paul II in urging the world to open up to communist Cuba, quoting the late pope as saying: "Let Cuba open itself to the world and let the world open itself to Cuba." (*AP, 8/1/07*)

January 8: Brazil's good relations with the US and Cuba could help bring a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba if Fidel Castro dies, Brazil's newly appointed ambassador to the US told the official government news agency. In an interview, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota said he believed the US could benefit from Brazil's analysis of the situation within the communist country. "Cuba is geographically close and also an important country in the region, with which we have fairly close relations these days. I consider Brazil could possibly play a role in the search for a transition to democracy that could be more calm and without possible turbulence," Patriota said in his first published interview as ambassador. Patriota was appointed by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva as ambassador last November and is expected to head to Washington in the coming weeks. (*Dow Jones Commodities Service, 8/1/07*)

January 8: The Government of Mexico seeks to improve its damaged relations with Venezuela and Cuba, said Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Patricia Espinosa. "We want diplomacy to work and work well, said Espinosa to a group of journalists. "In the case of Cuba there are also economic interests, as well as sectors that might offer important support to that country, just as Cuba has been offering support to Mexico", she added. (*EFE, 8/1/07*)

January 9: Honduran authorities prevented seven Cubans who attempted to leave that Central-American country from travelling illegally to the United States. According to the Immigration Office "they were detained after trying to bypass our routine controls, and their foreigners' status is now under review". The detention of the Cubans happened in Corinto, on the border with Guatemala. (*EER, 9/1/07*)

January 9: The Bolivian government deported an outspoken Cuban opponent of Fidel Castro, sending Amauris Samartino to Colombia, which agreed to accept him pending a response from Switzerland on his request for political asylum. Police placed the Cuban physician on a Peruvian airliner bound for Bogota. Attorney Rodolfo Tellez told the press that his client's stay in Colombia could last just "10 days or so" because the procedure whereby he might obtain asylum in Switzerland has moved forward. President Evo Morales' socialist government decided to expel Samartino, accusing him of having violated immigration regulations by participating in a political demonstration in the eastern city of Santa Cruz, where he had lived for the past six years. (*EFE, 9/1/07*)

January 9: Kemal Dervis, UN Development Program (UNDP) administrator, called Cuba's experiences very positive in risk management and natural disaster prevention. Speaking at a press conference in Havana, Dervis said the UNDP will continue working with the island in this important area and said Cuba's experiences could be very useful in Central America. The UN official thanked the Cuban government and specialists for their "impressive" assistance to the UNDP. Cuba and the UN organization are currently putting together a new program of joint cooperation for the period 2008-2012. Susan McDade, the resident UNDP representative on the island, said the areas of cooperation being discussed include the environment and energy, food security, health, risk management and housing, and human development. McDade noted that the UNDP budgets is around \$13 million USD a year for its collaboration with Cuba. (*AP, Granma, 10/1/07*)

January 9: The president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, reiterated his desire that Cuba hold a referendum so that the people can decide whether they want Raúl Castro to remain in power when Fidel Castro dies. Arias said he is only

asking for respect for the self-determination of the people, that Cubans be asked if they want Raúl Castro to continue as president for life once his brother dies. He also recalled that in 1959 the president of his country, José Figueres, was the first to say to Fidel Castro that he hoped his government would not become a communist tyranny. (*OCB*, 9/1/07)

January 11: New Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said he will upgrade diplomatic relations with Cuba, stepping further into Latin America's leftist camp in his second term in office. "We are going to reestablish full relations with Cuba: commercial, diplomatic and political relations with the brotherly Cuban people," said Ortega, who won November's presidential vote. Signs of moderation provided in recent months by Daniel Ortega, a former Marxist guerrilla chief and enemy of the United States during a decade-long stint in power, were nowhere evident during his new presidential inauguration, (*Reuters*, 11/107)

January 11: Nicaragua joined Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, a political and trade pact. The ceremony took place in Managua just over two years after the ALBA was first signed by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro in December, 2004. Bolivia joined up in April 2006. Presidents Daniel Ortega, Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and Cuban Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura were present. Moments before Hugo Chavez had told the crowd he arrived in Nicaragua "with my heart overflowing with emotion and joy." "I bring the infinite and deep embrace of the Bolivarian Revolution," the term he uses to describe his intended transformation of Venezuelan society into a paragon of "true socialism of the 21st century." He sent "an embrace to our compañero Fidel Castro," who he said "must be very happy." After Morales spoke, Cuban Vice President Jose Ramon Machado was invited to take the microphone, and while he made a few relatively timid comments the Bolivian leader, Chavez and Ortega chanted in unison: "Long live Cuba! Long live Fidel!" When the microphone was finally handed to the new president, Ortega blasted market-oriented laissez-faire economics and said his country would help blaze "a new path." (*Prensa Latina, Granma, EFE*, 11/1/07)

January 11: Human Rights Watch criticized the performance of the new UN Human Rights Council. The rights watch group embraced the council when it was launched last summer as a big improvement over its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights, which was considered ineffective and too influenced by human rights violators like Libya and Cuba. HRW's turnaround reflects the growing disappointment within the rights community with the new body, which has issued multiple condemnations of Israel but none against other violators. The Human Rights Watch 2007 Annual Report reiterates its critical stance on abuses in Cuba as "the one country in Latin America that represses nearly all forms of political dissent." The group's 556-page report, which assesses violations worldwide, says the Geneva-based UN Council has "quickly fallen prey to some of the same problems that doomed its predecessor." Countries charged with rights violations joined the previous body and then blocked its actions, with Cuba often acting as a lead lobbyist to water down resolutions. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/1/07)

January 13: Cuban ambassador to Bolivia, Rafael Dausá, said that this year his country will donate 23 second-level hospitals to Bolivia to provide medical attention to four million people, and it is expected that half a million will be taught to read and write. Dausá emphasized that medical attention and education will continue to be the priorities, as in 2006. (*ABI*, 13/1/07)

January 14: Ecuadorian President-elect Rafael Correa met with Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage and sent a greeting to Fidel Castro wishing him a speedy recovery. Lage also held talks with outgoing President Alfredo Palacio. "Cuba and Latin America are one single nation. The time has come to search for our common destiny", Correa told Cuban journalists. He then sent a message of gratitude to the Cuban people for the help provided to Ecuadorians through eye care and literacy programs. Asked about the future of relations between the two countries, the Ecuadorian leader spoke about Cuba's generic drug industry. "Here we euphemistically speak about free healthcare while people die at hospital doors because they don't have a few dollars. This is going to end and one of the ways we hope to achieve this is by importing high-quality generic low-cost medicine such as those produced by Cuba." Correa also cited other successful Cuban experiences including a series of initiatives implemented to save energy called the Energy Revolution. Shortly

after his arrival to Quito, Lage told the Cuban media that Correa's election is undoubtedly an expression of the changes occurring in Latin America, "where the traditional party system is practically dead in the water." (*Granma*, 14/1/07)

January 15: Latin America lives a new era and Rafael Correa's inauguration as President of Ecuador shows the creation of a left-wing and progressive way of thinking, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said in Quito. Presidents like Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia) and Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua) "represent a totally different way of thinking with social emphasis," Lage told the press. The Cuban leader, who was welcomed by a crowd of Ecuadorians in the outskirts of Mariscal Sucre Air Base, is heading the Cuban delegation to Correa's assumption of Ecuador's presidency. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/1/07)

January 16: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez rebuffed pessimistic news about ailing Fidel Castro, saying that Castro was "doing well" despite some people longing to see him dead. "Fidel is doing well, I spoke with him more than half an hour by telephone a few days ago," Chavez told Telesur television channel shortly before leaving Quito, where he attended President Rafael Correa's inauguration. Castro himself "told the world how he feels: he's dealing with a slow recovery that can't be easy for an 80-year-old," Chavez said. A friend of the Cuban leader, Chavez rebuffed a report published in Madrid's *El Pais* newspaper that Castro was gravely ill following three failed operations. (*AFP*, 16/1/07)

January 16: Three Cuban boxers, Olympic champions in Athens 2004, defected in Venezuela shortly before Christmas. Heavyweight Odlanier Solís, light flyweight Yan Bartelemí and flyweight Yuriorkis Gamboa left a group that was training in Caracas along with their Venezuelan counterparts for the Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro. (*EER*, 16/1/07)

January 16: The death of Fidel Castro will undoubtedly bring about changes in his country, but it is desirable that they be agreed on by consensus, said OAS secretary general, José Miguel Insulza. Insulza said that once he is gone there should be change in Cuba. "Fidel Castro is part of the strength and stability of the Cuban revolution, therefore, some transformations will likely take place. The important thing is that they happen in a calm and peaceful way and based as much as possible on consensus and with the participation of all". (*AP*, 16/1/07)

January 17: Diplomatic representatives from Mexico and Cuba have kept under wraps an important meeting that took place at the beginning of January. Foreign minister Patricia Espinosa Cantellano and Cuban ambassador Jorge Bolaños reportedly met as a first attempt toward thawing relations. (*El Universal*, 17/1/07)

