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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## February 2005

### Highlights:

**Domestic Affairs:** Havana's International Book Fair opens its doors in San Pedro de La Cabaña fortress. Cuba bans smoking in public places. The wives of several Cuban dissidents march to Revolution Plaza to demand amnesty for all political prisoners. Cuban officials declare their fight against drugs as a national security issue.

**Economy:** Hundreds of thousands of Cubans are suffering the consequences of the severe drought that has been punishing the island since 2003. The Cuban Ministry of Tourism passes a resolution that regulates relations between the more than 100,000 Cubans who work in the tourism industry and "foreign personnel." Cuban enterprises can no longer issue checks in excess of \$5,000 convertible pesos without prior authorization from the "Committee for Approval of Convertible Currency Expenditures".

**Exile Community:** Cuban writer and Miguel de Cervantes Award winner, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, dies in London.

**Foreign Affairs:** Fidel Castro expresses disdain for what was meant to be a conciliatory gesture by the European Union with regards to the lifting of diplomatic sanctions, saying Cuba does not need Europe. Cuban vice president Carlos Lage attends the 1st Economic Cooperation and China-Caribbean Forum held in Jamaica. Dominica's Prime Minister, Roosevelt Skerrit, holds talks with Fidel Castro. Cuba's National Information Agency announces that Felipe Pérez Roque will be leading the Cuban delegation attending Uruguay's president-elect Tabaré Vázquez's inauguration.

**US-Cuba Relations:** A group of US senators presents a bill to Congress seeking to clarify a law that permits the sale of agricultural produce and food to Cuba. Fidel Castro warns the US against plotting to kill Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez. The US Treasury Department rules that American exports to the island cannot leave US ports until Havana pays cash. A Cuban government tobacco company loses its right to the Cohiba cigar name in the US.



### Domestic Affairs

**February 3:** Havana's International Book Fair opened its doors with an activity at the San Francisco de Asís Plaza in Old Havana. This year's fair is dedicated to Cuban writer Abelardo Estorino and Poet Jesús Orta Ruiz, known as El

Indio Naborí. Brazil is the guest of honor and boasts a delegation of over 80 renowned intellectuals and artists. A record number of over 500 publishing houses from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe Australia and Oceania are attending the fair. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/05)

**February 3:** A significant reduction in illegal drugs in Cuba was recorded in 2004, thanks to energetic measures taken to stem the trafficking of illegal substances. Recent Cuban Interior Ministry statistics confirm a significant reduction in illegal drug activity off Cuban coasts, with the lowest figures of suspicious activities reported since 1996. In 2004, sixteen planes and 15 boats were reported approaching the island, presumably involved in air drops of illegal drugs for pick up and transfer to the United States via speed boats. Last year, Cuban authorities confirmed 50 such drug drops on the island's coasts, though this was well below the figure of 330 recorded in 2003. Stepped-up use of helicopters and even the Cuban armed forces have contributed to this reduction. (*Granma, Notimex*, 3/2/05)

**February 4:** Cuban medical authorities expressed concerns over the rising numbers of Cuban teenagers who resort to an abortion as a solution to unplanned pregnancy. According to the President of the Cuban Family Development Association, although the medical procedure can be performed in Cuba legally and under stringent sanitary conditions, there are no guarantees against possible post-abortion "physical and psychological complications." In 1990, 147,530 abortions were performed on the island, which means that 45.6 per thousand women between the ages of 12 and 49 underwent the procedure. Although by 2001 the number of cases had decreased to 69,563, a ratio of 21.2 per thousand is still considered high by the specialists. (*AFP*, 4/2/05)

**February 5:** The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), an illegal Cuban opposition organization, warned that at least 16 of the 75 oppositionists incarcerated in 2003 are showing "alarming health deterioration symptoms." (*Europa Press*, 5/2/05)

**February 6:** The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, named Sunday as a day of solidarity with the Five Cuban prisoners in the United States. The top Cuban official made the comment during the launching of five new titles linked to the Five in the framework of the 14th International Book Fair, underway in Havana. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/05)

**February 7:** Once a smoker's paradise, Cuba is banning smoking in stores, theaters, meeting halls and other public places. And longtime smokers in this island nation, one of the world's tobacco capitals, are fuming about the new rules. "They can't take this away from me. I'll kill them," said Graciela González, 80, clutching a fat stogie. "This is my life." Smoking is widely accepted in Cuba, where at least a third of the population lights up. With the new restrictions, Cuban officials hope to change people's thoughts about smoking and save lives. But it's an uphill fight in a country that sells cigarettes for as little as eight cents a pack, cheaper than anywhere else in the world. "I dread trying to make this thing work," said a security chief at La Bodeguita del Medio, a restaurant/bar in Old Havana. "Someone's going to have to tell people not to smoke. It's not going to be me." (*Dallas Morning News*, 7/2/05)

**February 7:** Dania Rojas Góngora, 18, has been released after serving 20 months out of a two-year jail sentence she received for her involvement in the attempted hijacking of the Baraguá ferryboat in Havana's harbor that led to the executions by firing squad of three young men in 2003. "We lived terrible moments back then," she told the press. "My boyfriend asked to see me the day before his execution. He (...) said not to worry, that he was no longer going to be executed. Now I don't know whether he was just trying to cheer me up, or whether he had been lied to like the rest of us. The next day, I was told the executions had been carried out." Although still a minor under Cuban legislation, Dania was confined in a jail for adult women in Holguín. (*APLO*, 7/2/05)

**February 7:** The former Cuban bodyguard of American mobster Meyer Lansky showed up for the presentation of a new Spanish-language book about the island's legendary past as a haven for US gangsters and their casinos before the Cuban revolution. "All is told in the book," former bodyguard Armando Jaime Casielles, now 73, said at the

International Book Fair of Havana. In the "La vida secreta de Meyer Lansky en La Habana," or "The Secret Life of Meyer Lansky in Havana," Casielles narrates to Cuban writer Enrique Cirules his experiences as the mobster's sidekick from 1957 to early 1959, shortly after the triumph of the Cuban revolution. (*AP*, 7/2/05)

**February 7:** The 7th International Encounter of Economists on Globalization and Development was officially inaugurated by Roberto Vernier, president of the Association of Accountants of Cuba, and of the Latin America and the Caribbean Economists Association. During his speech, Vernier, quoting Cuban singer and songwriter Silvio Rodriguez, said that these debates in Havana "don't change the world, but help to make it better". Also presiding over the prestigious event were Jose Luis Rodriguez, vice-president of Cuba's Council of Ministers; Armando Hart, director of the National Office of the Jose Marti Program; Osvaldo Martinez, president of the event's Organizing Committee, and foreign guests. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/05)

**February 8:** One of Cuba's most important Afro-Cuban singers, Lázaro Ross, died in Havana at the age of 79. Lazaro Ross, a self-taught musician, considered "the king of Yoruba songs", was born in the Cuban capital. Ross, who was nominated for a Latin Grammy in the category of Folkloric Music in 2001, was strongly influenced in his music by his religious beliefs. He made two important records entitled: "Yemaya" and "Chango". In 2002, Lázaro Ross received Cuba's Fernando Ortiz International Prize which is a recognition awarded to artists, researchers and specialists who have contributed to the social sciences, anthropology and culture. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/2/05)

**February 9:** For the first time in Cuba and possibly in the world, an International Centenarians Conference took place in Havana, in which a group of men and women aged between 100 to 124 shared their experiences and responded to geriatrists' and experts' questions on lifestyle and other factors that help to prolong life. People invited from Mexico, Chile, Spain, France, Haiti and Cuba attended the event, stated Doctor Eugenio Selman, president of the 120 Years Club, who presented diplomas to the organization's honorary members. (*Granma International*, *CNN*, 9/2/05)

**February 9:** Some 1,200 delegates from 36 countries and 15 foreign institutions attending Havana's 7th International Encounter on Globalization and Problems of Development focused attention on the world economy. Participants examined economic challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding globalization. 1994 Nobel prize winner in Economy, German Reinhard Selten, presented a guest lecture on the topic, with a representative of the Inter American Development Bank analyzing the world economy. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/2/05)

**February 11:** Over a thousand economists from 36 countries wound up discussions in the 7th International Meeting on Globalization and Problems of Development held in Havana. Fidel Castro closed the event in which economists discussed issues related to the world economy, the integration process, China's role in the region, challenges posed by the foreign debt and development in the conditions of globalization. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/2/05)

**February 12:** As he was writing a document in the prisoner's ward of the "Celestino Hernández Rumbau" Hospital in Santa Clara, political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez, "Antúnez," was attacked from behind by a supposedly mentally incapacitated inmate. The individual had arrived an hour earlier claiming he had been transferred from the Manacas prison. According to his family, this is not the first time "Antúnez" has been attacked. (*Cubanet*, 13/2/05)

**February 13:** The reorganization process of the dissident organization Confederation of Democratic Workers of Cuba (CTDC) ended in Havana, a spokesman of the organization reported. "All plans encompassing the current year's agenda were discussed and approved during the first month of this year", Niurka H. Martínez told the press. According to Martínez, the newly elected members of the National Executive are: Raúl Sosa Torres as president and Pedro Arocha Urquiza as vice president, while the affiliated dissidents Obet Matos Rodríguez, Alián Trojillo Larraza, Manuel Florencio Piedra Rivas and Alexie Gutiérrez Estrada were elected for the positions of National Coordinator, Advisor and Attention to Political Prisoners, respectively. (*Puente Informativo*, 13/2/05)

**February 13:** The first stage of Cuba's Book Fair was successfully closed at the San Carlos de Cabaña fortress, visited by nearly 600,000 people from Havana for 10 days. In the closing ceremony, Brazilian Culture Minister Gilberto Gil highlighted his country's contribution of 7,000 titles and 18,000 copies of his nation's best literature, to enrich Cuban culture. The Brazilian minister invited Cuba to participate in the Rio de Janeiro Book Biennial later this year. Cuban Book Institute chairman Iroel Sanchez emphasized the fair's diversity of options, and announced next year's event will be dedicated to other two important Cuban writers, Nancy Morejon and Angel Augier, both winners of Cuban National Literature Awards. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/2/05)