January 17: Prime Minister Robert Fico is beginning to change the value orientation of Slovak foreign policy. On January 11, the prime minister attended a celebration marking the victory of Castro's revolution. The Cuban Embassy in Bratislava had organized an official reception on the occasion of the 48th anniversary of Fidel Castro's arrival in Havana. Fico spent approximately half an hour in the luxurious Malecon restaurant in Bratislava and talked with the Cuban ambassador. Then he left to meet with Czech President Vaclav Klaus, with whom he had a working dinner. "The Government Office is not aware of any obstacle on the part of the European Union in connection with the level of participation in receptions marking Cuba's national holiday," stated Silvia Glendova, spokeswoman for the prime minister. The Cuban authorities have maintained almost no communication with Ivo Hlavacek, Slovak ambassador to Havana, who has not been received by the top brass of the regime at all over a period of two years. "We expect that he will meet with the Cuban foreign minister shortly. In Havana, the Slovak ambassador is conducting dialogue both with Cuban official representatives and dissidents," reacted Foreign Ministry spokesman Jan Skoda. (*BBC*, 17/1/07)

January 17: President Hugo Chavez said ailing Fidel Castro asked him to keep it a secret that the two spoke by phone earlier this month so that others would not get jealous. Chavez said in a speech that Castro's situation has been "delicate" recently, but he said recent Spanish press reports portraying Castro as near death were speculation. He did not elaborate on specifics of the Cuban leader's health. "About 10 days ago, he called me and we spoke for about half

an hour," Chavez said. Chavez said he was breaking a promise because Castro had allegedly said to him: "I beg you please don't tell anyone that I called you because then they get jealous, and others call me from I don't know where and want to speak with me, but I'm hardly calling anyone." Chavez gave no further details on their conversation or on Castro's progress, other than saying: "Fidel has been in a delicate situation, and he himself said it: this will be a slow process and not free from risks, (and) it has been a serious complication." (*AP*, 18/1/07)

January 17: Cuba and Panama signed an agreement to reinforce both countries efforts in the area of occupational health and environmental hygiene. The accord was signed for Cuba by Alfredo Morales, minister of Labor and Social Security and Reynaldo E. Rivera, Panama's minister of Labor and Labor Development. The agreement includes the holding of seminars, tutorships and technical consulting on the organization of inspection systems. (*Periódico 26*, 19/1/07)

January 18: The Mexican spy agency will have ten days to disclose documents related to an investigation in which Mexico accused Cuban officials of spying in 2004, reported the Federal Institute of Access to Information (IFAI). The IFAI ordered the National Security and Investigation Center (CISEN), to disclose and deliver a "public version" of the document it prepared for the ministries of Government and Foreign affairs, which served as an excuse to recall its ambassador in Havana and to ask the Cuban ambassador to leave Mexico. (*EFE*, 18/1/07)

January 18: Russian Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Kisliak, said that the slump in relations between his country and Cuba is over. Kisliak's statement was made during a "solemn meeting dedicated to the 48th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution", in Moscow. (*Ria Novosti*, 18/1/07)

January 18: British pop star Sting was spotted in Havana, learning Afro-Cuban dances, signing autographs and strolling along the city's colonial streets. Clad in dark jeans and a dark violet T-shirt, the famed crooner was initiated into the intricacies of Afro-Cuban dances by an elderly teacher of the National Folkloric Ensemble. The former Police lead singer, was also seen taking salsa classes at the National Ballet School in the Cuban capital and touring the colonial streets of Havana's historic center. Sting, 56, arrived in Cuba for a private visit, according to an official of the Cuban Music Institute who accompanied the singer. (*AFP*, 18/1/07)

January 19: Prensa Latina news agency of Cuba has launched an online news edition in Turkish. Making a keynote speech in a meeting held in Istanbul on this occasion, Cuban Ambassador to Turkey Ernesto Gomez Abascal said that the Havana-based Prensa Latina, which now has 22 representations, is transmitting news 24 hours a day. Turkish citizens can have access to easier and more reliable news about Cuba from the Turkish edition, the ambassador added. (*Anatolia*, 19/1/07)

January 19: Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said that Fidel Castro is "battling for his life" and said he spoke with the Cuban leader for nearly half an hour several days ago. Chávez, a close ally and admirer of Castro, compared Castro's attempt to recover from an unspecified medical condition to efforts in the 1950s, when Castro was a guerrilla in Cuba's eastern mountains fighting the government he would overthrow. "Fidel is in the Sierra Maestra again, battling for his life," Chávez said after attending a summit of South American leaders in Rio de Janeiro. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/1/07)

January 19: A delegation from Carleton University's Centre for Trade Policy and Law is heading to Havana on a mission to help Cuba improve its economic outreach. The Canadian men in Havana will be Derek Burney, head of the Harper transition team and a veteran diplomat; trade negotiator, corporate executive and director Bill Dymond, a former trade negotiator and diplomat; and Phillippe Rourke, executive director of the Centre. "It takes time to build trust and develop relationships, so this is a mission to assess how we can help the Cuban trade agenda", explains Mr. Rourke. "We think we've got a lot to share". Backed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the group will hold meetings and workshops with senior bureaucrats that focus on such issues as trade negotiations,

commercial diplomacy and how to structure bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Centre also expects that Cuban officials will come to Ottawa to participate in future trade training programs. (*Ottawa Citizen*, 18/1/07)

January 22: The World Trade Organization (WTO) should “speak out against the laws and measures of the blockade” imposed by the United States on Cuba for more than 40 years, Cuba said. Jorge Ferrer, a Cuban diplomat, made that request during an informal meeting of the WTO negotiating group for Access to Non-Agricultural Markets (NAMA), and asserted that a basic principle of that institution is non-discrimination. Cuba believes that this is an appropriate forum for taking a stand against violations that hinder and prevent trade with Cuba, Ferrer affirmed, noting that the WTO negotiations group is also responsible for eliminating non-tariff trade barriers. (*Granma International, EFE*, 23/1/07)

January 23: Ariel Dacal Diaz, a Cuban delegate to the Seventh World Social Forum, warned that Europe and the United States can differ on some matters but have the same pretensions to dominate the markets and natural resources of the Third World. Dacal, from the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Havana, pointed out that the imperialist philosophy is what dominates in Europe, which closely allies itself with Washington when it comes to defining its relations with poor countries. The Cuban delegate participated on a panel about the role of Europe in militarization and neoliberalism, programmed as part of the more than 1,300 local initiatives being studied by the WSF that began on January 20 in the Kenyan capital. (*Periódico 26*, 23/1/07)

January 23: The Governments of Belize and Cuba renewed their medical agreement for the next three years. Belize’s Minister of Health Jose Coye said they were renewing the agreement in terms of human resources. “*Is that in the area of the health care providers we were very short in the rural areas and what the agreement is doing is indeed to renew the contribution of human resources*”, Coye said. “*Today we enjoy a number of sixty three physicians from Cuba, which is made up of forty five general practitioners, eighteen specialists that work in the secondary and tertiary care of our country and it also provides nurses and in addition to that we also have engineers, x-ray technician, occupational therapists*”, he added. Cuban First Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla said the signing will improve the level of cooperation between Belize and Cuba. (*LoveFM*, 24/1/07)

January 24: A federal court dismissed the charges of discriminatory behaviour against the Maria Isabel Sheraton hotel in Mexico City in the case of the expulsion of a delegation of Cuban officials staying at the hotel in February 2006. (*AFP*, 24/1/07)

January 24: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said that ailing Fidel Castro is up and walking and “almost trotting” like a horse. Chavez offered the upbeat description of his ally after hearing from Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, who delivered a letter from Castro to the Venezuelan president. Chavez declared that, according to Lage, the 80-year-old Castro is “walking more than me; he’s almost trotting” like a horse. Holding up the letter before television cameras, Chavez said: “This is for those who say he’s dying.” Chavez, who has visited the ailing Castro and says he often speaks to him by telephone, said Castro had asked him not to publish his letter but to read some of it in public. Lage and his delegation, he quoted Castro as writing, “are bringing 17 points [of agreement] (...) I’m happy with the idea of including the tourist zone in the place you’ve selected.” “I’m pleased the energy program is going ahead at full speed (...) It is a vital issue for the human race,” Castro wrote, according to Chavez. Lage said Castro would be around for “a long time to come” and joked he would outlast his younger brother Raul Castro, who has been in charge of the communist-run island after Fidel had stomach surgery last year. Despite U.S. pressure, the country remained united during Castro’s illness, he added. (*AFP, Reuters*, 25/1/07)

January 24: Cuba and Antigua and Barbuda signed a sports cooperation agreement, which both countries view as a new step towards strengthening their bilateral ties. The agreement was signed by Christian Jimenez Molina, chairman of the Cuban National Institute for Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER), and Winston Williams, Antigua and Barbuda Youth Affairs and Sports Minister. The five-year agreement includes developing human

resources, building sports facilities, exchanging teams and delegations, controlling doping, organizing programs, applying sports medicine and collaborating in physical education and some other things. (*Caribbean Press*, 27/1/07)

January 25: Cuba's First Deputy Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez is due to be welcomed by Foreign Minister Gert Rosenthal at the beginning of a three-day official visit to Guatemala. The aim of the visit is to examine bilateral relations and affairs of regional and multilateral interest. Cuban official's agenda includes meeting with government officials and political leaders, attending the 12th Ministerial Conference of the Association of Caribbean States and opening an ophthalmologic center equipped by Cuba in Jalapa department. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/1/07)

January 26: The Cuban embassy in Mexico criticized the presence of Cuban exiles attending a meeting of the Christian Democrat Organization of America (ODCA) in that country. In a press release, the Cuban embassy in Mexico said that the presence of the exiles, whom it called "mercenaries" and did not mention by name, left no "room for doubt about the real intentions that drive them" alluding to what the embassy considers is an alliance with the government of the USA. (*EER*, 29/1/07)