**February 13:** Two books on Fidel Castro and his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chávez were launched at Havana's International Book Fair. According to AIN news agency, "El Encuentro" (The Encounter) by Rosa Miriam Elizalde and "Chávez Nuestro" (Our Chávez) by Luis Báez were both presented at the fair, attended by Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón and the ministers of culture, Abel Prieto, and foreign affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** A public audience on the electoral system and democracy in Cuba took place at Havana's International Conference Center in view of the district elections on April 17. Participating experts discussed the historical record of elections since the country ended an institutionalization process in 1976 that also included the promulgation of the Socialist Constitution. Cuban officials analyzed the national legislation regarding the electoral process and compared it with elections in Latin America. Discussions focused on the US government's plans against Cuba. At the audience, Cuban Parliamentary President Ricardo Alarcón said that the island's electoral system is totally transparent and far ahead of so-called "representative democracy" in the United States. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Prensa Latina*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** Pedro Ross, secretary general of the Cuban Workers Central Office (CTC), called for a massive participation of Cuban workers in the debates for the 19th Congress of CTC, scheduled for April 2006. These discussions should leave a mark in the Cuban working class actions to find solutions to the concrete problems of every workplace in our country, Ross pointed out in statements published by Cuban weekly *Trabajadores*. Debates of the CTC members will be centered in topics such as employment, economic efficiency and defense. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** Hundreds of artists from Holguin, the Cuban eastern province 743 kilometers from Havana, are preparing to paint the biggest outdoor mural in the country's history. Fifteen meters long by five meters high, in low and high cement relief, the work will represent the main heroic deeds that have occurred in this north eastern city since the arrival of its first inhabitants up to today. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** Independent journalist and political prisoner Héctor Maseda told his wife Laura Pollán that he would be transferred to a cell in the Higher Security Wing. Maseda has been confined in the maximum security prison since January 28. "The transfer took place after I spoke with officials from the State Council and the Ministry of the Interior to denounce and protest arbitrary measures taken against my husband. He and another inmate were the only ones made to strip in front of all the other inmates during a visual search of his block," said Pollán. (*Cubamet*, 17/2/05)

**February 15:** Cuban State Security agents warned independent journalist Iván García to "stop writing (...), or else." García, a frequent contributor to the online magazine "Encuentro en la Red," was summoned to a police station where he had a two-hour "meeting" with two State Security officers. "They told me they were under orders to have me and other independent journalists stop writing, particularly for 'Encuentro.'" They claimed to have information that 'Encuentro' is funded by the CIA and the US government..." explained García. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 15/2/05)

**February 15:** The primary electoral registers for April elections were published in public places throughout the island until March 17. These lists are one of the conditions for citizens' right to vote or be elected to the Peoples' Power municipal assemblies, government bodies renewed every two and a half years. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/2/05)

**February 15:** A microwave signal transfer system signals started operating in Cuba's central province of Ciego de Avila, 262 miles from this capital, in order to improve the reception of TV broadcast images in the area, the National Information Agency reported. About 4,000 students of all education levels will benefit from this new 100 watt powered technology as they will now be able to receive their lessons through one of the island's two educational channels. Director of the Radio Cuba in Ciego de Avila, Idalberto Moreira, explained the project was carried out in this particular area because geographical features prevented straight line TV signals from being received. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/2/05)

**February 15:** Dissenters of the Castro regime in the island continue to be removed from their jobs by members of the State Security as part of their usual tactics to restrain the internal opposition. Joenny Alonso Saiz, dissident and member the Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País", told the press that after agents of the political police visited the cafeteria where he used to work, both managers fired him for no reason. They simply said they did not want any trouble with the government. Later on, two police officers cited him to appear at a local police station where he was threatened with a 20 year sanction if he continued his activities in the opposition. In Camaguey, Yolanda Martínez Vargas told the press that she was denied a position as secretary in a military committee in her area because she is affiliated to an opposition party. (*Lux Info Press*, 15/2/05)

**February 16:** Recently released dissident Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara, one of the 75 oppositionists incarcerated during the 2003 crackdown, is awaiting authorization from the Cuban authorities to emigrate. Following his release, Valdés was admitted into several Havana hospitals for treatment of a severe kidney condition. The rest of Valdés's family has already been authorized to leave the country. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 16/2/05)

**February 16:** Political prisoner Héctor Palacios Ruiz was hospitalized at the Combinado del Este hospital, according to his wife, Gisela Delgado Sablón. Gisela told the press that her husband is suffering from different illnesses, as reported by doctors at the prison's health facility. Palacios received a 25-years sentence during the crackdown on dissidents in 2003. (*Cubanet*, 16/2/05)

**February 16:** Cuba will have an exceptional health system for all its citizens and those who need it worldwide, Fidel Castro affirmed when closing the 9th Congress of the National Health Workers' Union. The Cuban leader assured the island will undoubtedly become a unique health care provider in the world. "Medicine and the health of our people and that of neighboring countries and friends are perhaps the highest priorities in our Revolution," Fidel Castro stressed. In the last few years, Cuba has invested about 150 million dollars in high quality medical equipment for primary care, prevention and hospitals, thus improving specialized services, he revealed. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/2/05)

**February 17:** Cuba is hosting for the first time a meeting of Education Ministers of the Andres Bello Agreement in Havana. The Andres Bello Agreement is an international intergovernmental organization that favors the strengthening of integration processes, configuration and development of a common cultural ground. It embodies Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Spain, Panama, Paraguay, Peru Venezuela and Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/2/05)

**February 17:** Dolia Leal, wife of Cuban dissident Nelson Aguiar Ramírez, one of the 75 oppositionists incarcerated in 2003, sent a letter to Fidel Castro petitioning for her husband to be granted an "extra penal license." Aguiar Ramírez, 59, is in the hospital wing of the "Combinado del Este" prison in Havana, where he underwent epigastric hernia surgery last December. (*EFE*, 17/2/05)

**February 17:** The Cuban capital is preparing for 10 days of Carnival festivities set to begin February 26 along the city's oceanfront, organizers said. The fete will include parades of floats and performing troupes as well as street dances and performances by popular artists, state-run media reported. Most of the activities will take place along the Malecon, Havana's seaside boulevard, where crews are putting up bleachers and reviewing stands that will stretch for some 3,000 meters (almost 2 miles) to accommodate spectators. (*EFE*, 17/2/05)

**February 18:** In a rare display of public dissent, the wives of several Cuban dissidents -- wearing pictures of their husbands on their shirts -- marched to Revolution Plaza to demand amnesty for all political prisoners. The women delivered a letter with their demands to state offices behind the plaza's monument to independence hero Jose Marti. Loyda Valdes, whose husband Alfredo Felipe Fuentes is serving a 26-year sentence, said "the apathy of Cuban authorities" had "practically forced" her to be there. The women marched 45 minutes through Havana to reach the plaza before delivering the letter, which bore the signatures of more than 1,000 friends and relatives. Laura Pollan expressed both hope and pessimism about the government's reaction. "I think they're going to listen, that they're going to read the letter," said Pollan, whose husband Hector Maseda was sentenced to 20 years in prison. "But (...) this is an unpredictable government," she said. "It's possible that we're here and then tomorrow they send our husbands home. Or, they'll simply keep them stashed away, and there they will be for 20 years." (*The New York Times*, 19/2/05)

**February 18:** Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá launched a new stage in his campaign for a peaceful democratic transition, calling on Cubans within and outside the island to participate in a national dialogue to shape a post-Castro future. Payá, who earned international attention for organizing a petition drive signed by 25,000 Cubans in favor of government reforms, hopes his Committee for National Dialogue will spark a discussion across political and geographic lines and dispel some of the uncertainty shrouding Cuba's future. "Here there is room for liberals, conservatives, social democrats and those communists who have liberty and courage," Paya told reporters. Paya said activists in the new project have been harassed by the government, receiving visits at home from state security agents trying to persuade them not to take part. Paya announced the creation of a committee to organize participants, which he estimated in the thousands. The committee is made up of 110 Cubans, about half on the island and the rest participating from the United States, Spain, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Brazil, he said, emphasizing that it was nonetheless a distinctly Cuban project. The Cuban government has not publicly commented on the movement, which was formally launched last summer. [[Diálogo Nacional](#)] (*The New York Times*, *Sun Sentinel*, *EFE*, 18/2/05)

**February 18:** A Cuban court sentenced 13 people to prison sentences ranging from 6 to 25 years for their involvement in drug trafficking, according to radio reports. The accused, most of whom had prior criminal records, were part of a drug-trafficking network and confessed during their trial in the eastern Cuban province of Holguín. (*EFE*, 20/2/05)

**February 19:** Differing views on Cuba's future among Havana dissidents are becoming more apparent with ongoing efforts by prominent activists to reinvigorate a movement crippled by a government crackdown in 2003. Oswaldo Payá and Martha Beatriz Roque agree that Fidel Castro must release his 46-year grip on the island and that the future should be decided by the Cuban people. But differences between Payá's Committee for National Dialogue and Roque's Assembly to Promote Civil Society have become more clear in recent days as both groups gear up for upcoming events meant to search for a consensus. "We want nothing to do with the government," said Roque, whose group is planning a gathering May 20 and has invited notable figures like former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and former Czech President Vaclav Havel. "We can't include them because the government doesn't listen," added Roque. "Ours is a dialogue without borders," said Payá. He said the National Dialogue will soon make formal proposals for everything from revamping the justice system to ecological concerns. "What we are trying to do is find common ground." "We can't exclude people who have government jobs just because they might think differently." "If we want change, we must include them," he said. "Otherwise, it won't happen." (*The Miami Herald*, 19/2/05)

**February 22:** Harry Potter made the Cuban media but not the death of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the world famous exile writer whose books are banned on the island because of his criticisms of Fidel Castro. Cuba's government-controlled dailies such as *Granma*, *Juventud Rebelde* and *Trabajadores* printed stories about J.K. Rowling's upcoming installment of the Harry Potter series or the Havana International Book Fair. But the newspapers, as well as government television and radio stations, ignored the death in London of Cabrera Infante, who left Cuba in 1965. Only the online version of the culture magazine *La Jiribilla* noted Cabrera Infante's passing -- in a four-paragraph story that said his writings were "unfortunately tainted with his stance against the Cuban revolution, which became a fanatical obsession." [See also Exile Community] (*The Miami Herald*, 23/2/05)

**February 22:** A video that pokes satirical fun at Cuba's feared State Security agency and hints at corruption within this institution is making the underground rounds of the communist-ruled island, prompting shock over its boldness and chuckles over its jabs. The few Cubans who have seen the 15-minute tape say its comical references to listening bugs and other usually sensitive issues have them wondering how long it will take for the government to crack down on the well-known actors. While it makes fun of State Security -- the Interior Ministry agency that focuses on repressing the domestic opposition to Fidel Castro -- the video does not carry an openly anti-Castro message. Few Cubans have seen it because it is being passed around in a DVD, and access to DVD players or personal computers capable of playing DVDs is not widespread there. The video features three well-known Cuban artists who use their own names in the credits -- Eduardo del Llano, Luis Alberto García and Néstor Jiménez. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/2/05)