January 28: The Christian Democrat Organization of America (ODCA) volunteered to mediate a dialogue between different Cuban factions in order to promote a peaceful transition to democracy on the island, announced ODCA's president, Mexican Manuel Espino. "We will try, through dialogue, to convince as many players and partisan leaders as possible that what Cuba needs is a national reconciliation and that all Cubans face the challenge of a peaceful transition to democracy", said Espino. (*AFP*, 29/1/07)

January 29: Amnesty International expressed its concern over the violation of human rights in Cuba, but it also criticized the "negative impact" of the US economic embargo on the communist-ruled island. In a communique released from its headquarters in London, AI denounced the government in Havana for assorted abuses, "in particular, the imprisonment of political dissidents and journalists as a result of severe restrictions on the freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly." Moreover, AI said, 2006 saw "an increase in the public harassment and intimidation of critics and political dissidents by quasi-official groups in so-called acts of repudiation." [[Cuba: Amnesty International's Human Rights Concerns](#)] (*EFE*, 29/1/07)

January 29: Cuba and Guinea Bissau began their 13th Inter-Government Joint Committee Session, for future cooperation spheres, including trade, medical assistance, scientific-technical collaboration, education, and energy. Economic Collaboration and Foreign Investment Minister Marta Lomas welcomed the delegation presided over by Guinean Prime Minister Aristides Gomes, and highlighted the importance of the meeting, which will bring both nations even closer. Lomas said this working meeting with the western African nation is of great significance to Cuba, because the agreements they sign will benefit the two countries. Gomes highlighted the brotherhood and solidarity between both countries, and recalled the 19 Cuban internationalist combatants who died in his country in the struggle for independence from Portugal. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/1/07)

January 30: Canadians fed up with long health care waiting lists at home have begun seeking out orthopedic surgery and other services in Cuba, as the communist country markets its well-regarded health-care system on the international free market. A new medical broker in Quebec has just started arranging for patients here to receive care in the Caribbean nation, but Health Services International says its clients will not be the first Canadians to try the new brand of Cuban tourism. More than 30 underwent hip replacements, cosmetic operations and other procedures in Cuba last year alone, according to Lucie Vermette, a partner in the newly formed company. She said her firm has contracts with five patients, including a young mother blinded by a rare eye disease, and strong interest from another 20, just days after Health Services opened for business. "Cuba, it's true, is a socialist, communist government," said Ms. Vermette. "But this government gives priority to medicine and education and offers all the people very good treatment." Despite its generally moribund economy, Cuba has developed a reputation for a relatively high-quality health care system and

for a number of years has provided medical services for a fee to patients from elsewhere in Latin America. (*National Post*, 30/1/07)

January 31: Cuba plans to send doctors and medicine to Nicaragua, extending its so-called medical diplomacy to the new government of leftist President Daniel Ortega, a longtime ally of Fidel Castro. Cuba's top diplomat in Nicaragua, Manuel Guillot, said the doctors would work along the Caribbean coast, the most impoverished part of a country second only to Haiti as the poorest in the Americas. He gave no more details but said the region had been "effectively abandoned in terms of sanitation."(*Reuters*, 31/1/07)

January 31: First Vice President Raul Castro met with Dr. Aristides Gomes, prime minister of Guinea Bissau, who is paying an official visit to Cuba, on occasion of the 13th Session of the Joint Commission. During the encounter the two discussed important issues of bilateral interest relating to the diversification of Cuba's cooperation with the African nation, particularly those pertaining to the training of doctors and a pilot project for a literacy campaign using the "Yes, I can" Cuban method. On hand for the meeting for the visiting delegation were Antonio Isaac Monteiro, minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Communities; and Aristide Ocanto da Silva, minister of Natural Resources. For the Cubans were Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Pedro Dona Santana, Cuba's ambassador to the Republic of Guinea Bissau. (*Granma*, 1/2/07)

January 31: A total of 41 Nicaraguans travelled to Havana to undergo cataract surgery, as part of "Operation Miracle" promoted by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, according to official sources. (*EFE*, 31/1/07)

Terrorism

January 4: American activist Cindy Sheehan will join an international delegation traveling to Cuba to protest treatment of terrorism suspects five years after the first prisoners arrived at the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay, organizers said. Zohra Zewawi, the mother of a terror suspect still held at the base, will also be in the group protesting outside the US-run prison in southeastern Cuba, activist Medea Benjamin said in a release. Also planning to travel to Cuba is Asif Iqbal, a former Guantánamo detainee who was freed after no charges were filed. A retired US Army colonel and a constitutional rights attorney will also be in the group. The 12-member delegation is to arrive on January 9 in Havana, and later travel to the Cuban side of the US base. (*AP*, 5/1/07)

January 7: American "peace mom" Cindy Sheehan called for the closure of the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as she and other activists arrived in Cuba to draw attention to the nearly 400 terror suspects held at the remote site. Sheehan is among 12 human rights and anti-war activists who will travel across this Caribbean island, arriving at the main gate of the Guantanamo base in eastern Cuba on January 11-- five years after the first prisoners were flown in. "Anyone who knows me, knows that I am not afraid of anything," Sheehan said when asked about the possibility of US sanctions for traveling to communist-run Cuba, which remains under an American trade embargo. "What is more important is the inhumanity that my government is perpetrating at Guantanamo," she told reporters. Sheehan, 49, of Vacaville, California, became an anti-war activist known as the "peace mom" after losing her 24-year-old son Casey in Iraq in April 2004. (*AP*, 7/1/07)

January 8: Cuba recently released from prison a Guatemalan man with alleged connections to Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, who is being investigated by a federal grand jury in New Jersey on his alleged role in bombings on the communist island in the 1990s. Jazid Ivan Fernandez Mendoza, 36, was released from a Cuban prison on December 12 and returned to Guatemala eight days later, according to Guatemala's ministry of the exterior. A Cuban government official in Guatemala said in a telephone interview that Fernandez, a Guatemalan citizen, had been released more than a year before his sentence was up. "He was freed before finishing his term for good conduct even though he

was accused of terrorism," said Rolando Barroso, first secretary to the Cuban ambassador in Guatemala. "It would be interesting to ask the American authorities, now that this person is free, if they are going to interview him." FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela declined to comment on whether the agency had interviewed Fernandez. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/1/07)

January 11: International peace activists marched to the Cuban military zone wrapping around the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay to demand closure of the US military prison for terror suspects five years after the first detainees arrived. The dozen protesters, including relatives of one detainee and American "peace mom" Cindy Sheehan, walked along a lonesome asphalt highway connecting the Cuban city of Guantánamo to the military zone. Sheehan wore a peace sign medallion around her neck. They chanted, "Gitmo prison is a source of shame, no more torture in our name," and held signs saying, "Due process is overdue" and "There are no justice-free zones." US Army Colonel Lora Tucker, a spokeswoman for the detention center, said the military had no plans to acknowledge the protest or increase security at the gate, which is located at a distance from the prison camp on the other side of a hill. "Nothing changes for us based on a demonstration being held somewhere in Cuba," she said, adding that today was "a normal work day" at the Navy base. (*AP*, 11/1/07)

January 11: New UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that the US prison at Cuba's Guantanamo Bay should be shut down. "Like my predecessor, I believe that the prison at Guantanamo should be closed," Ban told a news conference. Kofi Annan, who stepped down as UN chief on December 31, also had called for the facility to be closed. President Bush has said he would like to close the facility, Ban reminded journalists. But the US leader has yet to do so. January 11 marks the fifth anniversary of the camp's opening. (*Reuters*, 11/1/07)

January 14: A group of American pacifists who visited Cuba to demonstrate against the US Guantanamo Bay prison left the island after a week-long visit. During their last day in Cuban territory, the protesters showed the film "The Road to Guantanamo," directed by the British film-maker Michael Winterbottom, for their final event. Also, the visitors met Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, and Culture Minister Abel Prieto. (*Xinhua*, 15/1/07)

January 22: Spanish journal "El Correo" said that with Fidel Castro ailing, Basque separatist group ETA fears it could lose the lone country that offers it sanctuary. So it is looking toward Bolivia as a possible alternative. The paper quoted unnamed Spanish security officials as its sources. (*AP*, 22/1/07)

January 27: A group of protestors – some wearing Guantanamo Bay-style orange jumpsuits, chains and black hoods – staged a rally in front of the US consulate in Toronto, demanding the Canadian government add its voice to demands the American military prison in Cuba be shut down. The event, organized by Amnesty International, drew about 100 protestors who marched around half a dozen "detainees" caged in a mock prison on the sidewalk across from the University Ave. consulate. The Toronto rally follows a series of Amnesty demonstrations around the world this month, marking the fifth anniversary of the facility's opening. Similar rallies were held in Halifax and Winnipeg, and earlier in Ottawa, Montreal, Peterborough and Vancouver. (*Toronto Star*, 28/1/07)

US-Cuba Relations

January 3: The number of undocumented Cuban and Haitian migrants stopped at sea by the US Coast Guard, which had been rising steadily year by year, dropped in 2006 -- dramatically in the case of Haitians and noticeably in the case of Cubans. While Cuban interdictions are down, the number of Cuban arrivals in South Florida on smuggling and other organized trips is up -- with 546 more landings in fiscal year 2006 than 2005, according to Border Patrol figures. There were 2,260 Cubans interdicted in 2006, compared to 2,952 in 2005 -- the first decline in annual Cuban interceptions

since 2001 when 777 were stopped. The figures may simply reflect cyclical declines, but they could also represent a more complex set of factors such as use of alternate routes by Cubans to reach the United States including more efficient smuggling trips. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/1/07)