**February 22:** Cuban officials declared their fight against drugs a national security issue after destroying 25 sacks of marijuana recently seized with US Coast Guard backup by tossing them into a boiling-hot cauldron. Authorities burned the drug at a steel factory in eastern Cuba, later telling international reporters they were determined to keep the island as drug-free as possible. The Cuban Government invited the media to fly to Holguín province, 457 miles east of Havana and smack in the middle of the most common drug routes according to Lt. Col. Miguel Guilarte, the Cuban border guard's anti-drug czar. "This is the region of Cuba most affected by drug trafficking." The marijuana was seized in the seas and along Cuba's northern coast in a bust that also netted three suspected Jamaican smugglers in a speedboat. "For us, drugs represent an issue of national security," said Lt. Col. Miguel Guilarte, the coast guard's anti-drug chief. The Cuban revolution's advances "will disintegrate if our citizenry doesn't fight against (...) this phenomenon that corrupts society." (*AP, CBS*, 24/2/05)

**February 23:** The Cuban Catholic Church is distributing among its congregation fliers warning against the ills of alcoholism. Written in a FAQ format, the flyer declares alcoholism to be "a severe problem in Cuba, with major personal and social repercussions," the extent of which there is little awareness. (*Cubanet*, 23/2/05)

**February 23:** Hundreds of prisoners from across Cuba began fierce competitions in the nation's first Inmate Olympics, official media said. The official newspaper Juventud Rebelde (Rebel Youth) said the prisoners are representing their regions in four geographic divisions with competition heated in this sports-minded Caribbean country: in baseball, basketball, track and field, table tennis, and presumably for the older and less fit, dominoes and chess. This is the first time an Olympic-style sports competition is being held for Cuba's prisoners. Previously only match-ups in the national pastime of baseball had been held. (*AFP*, 23/2/05)

**February 24:** Rolando Camacho, head of the oncological program in Cuba, said in Havana that cancer could become the leading cause of death on the island. Camacho made this assertion during the public invitation to participate in the 7th Terry Fox International Run to be simultaneously carried out in 50 countries next March 20. Over a million Cubans are expected to participate. (*EFE*, 24/2/05)

**February 24:** Cuban political prisoner and independent journalist Mario Enrique Mayo Hernández recently underwent surgery at the hospital wing of the "Combinado del Este" prison, where he was visited by his wife Maidelín Guerra Álvarez. Mayo has three brain nodules and suffers from glaucoma. (*Cubanet*, 24/2/05)

**February 25:** The first phase of Cuba's 44th polio vaccination campaign - this year aiming to inoculate 402,000 children against the disease - began. According to Dr. Miguel Angel Galindo, head of the National Immunization Program, all clinics in the country are prepared to provide the initial dose of the vaccine to children between the ages of one month and three years. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/2/05)

**February 25:** The President of the Cuban Parliament Ricardo Alarcón, termed the Cuban election process "an exceptional privilege" given the current world situation. In an interview published in Cuba's Granma newspaper, Alarcón stressed that the capacity and legal authority of the Cuban people to directly nominate and elect candidates

rather than depending on machine politics is a unique opportunity, which should be used with great wisdom, making sure that the right person is elected in each constituency. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/2/05)

**February 25:** Fidel Castro snubbed hundreds of cigar aficionados by skipping a gala dinner closing the annual Habanos festival, and British actor Jeremy Irons took his place as the star attraction. It was the third year in a row that Castro, 78 and recovering from a broken knee, has been a no-show at the dinner for worldwide cigar lovers and retailers of Habanos cigars, an incongruous meeting of the well-heeled and Communist Cuba. (*Reuters*, 25/2/05)

**February 27:** Someone scrawled "Christ yes, Castro no, down with Fidel" on a Havana church as wives of imprisoned dissidents attended Mass inside. "This is a provocation by state security to cause trouble for us and the church," said Gisela Delgado, wife of well known dissident Hector Palacios and a member of the Santa Rita Church in the upscale Miramar district. Once the graffiti was found, police quickly arrived at the church and covered the large green letters on the front of the building with cardboard, then waited for the graffiti to be cleaned off. About a dozen women in white held a quiet march outside the church as police looked on, one holding the cardboard over the sign. The wives said state security agents were always posted outside the church on Sundays and it would have been impossible to vandalize the building without their noticing. (*Reuters*, 27/2/05)

**February 27:** Raquel Rodríguez, the maternal grandmother of the young Cuban castaway Elián González, has died after an illness, state media said. The Communist Party daily Granma and other newspapers said Rodriguez died two days before, but did not specify her illness or give her age. Rodriguez was the mother of Elián's mother, Elisabeth Brotons, who perished along with 10 other adults in a November 1999 attempt to reach Florida by sea. Elián and two other people survived. National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón, who played a key role in Cuba's attempts to repatriate the boy, delivered the eulogy for Rodríguez when she was buried in the family's hometown of Cárdenas, a coastal city east of Havana. "Raquel is a hero of our people," Alarcón declared. "We are not burying her, we are planting a beautiful flower in the heart of the motherland." (*AP*, 27/2/05)

## **Economy**

**February 4:** Entrepreneurs from Italy, Spain and South Korea and about 70 foreign companies are attending the EXPOCAM 2005 trade fair in Camagüey, one of the eastern Cuban provinces. The fair, sponsored by the Republic of Cuba's Chamber of Commerce and supported by the Ministries of Foreign Trade and Investment and Foreign Collaboration, exhibits consumer goods, machineries, equipments, technologies and raw materials. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/2/05)

**February 7:** Cuba and Indonesia explored the possibility of mounting a cooperation program, mainly in the field of health, during an encounter on the issue held at the Dharmas National Cancer Center in Jakarta, the Indonesian capital. Attending the meeting were important representatives in health care in Jakarta, and from the Cuban pharmaceutical industry, as well as Cuban ambassador Miguel Angel Ramírez. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/05)

**February 8:** China's oil giants began cultivating their virgin soil in Cuba. China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (Sinopec), as the first comer, has inked a contract with Cuba Oil Company (Cubapetroleo) to jointly exploit oil in the Caribbean country. Under the terms of their contract, the two sides will join forces to prospect and exploit a potential oil-producing region. Chinese experts believe it is a significant beginning of the cooperation between China and Cuba in the petroleum industry. (*SinoCast*, 8/2/05)

**February 9:** Cuba, traditionally a sugar exporter, is expected to import more low-grade white sugar this year after this week's 7,000 tonnes from Colombia, industry sources said. "I expect the imports to continue as the industry goal is to export the maximum amount of raw sugar possible, given this year's low production," one industry insider said. A Cuban economist said the country needed to import to cover minimum internal demand. "The domestic market for whites includes around 9,000 tonnes per month through the ration system to the population. Then there is the food processing industry and tourism industry," he said. The worst drought in 64 years devastated this year's crop, with local analysts forecasting output at no more than 1.8 million tonnes of raw sugar, compared with the previous harvest's 2.53 million tonnes. (*Reuters*, 9/2/05)

**February 9:** Cuba has fixed a few export shipments of new crop sugar for the Black Sea and the Baltic, and further modest shipments of Colombian white sugar to Cuba are expected soon, brokers said. "There was a bigger volume of (export) shipments last year," one broker, who asked not to be identified, told Reuters, quoting Cuba-Black Sea freight steady at around \$50 a tonne. Brokers estimated that some 25,000-28,000 tonnes of Cuban sugar exports had been fixed so far this season. (*Reuters*, 9/2/05)

**February 10:** Cuban Attorney General Juan Escalona Reguera believes that "(Cubans) are currently at the most crucial and difficult stage" of the nation-wide campaign against criminal activities. During a working visit to Santiago de Cuba, Escalona pointed that "(...) progress has been made; numerous irregularities and instances of economic transgressions have been exposed (...). We cannot say it's anything to be alarmed about, (...) but obviously things have to change." (*Radio y Diario Monitor*, 10/2/05)

**February 10:** Cuba is concerned about possible forest fires because of a serious drought which has extended for months. Forest Rangers said the critical period of possible forest fires will be extended to June 30 due to the long dry spell. Under normal conditions this period concludes on April 30, but poor rainfall over the last three years has caused experts to extend the season and maximize measures to prevent disasters. "Cuban forests are facing a serious situation, since dry leaves and grass can combust anytime. This condition can whip a small flame into a fierce fire," said Manuel Lama Gómez, chief of the Forest Warden Department. Analysts say the average temperature in Cuba has increased 0.5 Celsius degrees because of climate changes and other environmental problems caused by global warming. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/2/05)

**February 11:** Aficionados of Cuba's famous hand-rolled cigars will be able to puff away without fear of running afoul of new anti-smoking laws during the island's annual cigar festival, organizers said. Cuba's tobacco exporting company Habanos S.A. announced its 7th International Habano Festival. The gala cigar fiesta, which will take place in Havana February 21 - 25, is expecting record-breaking attendance of nearly a thousand participants from 52 countries. Canadian Jazz musician, Jane Burnnet, is one of the Festival attractions since this year the traditional Distributors Dinner, called "a Cool Night in Hot Havana", will be dedicated to Canada. The 7th Habano Festival will again function as a trade fair offering scientific lectures and debates, contests, visits to tobacco plantations and factories, tasting sessions and master classes in hand-rolling cigars. (*AP, Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/2/05)

**February 12:** Cuba's communist state was rising from the ashes of its post-Soviet economic crash with greater control over its economy and help from China and Venezuela, Fidel Castro said. "The state is rising again like the phoenix," Castro said in an almost six-hour speech to economists at an anti-globalization conference. For two years Cuba has been steadily centralizing control again over state companies, scaling back the autonomy allowed during the crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. It has also introduced foreign exchange controls, eliminated the dollar as legal tender, increased regulation of foreign companies and curbed private enterprise in a return to a classic command economy that is 90 percent state-owned. The centralization of state company operations would save Cuba between \$500 million (R3.05 billion) and \$1 billion, Castro said. He complained that previously 3 000 managers had authority to buy and sell, or run up hard currency debt. China's state-owned Minmetals Corporation signed an agreement in November to invest \$500 million in a joint venture that aims to produce 68 000 tons of ferronickel a year. Castro called

China the "new engine" of economic growth. Cuba's tourism industry, the island's top foreign currency earner that brought in \$2 billion last year, has cut its costs to between 60c and 80c per dollar of gross income. Castro thanked Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez, his closest foreign ally, for assistance in shipping vital supplies of Venezuelan oil, officially 53 000 barrels a day, on preferential terms. (*Business Report & Independent Online, Reuters*, 14/2/05)

**February 12:** Spanish hotel chain Occidental will shortly open a hotel in Cuba, it was reported. The five-star hotel will be named Occidental Royal Hideaway Ensenachos and will be in Ensenachos, on the Cuban northern coast. The hotel will be one hour away from the airport of the central Cuban province of Villa Clara. The luxury hotel will have a total of 497 rooms. Occidental has 80 hotels in 13 countries including Spain, the Caribbean, Morocco and Tunisia. (*Latin America News Digest*, 14/2/05)

**February 15:** Hundreds of thousands of Cubans are suffering the consequences of the severe drought that has been punishing the island since 2003 and is expected to last at least through April. According to the government, over the past year and a half, the drought has cost Cuba more than \$800 million, killed tens of thousands of heads of cattle and inflicted water shortages on upwards of 700,000 people. The most complicated situation occurs in the eastern part of the island, where rainfall between May 2003 and October 2002 totaled less than 70 percent of the historical average. The effects of the prolonged drought have spread from east to west down the length of the island. Authorities are trying to dig new wells, build new aqueducts and distribute water on cistern trucks as quickly as possible. (*EFE*, 15/2/05)

**February 16:** Participants in the 4th International Workshop on Rural Environment in the New Millennium: Challenges and Perspectives in Cuba are debating on how to use rural environment for economic purposes. Experts are trying to find alternatives to lessen the deep crises in the world's rural zones caused by soil erosion and deforestation. The forum includes participants from Germany, Spain, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Colombia. Cuban experts presented a paper on the successes achieved in rural areas like the Turquino-Manati development project in eastern Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/2/05)

**February 16:** Fidel Castro said that the Cuban economy has climbed out of its decade-old economic slump, but it's unclear whether new subsidies from Venezuela and China will be enough to improve the quality of life for those in the island's increasingly state-controlled economy. Critics say that while Cubans are better off now than during the "special period" of the early 1990s, daily life remains a struggle. "I do not see real economic recovery," said Mark Thornton, a senior research fellow at the Alabama-based Ludwig von Mises Institute, which defends the market economy. "Basically, the reason Fidel is optimistic is that (...) he's now found two new sugar daddies: Venezuela and China." In Cuba, the government provides free education and health care, heavily subsidized utilities and transportation and a food ration. The island doesn't have the kind of wretched poverty seen in South American mountain villages or Central American urban slums. But the monthly food ration lasts most Cuban families less than two weeks, and state salaries averaging less than \$15 a month barely begin to cover the high prices of everything from canned food to toilet paper. Cuban officials estimate some 60 percent of Cubans have access to additional income, primarily through remittances sent from relatives and friends abroad or jobs in tourism that bring in tips and bonuses. The remaining 40 percent get by on their wits alone. (*The New York Times*, 17/2/05)

**February 16:** Official sources have admitted that scuffles on public buses, rocks being hurled at the vehicles and fraud in fare collection are some of the many ills affecting the public transit system in Cuba. The Director of the Provincial Public Transit Enterprise, Jorge Luis León, told the daily *Juventud Rebelde* that the problems besetting the state-run public transit system have experienced a turn for the worse in the last few months. He added that efforts to deal with the situation have been implemented with government and police support, and quick response teams are currently in place at all bus terminals. (*Notimex, Juventud Rebelde*, 16/17/2/05)

**February 16:** Cuba's Centro de Biofísica Médica (CBM) [Center for Medical Bio-physics] exported to Venezuela a first lot of 26 out of 100 Angiodin PD-300, an equipment to develop vascular research. The equipment, widely used in

Cuba's health care network of vascular hemodynamic labs, is a noninvasive device designed for the early detection and diagnosis of peripheral vascular ailments. Its acquisition improves Venezuela's sanitary system, especially its Barrio Adentro campaign implemented by medical and paramedical personnel. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/2/05)

**February 17:** Cuba's central bank has begun prohibiting most foreign exchange transactions without its prior approval as of this week, in a move businessmen fretted could tie the economy up in knots. Businesses must prepare weekly budgets for prior approval and companies and banks cannot accept payments or deposits unless they have central bank authorization, according to guidelines implementing an earlier decree. Water, electricity and other utilities must go through the same process every three months, and any new suppliers must first be approved at the highest level. "There is no doubt some dubious practices have been squashed and a more rigorous business climate imposed," a mid-level employee of Cimex, the largest foreign exchange-priced retailer in the country, said of the guidelines. But the head of a Cuban company that upgrades production facilities predicted the new rules would be revamped. "It appears the measure will hamper our work (...) The mechanism we must use is too complicated to function in an agile and dynamic manner," he said. (*Reuters*, 17/2/05)

**February 17:** The management of the trade financing bank Bancomext reported 66% of the total US\$480mil arrears portfolio refers to a US\$320mil credit to collect from Cuba. Negotiations have been suspended after a political divergence in 2004. Bancomext hopes to collect at least US\$50mil in amortizations during 2005. (*El Financiero*, 17/2/05)

**February 18:** Fidel Castro has warned the state-run pharmaceutical industry that he intends to crack down on illegal sales of medication, and pointed a finger at those in charge of producing and distributing legal drugs. Castro addressed the issue in his speech at a National Health Workers' Union congress to which the foreign press was not admitted but which was broadcast on state television. "You cannot have people selling medication on street corners. It is a shameless act on the part of anyone who does it and even more so on the part of anyone who tolerates it," he emphasized. The medications are obviously "stolen from either pharmacies or factories," he said, and those who cooperate in that activity must be "arrested and tried." Castro warned everyone linked to the pharmaceutical industry, from Public Health Ministry officials to pharmacy clerks, that if the practice continues "we will proceed to directly take over the (nation's) 2,000 pharmacies," which are already state run. Castro said he trusted "one warning will be enough." (*EFE*, 18/2/05)

**February 21:** Cuba started an action plan to fight the deficient water supply caused by an intense drought that has been affecting the island for several years. Jorge Luis Aspiolea, president of the National Hydraulic Resources Institute, explained the country has invested more than \$20 million on public works in the last months to improve the situation. Aspiolea said that action plans and government measures will aim to face the possibility that 2005 may be another dry year. The official said Cubans will be forced to improve the custom of saving water and make the best use of their intelligence and initiatives to protect this precious resource. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/2/05)

**February 21:** Cuba urged its citizens to cut back on water use, announcing that new measures will be necessary to fight a long-lasting dry spell. Jorge Aspiolea, president of Cuba's National Institute of Hydraulic Resources, told Granma that the government has invested more than \$25 million (Canadian dollars) in recent months to improve water infrastructure. But he also said it was crucial for the general population to start conserving water immediately. Of 235 reservoirs across the island, 114 contain less than 25 per cent of their capacity, Aspiolea said. Forty-one of those 114 have dried up and are out of use. Eastern provinces are the most severely affected, as reservoirs in Camaguey are only 14 per cent full, and those in Las Tunas, Ciego de Avila, Sancti Spiritus and Granma contain less than 30 per cent, he said. Only Pinar del Rio, Cienfuegos and Isla de la Juventud are at 50 per cent capacity, he said. Havana, the island's most populated city, is among the places that will be most affected by the water shortage, the newspaper said. (*Canadian Press*, *AP*, *Granma*, *Prensa Latina*, 21/2/05)

**February 21:** This year Mexico could recover US\$50 million in debt that Cuba owes the the National Foreign Trade Bank (Bancomext), once an international court decides when it can gain access to this money, said Salvador Rojas Aburto, assistant director general of Finances at Bancomext. Rojas Aburto said that Mexican officials were trying to arrange talks with their Cuban counterparts to "sit down at the table and find a way out." In 2002 the Council of Ministers of Cuba issued a decree suspending the payment of the debt to Bancomext. At that time the debt was US\$218 million, but there are another five loans and together they add up to around US\$325 million. (*El Universal*, 22/2/05)

**February 21:** Nearly one thousand participants from 52 countries are attending the 7th International Habano Festival. This year the event is focusing on the Partagas brand on its 160th anniversary, one of the most prestigious brands of Habanos. The Festival's agenda includes a trade fair, scientific debates, sommeliers contest, visits to tobacco plantations and factories, tasting sessions, master classes on rolling cigars and more. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/2/05)

**February 21:** The Cuban Ministry of Tourism (Mintur) has passed a resolution that regulates relations between the more than 100,000 Cubans who work in the tourism industry, and "foreign personnel." Employees in the sector are forbidden to accept gifts and invitations "of a personal nature," or to take part, without the authorities' permission, in meals and parties organized by foreigners. The first article of the Mintur resolution, passed in January, asks staff to limit relations with foreigners "to those that are strictly necessary." It also instructs them "to be vigilant at all times of any deed or attitude that could be harmful to the state"; and to refuse "remuneration, gifts, donations, accommodation or services that go against dignity and respect and create commitments that threaten the healthy spirit of collaboration" between the parties. The document, which consists of 10 chapters and 22 articles, likewise calls upon tourism employees to "be discrete and rational in the use and transmission of information within their reach," prohibits dealing with foreigners to obtain scholarships or invitations to travel abroad, and obliges personnel to declare, in writing to their immediate superior, all gifts received from a foreigner with whom they have work-related contact. The norms apply both inside and outside the country, and it is even recommended that negotiations between Cuban business people from the tourism sector and foreign colleagues be conducted, "whenever possible, in the presence of a witness." (*El País*, 21/2/05)

**February 22:** As part of the framework for a return to centralized controls of hard currency expenditures, new operational restrictions for Cuban business enterprises have been introduced by the Cuban government. According to a new resolution by the Cuban Central Bank (BCC), Cuban enterprises can no longer issue checks in excess of \$5,000 convertible pesos (a Cuban currency on a par with the US dollar) without prior authorization from the "Committee for Approval of Convertible Currency Expenditures." The resolution, signed by BCC President Francisco Soberón, prohibits the endorsement of checks for payment to third parties and reminds that only bank account check deposits are allowed. This resolution complements another approved last December that compels Cuban enterprises to deposit all their revenues in convertible currency into a single BCC account. (*EFE*, 22/2/05)

**February 23:** According to the Gaceta Oficial (Official Gazette), the Cuban government implemented exemptions on import duties and revenue taxes for Venezuelan transport companies operating in Cuba. Two resolutions from the Ministry of Prices and Finances declare Venezuelan air and maritime transport companies bringing goods to the island exempt from "payment of tonnage or revenue taxes." A third resolution, co-signed with the Ministry of Foreign Trade, lifts all "customs duties on imports originating from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela." (*AFP*, 23/2/05)