January 4: Even with Fidel Castro seriously ill and power transferred to his brother, the ailing leader's presence is widely felt and is keeping the country from taking any new economic or political direction, says the US government's top diplomat for Latin America. "We see that this regime has made this successful transfer of power and is trying to consolidate itself, but it can't define itself or separate itself from Fidel," Thomas Shannon, assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere, said in an interview. "My guess is that we're not going to see that until Fidel Castro is dead and buried." "Fidel Castro is in this odd moment where he is neither alive nor dead politically. He is alive physically, but he's not in charge day to day, and he's obviously not present day to day, but it appears that he still has the ability to sit up in bed and give orders occasionally," Shannon said. He said that Raúl Castro has shown no sign that he will be any different from Fidel, despite Raúl Castro's call on December 2 for the US government to meet with the Cuban government to work through their differences. Shannon said four goals must be met before the US government considers a change in policy: All political prisoners must be freed, human rights guaranteed, trade unions allowed to form and concrete moves made toward free elections. "We're not going to engage with Cuba just to engage," Shannon said. "Any engagement we have with Cuba has to be part of some kind of change process that leads toward this transition to democracy, and therefore we depend on what the Cuban people think and will want us to do." (*The Dallas Morning News*, 4/1/07)

January 4: US Representative José E. Serrano (Democrat-New York), introduced the Cuba Reconciliation Act (H.R. 217), legislation that would "lift the trade embargo on Cuba." The bill was referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, House Ways and Means Committee, House Energy and Commerce Committee, House Judiciary Committee, House Financial Services Committee, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and House Agriculture Committee. (*US FED News*, 19/1/07)

January 4: Some dissident sectors say that now that the Democratic Party controls the US Congress, changes in the George W. Bush administration's strategy of confrontation with Cuba might be possible. "Cuba and the United States have to end their cold war," Manuel Cuesta Morúa, a spokesman for the Arco Progresista, a coalition of small social-democrat groups critical of Washington's position, told the press. In his view, "the ground should be prepared for interchange and dialogue" with the government that will succeed Bush, "which will probably not be Republican." Meanwhile, the issue of financial aid from Washington has again raised the question of how independent, or otherwise, the dissidents are. "All the financial aid being received now is like a dress rehearsal for the assistance that will be needed during Cuba's reconstruction," Sánchez said, without commenting on when he expects that to happen. In his view, "most dissident activists live in poverty, and they cannot be asked to give up the financial aid just to avoid accusations of being mercenaries." Sánchez was a signatory, along with three other well-known dissident leaders, of a letter delivered to Flake and Delahunt asking for "urgent and vital" financial aid to be restored to "political prisoners" and their families, and members of the human rights movement. Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo is one of the critics of this position, because this cash funding "jeopardises the independence of those who oppose the government by peaceful means, seeking a democratic opening." "So many Cuban exiles are well-off economically, and they should be the ones to help the dissidents within the country," said Gutiérrez Menoyo, adding that the United States' strategy of confrontation "contributes nothing at all to democratisation in Cuba." Arco Progresista has also distanced itself from financial aid from the US government. (*IPS*, 5/1/07)

January 4: Two anti-Castro activists convicted in a South Florida weapons case have been subpoenaed as witnesses by a federal grand jury in Texas investigating whether detained exile militant Luis Posada Carriles lied about how he sneaked into the United States in 2005. Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat, both in their 60s, were transferred in December from the Miami Federal Detention Center to a jail in El Paso to testify before the grand jury, a lawyer for Alvarez confirmed. The subpoenas were issued as Justice Department prosecutors pursue two investigations into

Posada's past -- one in El Paso dealing with the perjury question and the other in Newark, New Jersey, probing the former CIA-trained explosives expert's alleged role in the bombing of Cuban tourist sites in 1997. A federal judge has set a February 1 deadline for the US government to justify Posada's continued custody as an immigration detainee in El Paso. Eduardo Soto, Posada's Coral Gables attorney, told the press that he "totally" anticipates the judge ordering Posada's release -- unless the federal government provides solid evidence to justify further detention. The government, in a recent court motion, said the law allows for Posada to remain in detention because his release would pose "serious adverse foreign policy consequences." (*The Miami Herald*, 5/1/07)

January 5: Miami investment advisor Thomas J. Herzfeld created his closed-end fund for the day -- near or distant -- when political change opens Cuba to investment. But it's doing just fine in the meantime. Shares of the Herzfeld Caribbean Basin Fund, which trades on the Nasdaq index under the ticker CUBA, rose 124 percent in the past year, according to the Closed-End Fund Association. That makes the fund the No. 2 performer among 673 peers. Only the Greater China Fund fared better, with a 167 percent return, according to the trade group. The small fund, which has assets of about \$14 million, scouts for companies with ties to Florida and the Caribbean that will do well without a change in Cuba but will likely get a boost once the embargo ends. (*The Miami Herald*, 5/1/07)

January 6: The US intelligence community still believes Fidel Castro is terminally ill and has "months, not years" to live, a spokesman said. Though a Spanish doctor visited Castro last month and denied he has cancer, Ross Feinstein, spokesman for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said "The bottom line: He is terminally ill." "We believe that he has months, not years," Feinstein said, adding that "nothing has changed in the director's assessment" since the doctor's comments on Castro late last month. US Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte told *The Washington Post* on December 15 that "everything we see indicates it will not be much longer (...) months, not years," for the 80-year-old Cuban leader. (*AFP*, 6/1/07)

January 7: Peace activists visiting Cuba to protest the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay expressed hope that the new Democratic congressional leadership will help ease long-standing US trade and travel sanctions against the communist-run island. "I think it is about time we end the embargo and open up relations between the Cuban and American people," said Cindy Sheehan, who became an anti-war protester after her 24-year-old son, Casey, was killed in Iraq in April 2004. "It hurts both sides." Also in the delegation to Cuba is Medea Benjamin, who organized the trip through the California activist groups Global Exchange and Codepink. "The restrictions have been around way too long, change is way overdue," Benjamin said, adding that the Cuba sanctions made the group's trip very difficult. "We had to jump through hoops to put together this delegation," she said. (*AP*, 7/1/07)

January 8: Wives and mothers of Cuban political prisoners urged US peace activist Cindy Sheehan to visit the island's state-run jails during her weeklong trip to Cuba to call for the closure of the US-operated Guantanamo prison. The Ladies in White, a group of women demanding the release of their loved ones, described what they called "inhumane" conditions at Cuba's prisons in a letter for Sheehan that was sent to international reporters. The group said it was trying to get a copy to Sheehan as well. "At the same time you and your noble followers fight for the closure of the US prison at the Guantanamo naval base (...) just a few miles away at the provincial Guantanamo prison in Cuban territory, peaceful and defenseless political prisoners suffer inhumane conditions, (living) without potable water and with poor nutrition, deficient medical assistance, insects and rodents, limited visits and precarious communication," the letter said. "We exhort you to visit the prisons of Cuba, chosen randomly, and not those prepared" by authorities, it added. In the letter, the Ladies in White said they are a peaceful group that faces constant harassment from Cuban officials. They also asked Sheehan to meet with them so she "could know this other reality of Cuban society." (*AP*, 8/1/07)

January 8: A watchdog group called for a government investigation into TV and Radio Martí's use of privately owned South Florida media to broadcast anti-Castro programming to Cuba. The Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington asked the Government Accountability Office to look into the legality of TV and Radio Martí's contracts with Radio Mambí (Univisión's WAQI-AM 710) and Azteca América (WPMF-TV 38). "Taxpayers should not be

paying for the illegal transmission of government propaganda within US borders," said Melanie Sloan, executive director of Washington, D.C.-based CREW, a nonprofit group that gets some of its funding from Democratic-leaning donors. Larry Hart, spokesman for the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees the Martí, said that the board remains confident it has the legal authority to lease time from the private stations. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/1/07)

January 8: Sixty-seven Cuban migrants turned up on the beaches of south Florida in three separate groups. The first group, of 21 persons, arrived at Dry Tortugas; the second one, of 28 peoples, at Key Largo; and the third group, of 18 migrants, arrived at Elliott Key. Eight out of the 67 were minors, 13 women, and the rest were men. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/1/07)

January 10: Cuba condemned as "theft" the use of frozen Cuban assets in the United States to compensate the families of two Americans killed in the 1961 US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion. The families of Thomas Ray, a CIA contractor whose plane was shot down by Cuban anti-aircraft guns, and Howard Anderson, who was executed by a firing squad, were cleared by a US court in November to collect nearly \$91 million after they won separate lawsuits, in 2003 and 2004, against Cuba. The Cuban Foreign Ministry said the families were paid \$72.1 million on November 27 from bank accounts holding frozen funds belonging to the National Bank of Cuba and the country's telecommunications company. It was the fourth compensation payout since 1996, totaling \$170.2 million in Cuban funds, a ministry statement published by the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said. "The government of Cuba condemns these new assaults on the Cuban funds frozen in the United States because they violate international law and are another example of US government's criminal policy of blockade and hostility against our country," it said. [[Statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)] (*Reuters*, 10/1/07)

January 10: Anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan is ignoring an appeal by wives and mothers of imprisoned Cuban political dissidents for her to visit Cuban prisons during her trip to protest the treatment of suspected terrorists held at Guantanamo Bay. The Damas de Blanco, or Ladies in White, who march silently through the streets of Havana every Sunday in protest at the incarceration of political prisoners of the Castro regime, wrote a letter to Ms. Sheehan inviting her to visit Cuban prisons. The Damas drew Ms. Sheehan's attention to the poor state of Cuban prisons, which they say lack clean drinking water and adequate food and where their relatives are imprisoned solely for speaking out against Fidel Castro's government. The leader of Ms. Sheehan's trip, Medea Benjamin, said the American activists had not seen the letter and that they would be focusing solely on Guantanamo. "It just so happens that this is where the [Guantanamo] prisoners are," Ms. Benjamin said. That the group is visiting Cuba, where prisons define daily life for many, is "very incidental," she added. (*The New York Sun*, 10/1/07)

January 11: A US grand jury has indicted jailed anti-Castro Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles, accused of bombing a Cuban airliner in 1976, on seven immigration charges in a move that may assure he stays in custody. The US Justice Department said that Posada, 78, was charged with one count of naturalization fraud and six counts of making false statements while seeking US citizenship after he entered the country illegally in 2005. Posada has been held without charges since May 2005, but a federal judge had set a February deadline for his release unless legal action was taken. The government said he would go before a federal magistrate in a hearing on the charges. Posada has been a political problem for the Bush administration because US foes Cuba and Venezuela consider him a terrorist for his suspected involvement in a 1976 airline bombing that killed 73 people. (*Reuters*, 11/1/07)

January 11: Raúl Castro, Cuba's acting president, will remain out of the spotlight after his brother's death but will maintain the system Fidel Castro established, a panel of Cuba experts said. "I'm not predicting that forever Cuba will remain the way it is, but for the short-term, the foreseeable future, one, two, three years ahead, I see significant repression, control of the population and very little openness," said Jaime Suchlicki, director of the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies. Suchlicki made the remarks during a media briefing on Cuba's future at the university's Casa Bacardi, the institute's headquarters. Other University of Miami experts weighing in included Brian Latell, a Latin American and Caribbean specialist and author; Andy Gomez, whose research focuses

on human values and attitudes in a post-Castro Cuba; Jorge Piñón, an energy expert, and Eric Driggs, the institute's humanitarian aid coordinator. "He is a ruthless military leader that for 47 years has run Cuba next to his brother. I don't anticipate Raúl becoming a reformer in his old age," Suchlicki said. Latell said Raúl Castro's governing style differs from his brother's. He delegates authority and seeks a wide range of advice, including from those who disagree with him, Latell said. "He's going to lead collegially. He's going to share the stage," Latell said. Since taking power, Raúl Castro has twice made overtures to negotiate with the United States. Suchlicki said he did not think Raúl Castro was serious about opening up a dialogue with the United States. Latell said he thought Raúl Castro's offer was aimed at appeasing segments of Cuba's population. Several panelists said one danger for Raúl Castro's government is a younger generation that does not have as strong a connection to the Cuban Revolution and the Castro brothers as their parents did. (*Sun Sentinel*, 12/1/07)

January 11: Raul Castro is firmly in control of Cuba and in a position to keep the island stable, at least for the short term, after his brother Fidel dies, a top US intelligence official told a Senate committee. Army Lt. General Michael D. Maples, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, also said that Raul, who's been Cuba's defense minister since the early 1960s, enjoys "widespread respect and support among Cuban military leaders who will be crucial in a permanent government succession." Maples' remarks, in a brief written statement to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, provide the first glimpse into what US officials believe might occur in the months following Fidel's demise. Raul Castro took the reins of power after Fidel fell ill nearly six months ago. "In Cuba, Raul Castro is firmly in control as Cuba's acting president," Maples said, "and will likely maintain power and stability after Fidel Castro dies, at least for the short-term." The US intelligence community's top chiefs joined Maples in an annual Senate hearing on threats to US security. Though the hearing focused almost entirely on Iraq and terrorism, the testimony shed some new light on the intelligence community's latest thinking on Latin America. The outgoing Director of National Intelligence, John D. Negroponte, whose agency coordinates the work of 16 US spying organizations, said the "key drivers" that will influence events in a post-Fidel Cuba are "how cohesive the governing elite will remain in the absence of Cuba's iconic leader, how astute Raul Castro proves to be as his brother's successor, and how much pressure the population will exert on the government in seeking economic and political reforms." (*McClatchy Newspapers*, 11/1/07)

January 13: Adolfo Franco, who oversees the US government's ambitious project to promote democracy in Cuba, will be leaving his post to serve as a foreign policy advisor for Senator John McCain, who is considering a presidential run. The announcement by Franco, assistant administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean for the US Agency for International Development, comes two months after a critical audit of the Cuba program by the congressional Government Accountability Office; a Miami Herald series also outlined problems with the program's oversight and effectiveness. But the Democratic congressional leader who sought the GAO audit said Franco should not be blamed, saying Franco inherited a flawed program. "The whole Cuba democracy promotion program, it cries out to be reviewed in a very transparent way with rigorous oversight," said Representative William Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts) "Let's have a full hearing. Let's air it out." Delahunt and Representative Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona), both opponents of US sanctions on Cuba, requested the GAO audit. In response to e-mailed questions, Franco said he was not pressured to resign and that USAID had done "phenomenal work to further the dissident human rights movement in Cuba." (*The Miami Herald*, 13/1/07)

January 15: Cuba said the United States should indict Luis Posada Carriles, a militant anti-Castro exile accused in the bombing of a Cuban airliner, for terrorism instead of minor immigration charges. The Cuban Foreign Ministry accused the US government of protecting the former CIA operative from extradition to Venezuela to face charges of masterminding the bombing of a Cuban airliner in 1976. A US grand jury in El Paso, Texas, indicted Posada, 78, on seven immigration charges including one count of naturalization fraud and six counts of making false statements while seeking US citizenship after he entered the country illegally in 2005. "The US government knows well, and has all the proof, about the innumerable acts of terrorism committed by Posada Carriles," the statement published by Granma, the ruling Communist Party's newspaper, said. [[Statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)] (*Reuters*, 15/1/07)

January 16: The White House played down a Spanish news report that Fidel Castro is gravely ill following three failed operations, calling it "a round up" of previous reports. "We've seen the report out of El Pais. I think that as far as we can tell, it's sort of a round up of previous health reports. We've got nothing new," spokesman Tony Snow told reporters. The Spanish newspaper El Pais, in a report swiftly dismissed by the Cuban leader's Spanish doctor, said that an intestinal infection, followed by at least three operations and various complications had left Castro "laid up in a very serious condition." The report published on the El Pais website quoted medical sources at Madrid's Gregorio Maranon hospital, from which a doctor traveled to Havana last month to examine the 80-year-old leader. (*AFP*, 16/1/07)

January 16: A bipartisan coalition of US lawmakers who favor easing the nearly 50-year-old trade embargo against Cuba say the new Democratic leadership in congress offers hope for progress this year. The coalition, which embraces Democratic liberals from the Northeast and the West Coast and conservatives from agricultural states in the Midwest and Mississippi Valley, say they will probably pursue an incremental strategy designed to roll back steps taken to tighten the embargo by President George W. Bush over the past six years. In particular, the lawmakers, who are backed by a lobbying group for major US companies called USA Engage, think they can reduce restrictions on food exports to Cuba and on travel to the island, particularly by Cuban-Americans with family members there. "Things are better; we can make some real progress," said Democratic Representative Jim McGovern, one member of a delegation of 10 lawmakers who traveled to Cuba in mid-December. His observation was seconded by Jake Colvin, USA Engage's director, who accompanied the delegation on the trip. The new legislative push comes amid continued speculation about Cuba's apparent transition since last summer from the nearly 50-year rule of its ailing president, Fidel Castro, to the post-Castro era. (*IPS*, 16/1/07)

January 16: President Fidel Castro's exit from Cuba's political scene is unlikely to spur major changes in the situation there, two House members who recently visited the country told reporters. Representatives Jim McGovern (Democrat-Massachusetts), and Jo Ann Emerson (Republican-Missouri), were part of a 10-member congressional delegation that visited Havana in December 2006. "There's no indication at all that what this administration's been telling people for a long time, that there's going to be this massive uprising, is going to happen; that's not going to happen," Mr. McGovern said. Although Cuba's government may still be hanging onto the idea that Fidel Castro will return, average Cubans "have already kind of moved on," Mr. McGovern said. Both House members said that without a shift in US policy, political changes are not likely in Cuba. Mr. McGovern suggested that eased relations with the United States could lead to political liberalization. He also said some senior Cuban officials might not want the United States to ease its embargo or otherwise loosen relations, saying that every time the two countries start to get close, "they do something stupid," such as arrest dissidents or shoot down a plane. Mrs. Emerson criticized US isolation of Cuba for providing Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez an opportunity to exert influence and was critical of Radio and TV Marti, the US government program to broadcast US values into Cuba. (*The Washington Times*, 17/1/07)

January 16: Royal Bank of Canada has closed the US-dollar chequing accounts of hundreds of dual-citizen Canadians and refuses to open new ones -- a move it asserts was necessary to comply with US rules on antiterrorism and money laundering. The decision, which has prompted charges of discrimination and racial profiling, has affected "a couple of hundred" Canadian citizens with dual nationalities of Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Sudan, North Korea or Myanmar since April, RBC spokesman David Moorcroft said. Mr. Moorcroft stressed that RBC, which has the most US-dollar accounts in Canada, is simply complying with US Treasury Department rules that govern any dealings with the US currency. "These are not rules made by Royal Bank (...), they are rules for banks all over the world," he said. (*Globe & Mail*, 17/1/07)