**February 25:** Hundreds of cigar lovers, including British actor Jeremy Irons, wrapped up an international cigar festival with an extravagant gala dinner featuring flamenco dancing and sleek acrobatic performances. Elaborate humidors signed by Fidel Castro were auctioned off at the event. Expert Bjorn Ericsson, from The Fummoik bar in London Claridges Hotel, ranked first in the fourth Habanosommelier contest where competitors must show their abilities in selecting, cutting and lighting a Cuban cigar. He was followed by Cuban Orlen Guerra, from Old Havana Palacio de O'Farrill Hotel. French Laigle Xauiu, from Le Forum Bar, in Paris, ranked third. Regarding the Commercial Fair, Cuban Edel Quintero was recognized as Best Amateur Cigar Maker, and the Chateau du Tariquet, from France, was the

most crowded stand. The annual festival brought together nearly 1,000 cigar connoisseurs from more than 50 countries this year. Participants visited tobacco plantations and factories and attended cocktail parties. (*AP, Prensa Latina, 25/2/05*)

**February 26:** Cuba's Varadero beach resort set a new record of foreign visitors for a single weekend with 24,200 tourists from different parts of the world. Canada, France, Germany and the United Kingdom have been Cuba's main tourist destinations during the ongoing winter travel season. Varadero features more than 15,000 rooms scattered in 46 hotels and resorts. By the end of 2005, the 13-mile-long beach strip will add 1,517 more accommodations to its stock of hotel rooms. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 26/2/05*)

**February 26:** A Russian delegation traveled to Cuba in hopes of reactivating economic and political ties between the two countries ahead of bilateral talks in Moscow, state media reported. Grigori Elkin, head of Russia's Federal Agency of Technical Standardization and Metrology, led a delegation to Havana. He met with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas, the government's weekly business newspaper *Opciones* reported. Elkin told the press that Cuba's debt to Russia featured high during talks at Cuban ministries and departments. "We hope that the question of restructuring of this debt will soon be solved. This will open the way for signing new credit agreements," Elkin explained. Cubans are traveling to Moscow in March for a meeting of the Joint Inter-Government Russia-Cuba Commission. Cuba is most interested in prompting exchange with Russia in the automotive, transportation, biotechnology, aviation and tourism industries, *Opciones* reported. Officials from the island's sugar ministry said they also want to strengthen trade with Russia. Exchange programs covering a wide variety of services increased by 23 percent in 2004 compared to the previous year, *Opciones* said, citing foreign trade ministry figures. Russia also moved up a notch on the list of countries with commercial ties with Cuba -- moving from tenth to ninth -- and is fifth for Cuban exports, said the newspaper. The Caribbean island exports sugar to Russia as well as vaccines and other products from its advanced biotechnology industry. (*AP, ITAR TASS, 28/2/05*)

### **Exile Community**

**February 2:** The representative of the Committee for Freedom and Democracy in Cuba, Maykell Barroso, asked the European Union (EU) to show its support for Cuban dissidents by attending the plenary meeting to be held on the island next May 20 under the auspices of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, an officially unrecognized organization led by Martha Beatriz Roque. (*AFP, 2/2/05*)

**February 10:** Cuban exiles closed ranks to oppose a draft bill to increase sales of US agro products to Cuba and were confident that President George W. Bush would veto the initiative should the Congress pass it. "It will be an important but by no means easy battle for those who do not understand that trade with Cuba only helps the tyrant (Fidel Castro)," said Ninaska Pérez Castellón, head of the Cuban Liberty Council. Pérez highlighted the unanimous position on that issue of Cuban-American legislators Mel Martínez, Bob Menendez, Ileana Ross-Lehtinen, Lincoln Díaz-Balart and Mario Díaz-Balart. (*EFE, 10/2/05*)

**February 11:** South Florida's Cuban-American US representatives expressed support for an upcoming gathering of dissidents in Cuba, saying the conference will mark the beginning of the end for Castro's government. "It's important to realize that the people of Cuba are working awfully hard for their freedom," said US Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (Republican-Miami), at a news conference also attended by Republican Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, as well as members of Cuban exile groups. "The days of tyranny are numbered." The first general meeting of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, an umbrella organization of 365 dissident organizations, is scheduled to take place in Havana on May 20, Cuba's independence day. There, dissidents plan to discuss how to re-establish civil society and democracy in Cuba. (*KRT, 11/2/05*)

**February 21:** Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante died in a London hospital. He was 75. He was one of the most original voices in 20th-century Spanish literature and an outspoken and unforgiving critic of Fidel Castro. Guillermo Cabrera Infante had long been lauded for a Joycean, experimental use of language in his novels, essays and cinema criticism. In 1997, he won the Miguel de Cervantes prize for literature, the most prestigious literary award in the Spanish-speaking world. His effervescent novel "Tres Tristes Tigres", published in English as "Three Trapped Tigers", captured the rum-soaked, salacious Havana of the late 1950s and became a classic of Cuban literature. He had actively opposed dictator Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s, and after Castro took power in 1959, Cabrera Infante became a cultural representative for the new government in Brussels from 1962 to 1965. By 1965, his discontent with the totalitarian direction of the Castro government led to a break over a highly critical interview. Cabrera Infante then sought refuge in London, where he has lived the last four decades, authoring "La Habana para un infante difunto" (published in English as "Infante's Inferno") and "Mea Cuba", among other works. [See also Domestic Affairs] (*The Miami Herald*, *EFE*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Reuters*, 22/2/05)

**February 24:** Nine years after the downing of two of its light planes and the killing of four pilots, the Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue asked US President George W. Bush to bring Fidel Castro to trial for the deed. Brothers to the Rescue president Jose Basulto said that then-President Bill Clinton bears some responsibility for the 1996 incident - in which Cuban air force fighter jets fired on the unarmed planes off the communist island's northern coast - because if he would have agreed to defend the exile aircraft they would not have been shot down. "That must be made known, and the current government is covering up for Clinton," Basulto said. "The United States didn't do anything to Fidel Castro that day. Moreover, Clinton prevented the departure of the US (military fighters), with their pilots already in the cockpits, that were about to take off and rescue us," he asserted. (*EFE*, 24/2/05)

**February 26:** The Cuban American National Foundation is under fire from Mexican politicians demanding that the influential exile organization be investigated for "anti-Cuban activities in Mexico." The lower house of Mexico's legislature is expected to vote on what it calls a "point of accord" on the issue. "In Mexican territory, between 1959 and 2004, Mexicans and people from other nationalities have ended up dead, injured or affected by terrorism from organizations like CANF," the resolution's supporting documentation states. CANF's new executive director, Alfredo Mesa, vehemently rejected the allegations, saying the foundation is considering legal action if the Mexican government moves forward. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/2/05)

## Foreign Affairs

**February 1:** Brazil's Culture Minister Gilberto Gil, is in Cuba heading a delegation from his country to participate in Havana's International Book Fair. The Brazilian representation will also include 85 publishing houses as well as prestigious intellectuals from that country like Antonio Nóbrega, Thiago de Mello, Fernando Morais and theologian Frei Betto. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 1/2/05)

**February 1:** In one of his most combative speeches in some time, Fidel Castro expressed disdain for what was meant to be a conciliatory gesture by the European Union, saying his Communist island does not need either Europe or the United States. Barely a day after Brussels agreed to lift the diplomatic sanctions it imposed in 2003, Castro said defiantly that Cuba "had learned to do without" the United States and Europe. When the Cuban leader, age 78, appeared about to complete his address, he referred to Europe briefly but emphatically. "They are treating us as if we are condemned to death and they have pardoned us for a few months, until June, while they observe how I behave," Castro said, visibly irked. "What are they going to forgive us for?" he asked, alluding to the EU's decision to temporarily lift, until July, the mild sanctions it imposed a year and a half ago in protest against the jailing of dissidents and execution of three men who attempted to hijack a ferry as a means of fleeing the country. "I have to shut up, because I don't want to help the worms," he said with references to Miami's Cuban exiles, "now that they are saying

Europe is treacherous, that Europe has abandoned champions of freedom, that Europe is playing along with and has sold out to the tyrant Castro." "No doubt some people in Europe have acted in good faith, but in what kind of world are we living in that to take a step forward, to rectify great mistakes, you have to put a country on tenterhooks and forgive it," said Castro. "Gentlemen, Cuba does not need the United States; Cuba does not need Europe. It has learned to do without them," he added. (*EFE, Reuters, 2/2/05*)

**February 1:** European ambassadors to Cuba defended the European Union's decision to restore normal diplomatic relations with Fidel Castro's government, expressing optimism that the end of the freeze would lead to several improvements. They also assured opponents of Cuba's government that the EU would continue to raise human rights issues on the Caribbean island and maintain contact with dissidents. "There is no reason to lack trust in our desire to try and do both things at the same time -- improve dialogue with the (Cuban) government, and with civil society, including the peaceful opposition," Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff, the EU's business attache in Cuba, told the press. Kuhn von Burgsdorff spoke while attending the opening of a state-sponsored photography exposition in Havana. During the crisis, many European diplomats abstained from going to such events. (*AP, 1/2/05*)

**February 2:** China jails more journalists than any other country and, along with Cuba, Eritrea and Myanmar, accounts for more than three quarters of journalists imprisoned around the world, a new report showed. The Committee to Protect Journalists said its annual snapshot of the situation on December 31, 2004, had found 122 journalists imprisoned in 20 countries for practicing their profession, 16 fewer than at the same time a year earlier. For the sixth year in a row, China was the leading jailer of journalists, with 42 imprisoned, followed by Cuba with 23, Eritrea with 17 and Myanmar with 11 behind bars. "These four countries operate outside the international mainstream," said Ann Cooper, the group's executive director. [[In imprisoning journalists, four nations stand out](#)] (*Reuters, 3/2/05*)

**February 2:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque met in Brazil with President Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva and Foreign Minister Celso Amorin. The Cuban foreign minister assured his host that Havana will support Brazil's candidacy to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council when the international institution decides to expand its membership. Perez Roque stated that one of the objectives of his visit to Brazil is to demonstrate the island's support for Brazil's desire to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Reuters, 3/2/05*)

**February 2:** Cuban vice president Carlos Lage, met in Kingston, Jamaica with his Chinese counterpart Zeng Quinhong and Jamaican prime minister Percival Patterson, in the 1st Economic Cooperation and China-Caribbean Forum. The Cuban official told the press that China's interest in the Caribbean is extremely important as is the Chinese vice president's visit to Latin America. While in Jamaica Carlos Lage will hold talks with representatives of Chinese banks before the Forum's official opening. He will also participate in a plenary session, meet with Cubans who are working in Jamaica and will visit sites of interest among other activities. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 2/2/05*)