January 17: Fidel Castro, ailing and out of sight, has been meeting with a trickle of international guests in recent months, a US government official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive situation with Cuba, declined to say with whom Castro was meeting. But the meetings, generally with visitors from Latin America, suggest he may be setting the stage for a transition of power that he hopes will protect the government he has built over four decades. In a review of global threats, National Intelligence Director John Negroponte said that

Castro and his brother Raul, who has taken over as Cuba's temporary leader, are trying to create a "soft landing" during the transfer of control. "From the point of the United States policy, we don't want to see that happen," Negroponte said. "We want to see the prospects for freedom in that country enhanced as a result of the transition" from Fidel Castro. Negroponte also said Castro's days "seem to be numbered," a view supported by the US government official. That official said US intelligence believes that Castro is likely to die within a month or two, although analysts don't yet know the precise nature of his illness. (AP, 17/1/07)

January 17: Relatives of the 73 people killed in a 1976 jetliner bombing urged the US government to charge the Cuban militant suspected of the attack with terrorism, saying that anything less is an "insult to the memory of the thousands of citizens who have died victims of terrorist actions." In a statement published in Cuba's Communist Party daily Granma, the families rejected a recent US Justice Department decision to charge Luis Posada Carriles with lying to federal immigration agents in a bid to become a naturalized citizen. They said they received the news with "stupor and indignation." "To accept that the internationally known terrorist Luis Posada Carriles be judged merely as an innocuous liar is to accept the strange idea that our families were never massacred in the sabotage of the Cubana Airlines plane," the statement said. (AP, 17/1/07)

January 17: The United States denied a travel permit to its Greco-Roman wrestling Olympic team that had plans for a series of joint training sessions in Havana with its Cuban counterparts, said the official newspaper Granma. (Reuters, 17/1/07)

January 17: Royal Bank of Canada said it will allow customers with dual citizenship to open U.S.-dollar denominated bank accounts, providing they can prove they are resident in Canada. Gordon Nixon, chief executive officer at Canada's largest bank, said he was concerned that immigrant clients would feel that Royal Bank did not value their patronage. "The issue the banks face comes from Canadian citizens who don't reside in Canada," said Mr. Nixon. "Royal Bank is no different from other financial institutions when it comes to dealing with those customers." The bank has been under fire from critics who said that it had closed US-dollar accounts held by anyone with dual citizenship. Critics said the move smacked of discrimination and racial profiling. It affected Canadian citizens with dual nationalities of Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Sudan, North Korea and Myanmar. (Globe & Mail, 18/1/07)

January 17: If Cubans flee in droves when Fidel Castro dies, those intercepted at sea will likely wind up at this base where nearly 400 men captured in the war on terror are held, creating "an incredible challenge" for US forces, the base commander said. Military officials say they have begun planning for a possible mass exodus, scouting potential sites to detain migrants in tents while keeping them far from the prisoners suspected of links to al-Qaida or the Taliban. A sudden surge of migrants would return Guantanamo to an earlier role. More than 40,000 Haitian and Cuban migrants were held here in the 1990s when political and economic turmoil in their countries prompted a mass movement toward US shores. "We continue to plan for the possibility of that happening again," Navy Captain Mark Leary, the commanding officer of the base, told the press. But it would be much more difficult next time. In the 1990s, Guantanamo Bay, which covers 45 square miles of land and water, was a sleepy Navy outpost with plenty of open space. Now, the land where most of the migrants were held is occupied by Camp Delta — a prison complex behind tall fences and coils of razor wire. The United States would have to increase troop levels to provide additional security and bring in more food and other supplies, most of which now come in a barge every two weeks. Planning for a potential exodus has not involved Cuban officials, Leary said. Top officers based at Guantanamo Bay regularly meet with their Cuban counterparts to discuss low-level practical issues such as how to fight fires that frequently scorch the dry brush that surrounds Guantanamo Bay. (AP, 18/1/07)

January 17: President George W. Bush extended the suspension of a clause in a 1996 law, which allows legal actions against foreign companies that use US's properties confiscated in Cuba for another six months. The clauses of Title Three of the Helms-Burton Act have been suspended every six months since the Law was passed. (OCB, 18/1/07)

January 18: Luis Diaz, a US Coast Guard spokesman in Miami, said officials there aren't expecting large numbers of Cuban migrants after Fidel Castro dies. "Since (Fidel Castro's) brother took over, we've seen a decrease in migrants," he said. "A lot of people expected the opposite, but our numbers indicate there has been a decrease." (*AP*, 18/1/07)

January 18: An Army National Guard staff sergeant who was denied the opportunity to visit his children in Cuba during a two-week break from the war in Iraq has appealed to the House Hispanic Caucus for help. Carlos Lazo, who addressed the congressional caucus, was a medic serving in Iraq in 2004 when the Bush administration changed its policies to no longer allow annual trips back to Cuba to visit family members. He discovered the change while on leave from the war zone when he flew to Miami with plans to make a trip to Cuba to see his two teenage sons. New rules that took effect June 30, 2004, allowed only one trip every three years — with no exceptions. "They said if they made an exception for me, they would have to make exceptions for everything," Lazo said. "Before, you could visit every year — one trip a year — and more often for humanitarian reasons. I wasn't able to see them, and I went back to Iraq." After his tour in Iraq ended, Lazo said he still couldn't make a trip to see his sons because he had last visited in 2001 and three years had not passed. Representative Hilda Solis (Democrat-California), a Hispanic Caucus member and member of the Cuba Working Group that visited Cuba in December, has been working to help Lazo. She called the travel restrictions "hurtful" and said she hopes there is a bipartisan move to change them. (*Army Times*, 19/1/07)

January 18: A Cuban prosecutor has asked for life in prison for an alleged Colombian drug trafficker jailed in Havana -- based on complaints from US, Colombian and Panamanian officials, but not on any allegations of trafficking within Cuba, according to the suspect's Miami lawyer. The decision enraged Miami attorney Oscar Rodríguez, who said his client, Hernando Gómez Bustamante, was arrested in Havana on charges of carrying false identification documents, not drug trafficking. "There's something fishy here," Rodríguez said. "Cuba's intentions are very dark (...) They're going to condemn him using Internet clippings." Considered one of the top leaders of Colombia's North Valley Cartel, Gómez is wanted by the US Drug Enforcement Administration. The US and Colombian governments have offered a total of \$5 million for information leading to his arrest. Panama also has legal proceedings against him. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 18/1/07)

January 18: Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman will make another trade trip to Cuba in March. He announced his third visit to the country and the fifth trade mission of his administration during a conference call with reporters. A delegation that also is expected to include Greg Ibach, state agriculture director, and Richard Baier, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, will be on the trade trail March 25-28. Taking advantage of an exception to a US trade embargo that allows for delivering agricultural commodities, Nebraska has already filled a \$30 million order for dry edible beans and other entries on the Cuban shopping list. Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy led a trade group to Cuba in 2006 that ended with a memorandum of understanding and prospects for another \$30 million in sales. (*The Lincoln Journal Star*, 19/1/07)

January 19: The United States is calling on Canada to take about 40 Cuban refugees now housed at the American naval base at Guantanamo, Cuba. Ellen Sauerbery, an American assistant secretary of state, spent two days in Ottawa this week discussing the matter with foreign affairs and immigration officials. Canadian officials say no policy decisions have been made. "We've encouraged Canada to make this a priority in their resettlement policy because this is an area of tremendous need and vulnerability," she told reporters. The Cubans at Guantanamo were plucked from the sea by the American coast guard while trying to escape their homeland. Ms. Sauerbery said most migrants are economic refugees and in no danger of political persecution and are routinely returned to Cuba. But the 40 at the naval base, along with a handful of Haitians, are deemed to be legitimate refugees, she said. "Canada has been very helpful in taking Haitians, but at this point has not taken Cubans. We would welcome Canada's assistance." She said Canadian officials said they would look into the matter. Ms. Sauerbery also said the United States is planning for a new wave of migration when Fidel Castro dies. "A lot of people may see this as an opportunity to escape. We are laying out a strategy to try to discourage a mass migration, but at the same time we can't guarantee it won't occur." A Canadian Immigration Department spokeswoman confirmed that Canada views Guantanamo as still being part of the territory of

Cuba, which means these migrants are not considered refugees. Ms. Sauerbery said the United States has requested the federal government consider changing the law to fix this loophole, but Canada's response so far has been non-committal. (*Canadian Press, National Post*, 19,22/1/07)

January 19: US Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid included Fidel Castro and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in the global challenges the US has to face in 2007. Reid made the comments to the National Press Club in Washington. "Chavez and (Cuba's Fidel) Castro want to put their leftist marks on young democracies," Reid said. (*Seattle Post*, 19/1/07)

January 20: The Coastguard Service reported that twenty-seven Cubans managed to reach Boca Chita, a small island 16 miles south of Key Biscayne. Another group of 11 Cuban immigrants arrived on a beach on Isla Mona, Puerto Rico, on January 19, reported the police. (*The Miami Herald*, 21/1/07)

January 22: From small South Florida businesses run by Cuban exiles to multinationals with sprawling global operations, many companies have long had a Cuba plan in a drawer or a file somewhere, ready for the day when the US trade embargo is lifted. Although the nation of 11.3 million people represents a virgin market for all types of products and services, several sectors appear riper for immediate investment than others. One industry that the Cuban government is already pushing is oil and gas exploration. Cuba boasts untapped reserves of both oil and natural gas, and both commodities could be big revenue earners for the cash-strapped island. But they also require significant capital investment and technical know-how, which foreign companies have. Housing is another sector that is in dire need of investment, both to rehabilitate existing stocks and build new housing. Experts estimate Cubans need some 50,000 new homes. US tourism operators are also eyeing a brand new market that is physically easy and cheap for Americans to access, especially from South Florida. If the embargo is lifted at some point and the Cuban economy opens up, some businesses may still be difficult to enter. Among them: the media, which the Cuban government may be reluctant to relinquish to foreign investors, and sectors that rely on a consumer-driven economy, such as advertising. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/1/07)

January 22: A University of Colorado study predicted in 2002 that nearly 1 million Americans would visit Cuba the first year it was opened to the United States -- rivaling both Puerto Rico and Jamaica as tourism draws. The report said travel would soar to 3 million Americans by the fifth year, a potential flood that has tourism officials throughout Florida worried. Also in 2002, Visit Florida produced a report warning that interest in visiting Cuba was growing among Florida tourists and that one in five would pick Cuba over the Sunshine State if given the choice. "People want what you can't have," said Dale Brill, Visit Florida's marketing chief. "And when what you can't have is made available, it's going to have immediate appeal." But some experts say that even with white-sand beaches and colonial charm, Cuba's government-run hotels and crumbling infrastructure will limit its appeal. "They can't handle a whole lot more" tourism, said Joseph Scarpaci, a Virginia Tech professor who recently returned from his 45th Cuban trip. "And they aren't handling what they have very well." From concerns of a clogged A1A highway as tourists flock to Havana-bound ferries to the use of Cuban migrants to alleviate the Keys' labor shortage, the island chain predicts big changes should Washington open up commerce with the communist nation. Virginia Panico, president of the Key West Chamber of Commerce, met with government tourism officials in Havana in May 2005. Joined by a delegation of Chamber members (the group delivered medical supplies under an exclusion of the travel ban for humanitarian missions), Panico said they discussed luring vacationers to both destinations. "We told them we are prepared to do pre- and post-packaging -- three nights here, two nights there, or vice versa," she said. "We've done our homework," Florida Keys tourism director Harold Wheeler said. "We're prepared." (*The Miami Herald*, 22/1/07)

January 22: Cuban officials told American suppliers that they plan to shift about \$300 million in food purchases away from the United States toward friendlier countries in the coming months, according to US executives present at a recent meeting. The reason: Cuba has been buying food from suppliers in some 30 states in an effort to get those suppliers and their states to lobby Washington to ease the US embargo. But after six years of buying, the strategy has failed to result

in an easing of the embargo, Pedro Alvarez, chief of Cuba's Alimport import agency, told the group last December. Cuba likely will buy more rice, soy and wheat from Vietnam, China, Argentina and Brazil this year instead of US farmers, said Jay Brickman, vice president of government services for Crowley Maritime Corp., present at the meeting. Crowley ships haul US food products to Cuba from Broward County's Port Everglades, with US authorization. The Cuban government began slowing purchases from the United States about two years ago, shifting business to such political allies as Venezuela, according to trade reports from Washington and Havana. (*Sun Sentinel*, 22/1/07)

January 22: An anti-Fidel Castro militant accused of bombing a Cuban airliner in 1976 pleaded not guilty to US immigration charges, the latest round in a long fight by the US government to keep him in jail. Luis Posada Carriles, 78, who says he has renounced violence in the fight against Castro and only wants to join his family in Miami, Florida, appeared before US Magistrate Norbert Garney in El Paso shackled at his wrists and feet. He has been detained since May 2005. If convicted on all charges, he could be sentenced to 40 years in prison. The charges are the latest effort to hold Posada without declaring him a terrorist. Cuba and Venezuela have demanded Posada's extradition in the Cubana Airlines bombing that killed 73 people, including teenage members of Cuba's national fencing team returning from a tournament in Venezuela. (*Reuters*, 22/1/07)

January 22: A Coast Guard cutter repatriated 47 Cuban migrants to Bahia de Cabañas. The Coast Guard said a first group of 32 Cubans were picked up after a Coast Guard jet crew spotted two go-fast vessels on January 18 in the vicinity of Cay Sal Banks, Bahamas. A Coast Guard cutter with a Bahamian official on board was diverted to intercept the two vessels. Another group of 16 Cuban migrants were spotted by the cruise ship Coral Princess. The migrants, who were on a raft or homemade boat, were later turned over to the Coast Guard. (*Sun Sentinel*, 24/1/07)

January 23: Members of the bipartisan Cuba Working Group have proposed legislation to lift economic restrictions on Cuba. They have been explaining to Washington audiences why they back the normalization of relations with the poor island nation. Democrat William Delahunt of Massachusetts told the Inter-American Dialogue research center the trip itself showed that many in Congress disagree with existing US policy on Cuba. "I would submit that our paramount motive in going to Cuba was to demonstrate just simply by our physical presence, given the size of our delegation, that many in this country, particularly in the US Congress, want dialogue," he said. "And that obviously is not the position of the administration." Washington forbids US citizens to travel to Cuba or spend money on Cuban products. The two countries do not have diplomatic relations. Republican Jeff Flake of Arizona said US policy of shutting Cuba out has not worked to oust the island's communist government or end human rights abuses. He said Washington should instead try focusing on engaging Havana with trade and dialogue. "We're losing influence," he said. "We could have influence in Havana, but we are very much on the sidelines while this transition is taking place." (*VOA*, 23/1/07)

January 23: Republican and Democratic lawmakers said they would push hard to get legislation through Congress this year to ease restrictions on travel to Cuba. Republican Representative Jo Ann Emerson of Missouri said the strategy was to attach Cuba legislation to a mammoth bill, most likely the farm bill, making it harder for President George W. Bush to veto it once it reached his desk for signature. Emerson and Democratic Representative James McGovern of Massachusetts, who were speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations, were optimistic that such a strategy would work, particularly with the Democrats now in charge of Congress. "There is a real opportunity for us to actually make some policy changes here (...) we have to go through this back door approach," said McGovern. (*AP*, 23/1/07)

January 23: President Bush said his administration would continue to "speak out" for freedom in Cuba, mentioning the island for the first time in a State of the Union address. "We will continue to speak out for the cause of freedom in places like Cuba, Belarus and Burma, and continue to awaken the conscience of the world to save the people of Darfur," Bush said in a portion of his speech listing foreign policy priorities. Earlier, national security advisor Stephen Hadley said, "we hope there is an opportunity for a democratic transition in Cuba, where the Cuban people will have an opportunity, really for the first time, to take control of their own future and define the kind of government they want

going forward." The president did not mention Cuba when he listed nations that violate human rights in his State of the Union speech a year ago. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/1/06)

January 24: Nineteen Cuban illegal migrants came ashore in the backyard of the home of US Naval Air Station Key West's commander, officials said. The group of 12 men, five women and two children was discovered by an off-duty Defense Department officer who was jogging on US military property, Key West police said. The group arrived in what appeared to be a homemade boat, police said. (*AP*, 25/1/07)

January 24: The US government should emulate the Catholic Church and look for a dramatic way to improve relations with Cuba, said a US lawmaker after returning from a fact-finding trip to the Caribbean island. Representative James McGovern (Democrat-Massachusetts), cited the 1998 trip to Cuba by Pope John Paul II and said it had a "dramatic impact" on improving the church's situation in the communist-ruled country. "The pope's visit opened things up for the church," said McGovern at a January 23 panel discussion in Washington on US-Cuban relations. "We should learn by that example," he said. McGovern was part of a bipartisan delegation of House members that visited Cuba in December to check out the political situation caused by the lengthy hospitalization of Fidel Castro after intestinal surgery. (*Catholic News Service*, 24/1/07)

January 25: The US Treasury Department shot down the World Trade Center Palm Beach's plan for a humanitarian, educational and information-exchange trip to Cuba in June. The WTC Palm Beach, a not-for-profit trade group affiliated with 278 similar organizations around the globe, unveiled plans to take about 30 South Florida professionals to the island last December. The Palm Beach group said it wanted to discuss ideas and technology related to food, water and medicine with non-government agencies and private citizens in Cuba. It said the delegation didn't intend to conduct business or to meet with Cuban government officials. The group was coordinating the mission with its counterpart, the World Trade Center Havana. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/1/07)

January 25: A human right watchdog has launched a campaign to defend Cuban human rights activist, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva. According to New York based Human Rights First, Leiva and his family have been subject to harassment, intimidation, and violence on the part of government officials and mobs of civilians (who are widely believed to be organized by the government) who have repeatedly surrounded his home for hours at a time, shouting threats and banging on windows. Leiva is a human rights lawyer and President of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights, a human rights monitoring group that exposes human rights violations by the government and reports on attacks against peaceful activists and independent journalists. (*HRF Press Release*, 25/1/07)

January 25: Legislation to chip away at the Bush administration's hard-line Cuba policy is in the works in the House, where Republicans and Democrats are planning a variety of measures aimed at easing the US policy on Cuba. The first bill, which would lift the ban on Americans traveling to Cuba, was introduced by Representative Jeff Flake, Arizona Republican. The measures to ease the policy will be filed as stand-alone legislation or as amendments to appropriations bills or other legislation. Mr. Flake, who introduced his bill with House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles B. Rangel, New York Democrat, said that nearly 50 years of the current policy have "done little" to bring democracy to Cuba. Instead of aiding democratic reform, the policy has given Fidel Castro "a convenient scapegoat for his own regime's failures," Mr. Flake said. Representative Bill Delahunt, Massachusetts Democrat, plans legislation to ease restrictions on Cuban-American family travel. Other possibilities include legislation to ease payment restrictions for cash sales of food to Cuba. The White House had no comment on the bills yesterday. National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe only said: "Our Cuba policy is unchanged." (*The Washington Times*, 25/1/07)