**February 3:** Hans-Gert Poettering, head of the European Parliament Conservative Group, declared that Cuba must make headway on the human rights and democratic front by July or face new European Union sanctions. "When the decision to lift the sanctions is reviewed in mid-2005, the human rights situation in Cuba must be carefully assessed once again," reminded Poettering, leader of the European People's Party (EPP-ED), the majority parliamentary group in the Chamber. (*AFP, 3/2/05*)

**February 3:** A Mexican Secretariat of Public Safety press release informed that the Mexican Federal Preventive Police arrested in Campeche 16 illegal Cuban migrants and two alleged human smugglers, one of which was also Cuban. According to the Mexican National Migration Institute, out of 10,089 illegal immigrants "detained, repatriated or turned back" between January and December 2004, 141 were Cuban. (*AFP, 3/2/05*)

**February 3:** Moscow has welcomed a decision by European Union foreign ministers to suspend political and diplomatic sanctions against Cuba which were imposed on June 5, 2003. "We hope that this move will help normalize political contacts between EU member-nations and Havana and settle the situation surrounding Cuba in general," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a report. (*Interfax*, 3/2/05)

**February 4:** Reporters Without Borders deplored the "continuing farce" of "leading repressive countries" - this year China, Cuba and Zimbabwe - being chosen by the United Nations to decide which cases its Human Rights Commission will consider at its annual meeting. "We know for sure that no case about violations in any of these three countries and their allies will be heard," the worldwide press freedom organization said. "This is a very grave matter and we don't understand why the United Nations allows it. It would be comical if it wasn't so serious." (*RWB Press Release*, 4/2/05)

**February 4:** Ricardo Cabrisas, The Cuban Minister of Government, who attended the 1st China-Caribbean Forum on Economic and Commercial Cooperation, noted China is capable of understanding problems affecting the Caribbean small states, as well as establishing cooperation relations with them. "Everything we can do to foster relations," highlighted Cabrisas, "will be for the benefit of the Caribbean states, Cuba and China." Besides Cabrisas, the Cuban delegation to this forum was also made up of Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, Chamber of Commerce chairwoman Berta Delgado and ambassador to Kingston Gisela Garcia. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/2/05)

**February 6:** A leading Spanish politician wrapped up a visit to Cuba after meeting separately with Fidel Castro and dissidents in what appears to be the first test of a new European Union policy to reach out both to the Cuban government and its critics. Socialist Party President Manuel Chaves, also a regional leader in Andalusia, Spain, was the first high-ranking European politician to visit Cuba since the new EU policy was approved. Chaves met behind closed doors with Castro, then several hours later met separately with several well-known dissidents including Oswaldo Paya, Elizardo Sanchez and Eloy Gutierrez-Menoyo. "Dialogue always bears more fruit than unilateral imposition," Chaves told a news conference earlier in the day of the new EU policy. "It was a transparent and close meeting," Paya said of Chaves' meeting with dissidents. Paya heads Cuba's Christian Liberation Movement and is lead organizer of the Varela Project, a signature gathering drive aimed at forcing a voters' initiative on civil rights such as freedom of speech and assembly. Paya said a central issue of the talks was the 61 dissidents who still remain behind bars following a spring 2003 crackdown that rounded up 75 opposition members. Of those arrested, 14 have since been released for health reasons. (*AP*, 6/2/05)

**February 6:** King Juan Carlos and Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero have no plans to travel to Cuba either this year or in 2006, Spanish officials told the press. The officials were responding to a statement by the head of the Andalusian regional government, Manuel Chaves, who ended a visit to the island and said he and Fidel Castro discussed a possible visit to the Caribbean nation by the king and Zapatero. Sources close to Chaves, who also holds the mostly ceremonial post of chairman of the ruling Spanish Socialist Workers Party, said the meeting, which lasted for an hour and 40 minutes, was "very cordial." The Spanish government will host the 15th Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca in October, and Chaves told the Cuban leader of the desire on the part of the king and Zapatero that he assist the gathering. Castro's answer was noncommittal, according to the Andalusian leader. (*EFE*, 6/2/05)

**February 6:** Cuba has offered Malaysians scholarships to study at the International School for Physical Education and Sports. The university churns out graduates in sports management, physical education and recreation. The courses, which are to be completed in a five-year period, will enable the graduates to seek employment as physical education teachers as well as coaches. At present, the university has students from 37 countries with the bulk coming from Africa and Asia. Entry to the university is by means of a Cuban state programme devoted to providing scholarships to students through the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX) and its embassies in the concerned countries. (*The Star Online*, 6/2/05)

**February 7:** In a visit to Havana's "Lázaro Peña" School for Trade Union Professionals, Venezuelan education and sports minister, Aristóbulo Istúriz, thanked the Cuban revolution for its contribution to raising the educational level of "the peoples of the world". The school's director, Lázara García, presented Istúriz -who concluded his studies at her center in 1987- with the Graduate of Honor acknowledgement. For his part, the Venezuelan minister conferred upon García Santiago, on behalf of the school's staff, the commemorative medal for the anniversary of the birth of Simón Bolívar, for the work of the educational center in the formation of Cuban and foreign trade union leaders. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/05)

**February 8:** As efforts continue in Guyana to recover from the worst floods in the last 100 years, volunteer Cuban doctors are assisting hundreds of patients a day, according to AIN News Agency. The Cuban medical team, made up of 40 doctors and other specialists, arrived in that South American nation last week to offer assistance to victims in the most affected areas. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/2/05)

**February 10:** During an official visit to Spain, Mexican President Vicente Fox said that US traditional policy towards Cuba is "good for nothing" and expressed "total" support for the new European Union strategy toward the island, promoted by the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. (*Notimex*, 10/2/05)

**February 10:** Uruguay's designated foreign minister, Reinaldo Gargano, said that the future Uruguay government will no longer support resolutions in the United Nations Human Rights Commission that criticize human rights in Cuba. The current Senator will officially take up his position as Uruguay's foreign minister on March 1st, the same day

President-elect Tabare Vazquez replaces Jorge Batlle as head of state. Stressing that "Cuba needs to be helped," Gargano said Uruguay opposes the four-decade-old US economic embargo against the island. When a reporter asked him whether the incoming Vazquez administration would urge Cuba to be more flexible with dissidents and to release more political prisoners, the future foreign minister said those were internal matters for Havana to resolve. Gargano rejected the notion that the planned rapprochement with the Castro regime could create strains between Uruguay and the United States. "What we want is respect for international law and for the right of every country to set the guidelines of its internal policies," he said. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 11/2/05)

**February 11:** Cuba's successful battle against the dengue epidemic and infectious Hepatitis C disease needs to be studied and, if possible, emulated in Malaysia. Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek said that during a recent visit to Cuba he had learned that the country's methods were very effective in combating the two diseases. "I will inform the Government about Cuba's ability to combat dengue and Hepatitis C disease so that we can observe how they did it," he told reporters at Kuala Lumpur. (*The Star Online*, 12/2/05)

**February 11:** Cuban authorities should make a greater effort to rekindle diplomatic relations with the European Union, the bloc's commissioner for humanitarian aid and development told the press. Belgium's Louis Michel said that he would travel to the island at the end of March to try and narrow the gap between the Cuban and European positions. "I hope that the Cuban authorities will take advantage of the opportunity to re-launch a positive political dialogue with the European Union," he said. Michel said that it was possible for the Cuban authorities to "give a little bit more" on the matter. "They must take the steps, the Cuban authorities, because the European Union has already done its part (...) and Cuba must make an effort, and I hope they take that course," he declared. (*EFE*, 11/2/05)

**February 11:** Cuba officially announced Venezuela as the guest of honor at the 15th International Book Fair in February 2006 and Brazil will transfer the banner in a public ceremony to Ambassador Adan Chavez Frias. The Governor from the state of Anzoategui, Tarek Williams Saab, arrived in Havana for the preliminary arrangements for the annual book fair at the old fortress Morro-Cabaña. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/2/05)

**February 12:** Argentinean Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa said that there was a possibility that Fidel Castro might visit Buenos Aires in March and meet with his counterpart Néstor Kirchner. "It is a possibility but it has not been confirmed through any of the usual channels," said the Minister. (*EFE*, 14/2/05)

**February 12:** Musician Gilberto Gil, Brazil's Minister of Culture, said that he will promote cooperation between the two countries. According to Gil, the agreement signed with his Cuban counterpart, Abel Prieto, comprises collaboration on how to put Spanish and Portuguese to the best use possible, as well as on the areas of historical heritage, cinema and the audio-visual arts in general. (*AP*, 12/2/05)

**February 14:** Cuba's primary health care system and specialized services are playing a crucial role in disease prevention and treatment, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) official in Havana. Dr. Jack Chow, Assistant Director-General of WHO for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, described the Cuban health system as "exceptional." The expert visited a facility in Havana, where he learned of the specialized attention being provided to HIV/AIDS patients. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** Just before her departure from the island after completing her posting to Havana, Mexico's outgoing Ambassador to Cuba, Roberta Lajous, said that the crisis in Cuba-Mexico relations "had already been overcome." Before boarding her flight back to Mexico, Lajous told the press that "(...) bilateral relations are back on track and any obstacles that need clearing before they can move on to the next step have been established." (*EFE*, 15/2/05)

**February 14:** Cuba's top anti-drug agent and European officials launched a course on drug interdiction in the Caribbean, marking one of the first renewed programs since diplomatic relations between Havana and the EU were restored last month. John Dew, the British ambassador to Cuba, said he was enthusiastic about the weeklong course, as well as recent improvements in political relations with Cuba. "This is a positive time, and there will be more of this kind of cooperation, especially on drugs," Dew said. The course, which also involves France, brings together dozens of anti-narcotics agents from countries including Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Belize and Curacao to receive training. (*The New York Times*, 14/2/05)

**February 15:** In light of the growing exodus of Cubans through the southern coasts of the Cuban territory, the Cayman Islands authorities have implemented new restrictions aimed at discouraging the arrival of illegal immigrants. Under the new guidelines, in effect since last January 11, no migrant encountered on territorial waters or who come ashore on any of the three islands that make up the Caribbean country, will obtain authorization to remain there and will only receive humanitarian aid to prevent loss of life in the event of their vessel becoming disabled or in distress. "Any Cuban rescued (at sea) will be repatriated," says the declaration. Hundreds of Cuban migrants have used the Cayman Islands territory to replenish their food and water provisions as well as to repair their vessels before continuing on to Honduras or Costa Rica, where they seek temporary refuge until they are able to reach US soil. During 2004, nearly 400 Cuban nationals arrived in the Cayman Islands. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 15/2/05)