January 26: World-renowned salsa singer Issac Delgado has emigrated from Cuba and plans to pursue his career from a new home in Florida, becoming the biggest name in Cuban music in more than a decade to make the politically charged move away from the communist enclave. Unlike the highly publicized defections in recent years of two other prominent Cuban vocalists, Manolin and Carlos Manuel, Delgado made his move under a cloak of secrecy. Internet

chat rooms have been abuzz about the star's whereabouts since late last year, but Delgado and his new US business associates have kept mum until now. Concert promoters were notified that the William Morris Agency had signed Delgado for worldwide representation. "Issac is probably the most significant singer of his generation," said Michel Vega, head of Latin music for William Morris, in an interview this week from his Miami office. "We're thrilled to be working with him and we think he's going to be a great addition to the American music landscape." The critically acclaimed singer was not immediately available for interviews. But Vega confirmed that the artist has settled into a new home in Tampa, Florida, along with his wife and children. Details of his entry into the country were not disclosed. (*Los Angeles Times*, 26/1/07)

January 26: After eight years of separation, Rene Gonzalez, one of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US, and his daughter Ivette finally got together at the Marianna, Florida, prison on the 30th of December of 2006, according to a statement from the family. The information was made public during the Cuban Round Table Broadcast. The girl went together with her sister Irma; her mother was not allowed to enter the US. It was the first time that their communication was not by telephone since father and daughters were abruptly separated, when Ivette was just four months old. (*Granma*, 27/1/07)

January 29: US lawsuits seeking monetary compensation from Cuba face discouraging prospects: The Cuban funds frozen in US accounts now are estimated at only around \$70 million and are expected to run out soon. The depletion of the Cuban assets held in US banks has alarmed Havana, which has accused the US government of stealing \$170.2 million of its money over the past five years. Cuba's accusation was contained in a note from the Ministry of Foreign Relations earlier this month, after a court ruling in Miami awarded \$400 million to the survivors of Robert Fuller, a US citizen executed by firing squad in Cuba in 1960. The compensation in that case has not been collected. "Cuba will never renounce its right to demand that the U.S. government take full responsibility for the theft of the funds that are legitimately ours, to the last cent," the ministry's note said. "These funds could be a subject for negotiation with Washington," said Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Center for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami. "The new clique of Raúl Castro, [Central Bank President] Francisco Soberón and company, is interested in those accounts, with a pragmatic vision." (*The Miami Herald*, 29/1/07)

January 29: The anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles, wanted in Cuba and Venezuela in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner and other terrorist attacks, pleaded not guilty to charges that he lied on his citizenship application about how he entered the United States. The 78-year-old anti-communist, who fought with CIA forces in the Bay of Pigs invasion and is believed to have plotted a failed attempt to kill Castro, is being held at an immigration facility near El Paso, Texas. A federal grand jury in early January indicted him on seven counts of making false statements to immigration officers about the details of his March 2005 arrival in the United States. Posada claims that he entered through the Mexican border, but authorities believe he sneaked in aboard a shrimp vessel owned by his allies Santiago Álvarez and Osvaldo Miat, both of whom also face legal charges. (*El País*, 29/1/07)

January 29: Oil prospecting in Cuban waters in the Gulf of Mexico may become another factor in the conflict with the United States, but researchers from both countries are carrying out joint studies on this body of water to preserve one of the planet's richest ecosystems. The US Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) is carrying out a research project on the northwestern coast of Cuba. HRI is collaborating with the University of Havana's Center for Marine Research (CIM) in the project, which began in 2003, and so far they have carried out three joint coastal expeditions, with four more planned for this year. "The Harte Institute is fortunate to be one of the few institutions licensed (by the US government) to carry out marine research in Cuba," David Guggenheim, the director of the HRI program on the island, said. This permission is in stark contrast with, for example, Washington's ban on US oil companies participating in oil prospecting on the Cuban underwater platform in the Gulf of Mexico, only 137 kilometers from the Florida peninsula. (*IPS*, 29/1/07)

January 31: A federal judge in South Florida has slapped three immigrant-smugglers with stiff prison terms of 12 years each for their part in a human-trafficking operation from Cuba that left a young woman dead. Judge K. Michael Moore, in imposing sentences that were twice those recommended by federal guidelines, said the harsh punishment was meant to serve as a deterrent to prospective smugglers. Amil Gonzalez Rodriguez, Rolando Gonzalez Delgado and Heinrich Castillo Diaz, all Cubans or Cuban-Americans, were sentenced in Key West. Gonzalez Delgado and Castillo Diaz pleaded guilty last year in a bargain with prosecutors to charges of involuntary manslaughter and people-trafficking that resulted in death. At trial, Gonzalez Rodriguez was acquitted of the manslaughter charge, but convicted on the people-trafficking count. He also was found guilty of providing false information to federal agents. (*EFE*, 31/1/07)

January 31: The US government is ready to stop a mass migration of Cubans when Fidel Castro dies, two Florida lawmakers said after meeting with military and Homeland Security officials. US Representative John Mica, the top Republican on the House Transportation Committee, organized the closed-door meeting to find out if the Coast Guard and other Homeland Security agencies are prepared to protect Florida, where many refugees likely would migrate. Mica, of Winter Park, said he was satisfied with what he heard. US Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (Republican-Miami), agreed. The United States will not lose control of its borders, Diaz-Balart said. "That's just not an option." But Andy Gomez, assistant provost of the University of Miami and a scholar on Cuban issues who has met with federal officials about their plan, said they may be underestimating the fallout from Castro's death. Gomez said as many as 500,000 Cubans could end up fleeing if social and political unrest breaks out on the island just 90 miles from Florida. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/2/07)

January 31: Starting in February the United States will allow Cubans to obtain visa information and schedule appointments by using a telephone service operating since 2006 to eliminate inconsistencies. Starting February 15th, Cuban residents in the United States will be able to contact a "call center" to request three new types of permanent visas on behalf of their relatives in Cuba: immigrant visas, fiancé visas and family-based paroles. (*Reuters*, 31/1/07)

January 31: US immigration officials have asked a federal judge to toss out Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles' bid to be set free pending his ordered deportation. In a four-page motion filed in El Paso, the government argued that Posada's lawsuit is moot because he was transferred to the custody of the US Marshals Service after being indicted January 11. He had filed the lawsuit last year after spending nearly a year in a federal detention center on an immigration violation. Posada, 78, was indicted on charges that he made several false statements about how he made it into the US in 2005. Posada, a former CIA operative and US Army soldier, is accused by Cuba and Venezuela of masterminding the 1976 bombing of a Cuban jetliner that killed 73 people. (*AP*, 31/1/07)

January 31: The United States admitted it had no idea about Fidel Castro's state of health, hours after Cuban television broadcast new pictures of its ailing communist nemesis. "We don't actually have any idea what the status of his health is," State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said, despite previous predictions by a senior US official that Castro's days may be numbered. "The Cuban regime is surprisingly disinterested in providing the US government with assessments of Fidel Castro's health," Casey told reporters. "I can't tell you whether these new images are significant or not and I think it's rather speculative for anybody who is not an intimate part of the regime to try and give you one." (*AFP*, 31/1/07)

January 31: Citing the heartbreak of divided families, House members introduced a bill that would allow Cuban-Americans to visit their relatives in Cuba as often as they wish and take as much money as they want. "I look at this as an emergency. This needs to take place right now," said Silvia Wilhelm of Miami, a travel-rights advocate eager to visit her cousin in Cuba. "Lots of people are suffering on both sides of the Florida Straits." The House bill is the latest of several measures in Congress designed to chip away at the US embargo of Cuba. A separate bill introduced the week before would remove travel restrictions for all Americans, not just Cuban-Americans. Farm-state members plan to

introduce another bill to remove restrictions on financing to ease food sales to Cuba. Yet another bill already filed would allow Cuban baseball players to come and go between this country and the island. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/2/07)

January 31: Fidel Castro no longer plays a central role in governing Cuba, but the ailing leader remains so influential that his successors will have to move swiftly to establish themselves as the legitimate government when he dies, a senior US diplomat said. US Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon, Washington's top diplomat in Latin America, told the press in an interview that Castro's political influence was underscored by post-handover Havana's limited ability to set an agenda. "It is evident that he does not have a central role in the day-to-day management of Cuban society," Shannon said during a visit to Bogota. "But he does appear to have some kind of controlling political role because the regime that has taken over really has not been able to define itself." Shannon said Washington had worked "quietly and efficiently" to engage Cuban opposition and to persuade other countries of the need for a democratic transition on the island. He dismissed a newspaper report suggesting US policy toward Cuba has been paralyzed. "Once Fidel Castro leaves the scene, Cuba will lose its revolutionary leader and it will be faced with a situation in which this new government will have to create its own form of legitimacy with the Cuban people," Shannon said. "The only way it can do that is improving the day to day life of Cubans, which will require some kind of economic opening, and then giving the Cuban people a voice in how the government responds to them," he said. (*Reuters*, 31/1/07)