**February 16:** In a lengthy speech closing the 9th Congress of the National Health Workers' Union, Fidel Castro criticized several developed nations - especially those who frequently voice concerns about human rights - for not doing more in the field of health. "All of Europe together couldn't pull together the 500 doctors and health care workers we have over there," he said, referring to Cuban teams of specialists working in Haiti. Castro advised those who continue to accuse Cuba of human rights violations to focus on their own problems. "They'll have to shut their mouths, or (...) start admitting that revolution can be just," he said, calling his brand of socialism much more humane than the "imperialism" he said is being imposed around the world. (*The Washington Post*, 18/2/05)

**February 16:** Fidel Castro would have immunity from arrest if he visited Chile, the government said, clarifying an earlier statement that had appeared to suggest the Cuban leader could face possible arrest if he set foot on Chilean soil. Chilean government spokesman Francisco Vidal, asked earlier about the possibility Cuban exile groups could press for

Castro to be arrested on human rights charges, commented: "that's a new process (...) we have seen it with Pinochet." However, in a subsequent statement issued by Vidal, the government said Castro would receive immunity if he visited Chile as he is a serving head of state. (*AFP*, 16/2/05)

**February 16:** Cuba and Venezuela are not respecting international norms regarding freedom of expression and human rights, says a global coalition of press freedom advocacy groups. The coalition - known as the Global Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations - issued resolutions on the state of press freedom for Cuba and Venezuela, as well as a resolution on Haiti. The Global Committee is composed of the Miami-based Inter-American Press Association, which is a watchdog organization for press freedom in the Western Hemisphere; the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers; the North American Broadcasters Association, with headquarters in Toronto; and several other groups. The committee issued the resolutions on Cuba, Venezuela and Haiti when it met in Geneva. In its resolution regarding Cuba, the committee said the recent release from prison of several journalists by the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro "is not sufficient, since 26 colleagues" of the freed journalists "still remain behind bars under the pretext of having committed a crime for the mere act of expressing their ideas or criticizing" Castro's government. The Global Committee said it will "keep vigilant and work with governments and international organizations until achieving the release of all journalists and dissidents in Cuba." (*Washington File*, 28/2/05)

**February 17:** Russia and Cuba are finding common grounds in their respective foreign policies in consultations the two countries are holding in Moscow on multilateral issues, particularly on human rights. According to Rodolfo Reyes, deputy director of the Department of Multilateral Relations in the Cuban Foreign Ministry, the two parties agree that reforms should immediately be implemented to improve the work of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, with headquarters in Geneva. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/2/05)

**February 18:** According to a source with the soon-to-be-appointed staff of the Uruguayan Foreign Affairs Ministry, Fidel Castro will visit that country to attend the swearing-in ceremony of left-leaning President-elect Tabaré Vázquez on March 1, the same day that Havana and Montevideo will resume diplomatic relations, suspended since 2002. The source added that the new building for the Cuban embassy in Montevideo is nearly ready. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 18/2/05)

**February 18:** Dominica's Prime Minister, Roosevelt Skerrit, is scheduled to hold talks with Cuban government officials to discuss the strengthening of bilateral relations. Roosevelt Skerrit, also Finance, Planning and Caribbean Affairs Minister, arrived in Havana for a working visit. The Prime Minister's agenda includes a meeting with Fidel Castro and interviews with other officials such as Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas and the head of International Relations of the Cuban Communist Party, Fernando Remírez de Esténoz. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/2/05)

**February 19:** The Prime Minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit, who arrived on a working visit to Cuba, is due to meet with Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, in charge of relations with the Caribbean Community, which Havana authorities consider of paramount importance. The two officials will examine the Cuba-CARICOM joint meeting to be held in March 2005, and preparations for the 2nd Cuba-CARICOM Summit, slated for Barbados next December. The Caribbean PM will also exchange views with Fernando Remírez de Esténoz, who heads the Cuban Communist Party's International Relations Department. Fidel Castro welcomed the visiting dignitary at the Revolution Palace, where they held cordial but intensive working talks, a source close to the meeting said. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/2/05)

**February 21:** Fidel Castro officially received Roosevelt Skerrit, prime minister and minister of finances, planning and Caribbean affairs of the Commonwealth of Dominica at the Palacio de la Revolución, when the latter carried out a working visit to Cuba. The Dominican delegation included Osborne Riviere, minister for foreign affairs, trade and marketing; Reginald Austrie, minister for communications, construction and housing; Clarkson Thomas, honorary consul; and Floyd Capitolin, an official from the ministry for foreign trade. (*Granma Internacional*, 21/2/05)

**February 21:** Mikhail Gorbachev, former leader of the now-dismantled Soviet Union, has accepted an invitation to attend in an observer's capacity the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society in Cuba, to be held on May 20 and organized by Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello. Other personalities attending the meeting are Elena Bonner, president of the Sakharov Foundation, Serguei Kovaliev, Irina Preskaya, Mikhail Roy, and other important figures in Russian human rights activism and politics. Lech Walesa, founder of the Polish trade union Solidarity; former French Prime Minister and former leader of the French Socialist Party, Laurent Fabius; Vaclav Havel; and other prominent personalities in world politics have also applied for visas at the corresponding Cuban embassies. (*Netfor Cuba*, 21/2/05)

**February 23:** Three Cuban skaters, two of them members of the national team, defected from their training camps in two cities of the Yucatan Peninsula and their whereabouts remain unknown. According to Tamara Campos Medina, president of the Yucatan Rollerblading Association (APSRY), the two Cuban National Team members are Adaly Pérez and Rolando Bravo. Neither athlete has been heard from since February 20. Another unidentified Cuban skater also defected in Cancun. (*Notimex*, 23/2/05)

**February 26:** Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno Fernández said the 14th Non-Aligned Summit that would be held in Havana next year, exactly 30 years after the Colombo Summit, would redefine the objectives of the Movement and provide methodological guidelines. In a lecture at the Cuban Embassy in Sri Lanka, he said the Third World countries needed a forum to join hands and take a common position in the international arena. Moreno Fernández said that no country could take unilateral measures in the present day world. Countries of the world, especially in the South, must cooperate with each other in solving common problems. (*Sunday Observer*, 26/2/05)

**February 26:** Ten years of partnership between Canada World Youth (CWY) and Cuba were celebrated in the island. A group of thirty people from Canada's business and philanthropic sectors were in Cuba to visit participants and observe them in action in their host communities, host families and work placements. The week wrapped up with a reception attended by the founder of CWY, Senator Jacques Hébert, the Cuban Minister of Education, Luis Ignacio Gómez Gutiérrez, and the Canadian ambassador to Cuba, Her Excellency Alexandra Bugailiskis. (*Canada World Youth*, 4/3/05)

**February 27:** Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque arrived in Buenos Aires as a prelude to his visit to Uruguay, where he will lead the Cuban delegation attending President-elect Tabaré Vázquez's inauguration. Although Argentina and Cuba maintain difficult open negotiations over the case of dissident doctor Hilda Molina, sources with the San Martín Palace said there are no plans for a bilateral meeting in Buenos Aires. Cuba's National Information Agency (AIN) announced Pérez Roque's trip and, in clarifying that he would be leading the delegation, put to rest rumors of a Fidel Castro visit. (*La Nación*, 28/2/05)

**February 28:** The human-rights arm of the Organization of American States held its first hearings on Cuba in five years, with the Miami-based Cuban American Bar Association stating its case against the Fidel Castro government for the 75 arrested dissidents before a panel of judges. The International Human Rights Commission can recommend that countries pay reparations to the victims or their families, or refer the cases to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights Tribunal in Costa Rica. Cuba, which was suspended from the OAS in 1962, does not recognize the commission's jurisdiction. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/3/05)

## **Terrorism**

**February 7:** Nearly a dozen detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp contend they were wrongly imprisoned after repeated abuse by US troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including beatings with chains, electric shock and sodomy, their lawyer said. "These are classic stories of men who ended up in Guantanamo by mistake," charged

attorney Tom Wilner, who represents 11 Kuwaiti prisoners held in the detention center at the US Navy base in eastern Cuba. Most of his clients say they falsely confessed to belonging to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or the al-Qaida terror network as a way to stop the abuse, Wilner said. He said one is too angry over his treatment to discuss details of his case, but all argue their detentions are unjustified. (*The New York Times*, 8/2/05)

**February 9:** Lawyers for a Canadian detainee at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, who was captured in Afghanistan when he was 15 years old asserted in a document that he was repeatedly abused by his American jailers. Mr. Khadr's situation has received considerable attention, especially in Canada, where his lawyers held a news conference to criticize the Canadian government for what they said was its failure to press for his release. (*The New York Times*, 9/2/05)

**February 12:** The US military dismissed concerns expressed by a UN rights investigator about allegations of prisoner abuse in Afghanistan, saying an internal investigation had found that detainees were treated humanely. A UN independent expert said in a statement after a visit to Afghanistan that he was "gravely concerned" by allegations of mistreatment and even torture of local people by foreign forces in the country. (*Reuters*, 12/2/05)

### **US-Cuba Relations**

**February 1:** Fidel Castro said that US President George W. Bush appears deranged, and that Cubans would much rather live in the Caribbean island's "heaven" than try and survive in Bush's corrupt, capitalist "hell." In comments aired live on state-run television, Castro told thousands of teachers attending an international pedagogy conference in Havana that he closely watched Bush's inauguration speech and saw "the face of a deranged person." "If only it were just the face," he said, to roars of applause by educators in the audience hailing from 52 countries around the world. Castro criticized Bush's government, linking it to corruption and torture. He then defended Cuba's socialist system, which Bush's administration has openly said should be replaced with a democratic, free-market one. "This country is heaven, in the spiritual sense of the word," he said. "And I say (to Bush), we prefer to die in heaven than survive in hell." (*AP*, 1/2/05)

**February 1:** Fidel Castro said the only way the United States could overthrow his communist government was by the nuclear destruction of Cuba. Castro, whose one-party state was recently labeled an "outpost of tyranny" by US President George W. Bush's administration, said Cuba would resist an American invasion like Vietnam. "I hope I'm wrong (...) but if they make the mistake of attacking and invading this country, I recommend Mr. Bush had better launch 50 nuclear weapons and exterminate us all," Castro said in a speech. "I assure you this country could be exterminated," he said. "Extermination by weapons of mass destruction is the only way," he said. "We are not afraid." "Nobody was frightened here when hundreds of nuclear arms were pointing at this country in 1962," he added, in reference to the missile crisis in which Washington and Moscow came to the brink of nuclear war over Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba. (*Reuters*, 1/2/05)

**February 1:** Despite a much-publicized agreement signed last year for the government of Cuba to buy \$10 million in goods from South Carolina companies, little has been done since then to implement the deal. Three state officials, including Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer and then-Agriculture Commissioner Charles Sharpe, and two shipping executives returned from a controversial trip to Havana with a deal that included the officials agreeing to urge the state's congressional delegation to push for more open trade with the communist nation. "There were some people who were unhappy, but we weren't endorsing Castro," said Representative Chip Limehouse (Republican-Charleston), who went on the trade trip. Increased political tensions between Cuba and the United States could be to blame for the deal falling through. "For trade to flourish, we have to get the political situation better," Limehouse said. "It seems like every foot we go forward, we take a step or two backward." (*AP*, 2/2/05)

**February 2:** The United States took a dim view of an EU suspension of diplomatic sanctions on Cuba, calling productive dialogue with Havana "simply not possible." "We remain concerned that suspending the restrictive measures without achieving the goals for which they were put into place will embolden regime hardliners and dishearten the peaceful opposition," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher. The United States will "encourage" the European Union to actively support Cuba's peaceful opposition and to "make more vigorous efforts to focus international attention on Cuba's egregious human rights record," Boucher said. "Our experience in terms of watching what's happened with Cuba and the Castro regime is that a productive dialogue with the Castro regime is simply not possible," Boucher added. "Past efforts by the Europeans and others have yielded neither political nor economic reforms. And therefore we believe that the kind of pressure that has existed in the past is the only approach, the best approach of trying to secure change in Cuba." (*AFP*, 2/2/05)

**February 3:** US farm product sales to Cuba, which began only in 2002, have now topped \$1 billion, the head of Cuba's food import agency said. That trade appears to be growing despite a marked deterioration in always tense bilateral relations. "We have paid \$1,043 billion to date," Alimport Chairman Pedro Alvarez said after signing a \$22 million contract for 10,000 tonnes of milk with Dairy America of Arizona. Alimport includes shipping and other costs in its figures. Alvarez said most of the 163,000 tonnes (tons) of agricultural products purchased from the United States under a 2000 US measure that allowed cash-only sales were shipped by US companies. Alimport reported Cuba had become the 22nd largest US agricultural market, with sales of \$474 million last year. (*Reuters*, 3/2/05)

**February 3:** The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, denounced Washington's maneuvers to destroy the island's educational system and its example of equality and social justice. In a conference during the International Pedagogy 2005 conference underway in Havana, Alarcon explained the objectives of a document drafted by the US State Department entitled: "Plan for the Assistance of a Free Cuba". The Cuban Parliamentarian pointed out that the text ignores Cuba's priority in education since it claims that one of Washington's tasks will be to teach the Cuban people to read and write as well as train its teachers and professors due to their low professional quality. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/05)

**February 3:** New US government moves to reinterpret the payment system under a 2000 law allowing sales of American farm goods to communist Cuba threatens to slow the limited but growing trade relationship of recent years, the island's top food import official said. If the American government ultimately decides no US food products can leave port until paid for in advance by the Cuban government, deals "could be dramatically reduced" this year, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. "This harms American producers as much or more than Cuba itself," said Alvarez, speaking at a news conference called to announce a US\$22 million contract for the island to buy milk from Dairy America of California. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/2/05)

**February 3:** A videoconference celebrated as a first has linked Cubans in Miami and Havana for a discussion on a new book on the island's post-Castro economy. The University of Miami's Institute of Cuban and Cuban American Studies arranged the teleconference with Kelly Keiderling, a public affairs officer at the US diplomatic mission in Havana. "It's a pleasure to be part of this collaboration, that for the first time is possible," said Martha Beatriz Roque, a leading Cuban dissident. Keiderling invited about 50 Cubans to her home in Havana to take part in the videoconference with a Miami panel on the new book by Jorge Sanguinety, a Miami economist who headed Cuba's National Investment Planning Department from 1963 to 1966. He has also advised former Soviet-bloc nations on economic reforms. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/2/05)

**February 3:** US Southern Command chief, General Bantz Craddock, said his country has no intention to invade Cuba. When asked in Tegucigalpa whether his country was planning to invade Havana, the general replied with a sparse "No." Fidel Castro recently said that the US would consider military operations against the island. (*AP*, 4/2/05)

**February 4:** Governor Kathleen Blanco will lead a state delegation to Cuba from March 8 to 11 in an effort to win business for Louisiana ports and companies seeking to expand trade with the communist island nation. A spokeswoman for the governor said no meetings were planned with Fidel Castro during her visit, which was announced previously with no firm date. The relaxation of a trade embargo three years ago allows the sale of US food, agricultural, medical and some wood products to Cuba. (*The Times Picayune*, 4/2/05)

**February 4:** Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has decided to keep Roger Noriega as the top US diplomat for Latin America despite opposition by some members of Congress, officials and legislators say. Analysts saw the decision as a victory for Cuban-American lawmakers who lobbied on Noriega's behalf and as a sign that the second Bush administration will probably take a harder line against Cuba and Venezuela. Noriega has supporters, especially South Florida Republican Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. "I consider him a true soldier in favor of liberty and justice," Ros-Lehtinen said. "He's doing everything possible to boost the Bush doctrine in Latin America, combining democracies with solid market economies." (*The Miami Herald*, 4/2/05)

**February 7:** Eloy Gutiérrez-Menoyo, a controversial Cuban exile who returned to the island two years ago to join the dissident movement, said that the US Treasury Department warned he could be prosecuted or fined for living in Cuba. Gutiérrez-Menoyo, a permanent resident of the United States, after 17 years in Miami, announced during a trip to Cuba in August 2003 that he would remain there as a dissident with hopes of eventually opening a Cambio Cubano office. His legal immigration status in Cuba remains in limbo and he has been unable to open the office. Now US government officials say he could be violating the US embargo against Cuba. In November, the Treasury Department sent Gutiérrez-Menoyo a letter that said the department's Office of Foreign Assets Control "has reason to believe" that he is subject to US jurisdiction because he is a permanent resident. A representative of the US Interests Section in Havana gave Gutiérrez-Menoyo the Treasury Department letter late last year. According to the letter, Gutiérrez-Menoyo "presumably" went to Cuba in 2003 under a general license from the Treasury Department that allowed him to visit family, but new Treasury regulations that went into effect on June 30, 2004 require people traveling from the U.S. to Cuba to visit family to obtain a specific license. They are also limited to one visit every three years. Eloy Gutiérrez-Menoyo has returned to the United States twice since August 2003, his daughter, Patricia Gutiérrez-Menoyo, said. He made the first visit in July 2004 and has since renewed his expired green card, she said. (*Sun Sentinel*, *AP*, 8/2/04)

**February 8:** Foreign Affairs Professor at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Piero Gleijeses, said that the five Cuban political prisoners incarcerated in the United States "are the victims of Washington's hatred against the Cuban Revolution." The US scholar's views and considerations regarding the case of the Cuban Five are included in a 20-chapter book written by different international public figures under the coordination of Salim Lamrani. That book will be launched during the 14th Havana International Book Fair taking place in the Cuban capital. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/2/05)

**February 8:** The State Department denounced the selection of Cuba and Zimbabwe for a panel that will decide on the agenda for a meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission next month. "The United States believes that countries that routinely and systematically violate the rights of their citizens should not be selected to review the human rights performance of other countries," State Department press office Tom Casey said. Besides Cuba and Zimbabwe, the other members of the so-called "Working Group on Situations" are Hungary, the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia. "Despite the inappropriate membership of Cuba and Zimbabwe, we look for the working group to conduct its procedures in a balanced and transparent manner," Casey said. (*AP*, 8/2/05)

**February 9:** A group of US senators presented a bill to Congress seeking to clarify a law that permits the sale of agricultural produce and food to Cuba, thus ending a controversy that has jeopardized authorized trade with the communist island. The bill, presented by some 20 Republican and Democratic senators, clarifies details of 2001 legislation that allowed US firms to sell medicines and agricultural produce to Cuba as long as the government of Fidel Castro pays cash in advance. A dispute in interpreting the law had pitted US exporters since November with the US

Treasury Department, which had asked banks to block sale of foodstuffs and medicine to Cuba. "The Agricultural Export Facilitation Act (2005) will ensure that (agricultural producers ... all over the country) can keep the market and continue to sell their products to Cuba as they have done without incident for several years," said Senator Max Baucus, ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee. "Today, I will not allow bureaucrats to reinterpret Congress' original intent and obstruct already established legal trade," said Senator Larry Craig, as the bill was unveiled. The bill defines cash payment in advance as receipt of payment before transfer of title and release of physical control of goods to the purchaser. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/2/05)

**February 9:** The American Farm Bureau Federation said that it supports a bill introduced in the Senate to facilitate and increase US agricultural exports to Cuba. "We applaud these changes, which would clarify Congress' intent when it enacted trade sanctions reforms in 2000 and streamline the procedure that allows US farmers and ranchers to export their products to Cuba," said AFBF President Bob Stallman. "Congress clearly meant to open the Cuban market for farm exports, and this bill is a positive next step." (*Southwest Nebraska News*, 9/2/05)

**February 10:** Through gestures and bits of each other's language, teenagers Mara Blesoff of the United States and Lessys Rusindo of Cuba communicated animatedly during a break in their softball game. "We were talking about the party tomorrow night and she wanted to know if I knew how to dance," 13-year-old Mara said of her new 19-year-old friend. "I really can't, so maybe she can teach me." Mara is among 10 Chicago-area girls who, along with their coaches and many of their parents, are in Cuba on a US-government approved sports exchange -- one of the few remaining categories under which Americans can visit the communist island legally. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/2/05)

**February 10:** Cuba has purchased 125,000 tonnes of US wheat "over the past several days," according to the US Wheat Associates, an industry group that promotes sales of American wheat abroad. US Wheat Associates officials, accompanying wheat growers from Oklahoma and Texas, have been in Cuba this week meeting with food-buying officials. Details on delivery dates for the wheat were not available, according to a US Wheat Associates official. According to the group, "More purchases (of wheat) are being negotiated" by Cuba. (*Reuters*, 10/2/05)

**February 10:** Washington's Festival Center hosted packed audiences over the weekend to the premier of the documentary "Mission against Terror." AIN News Agency notes that the film, produced and directed by Bernie Dwyer of Radio Havana Cuba and Cuban TV producer Roberto Ruiz, profiles the incarceration of the so-called "Cuban Five" in prisons in the United States. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/2/05)

**February 11:** An administrative law judge fined a Michigan couple \$5,250 for traveling to Cuba in 2001. The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control had asked Administrative Law Judge Irwin Schroeder to fine Michael and Andrea McCarthy \$9,750. The McCarthys, of Port Huron, went to Cuba through Canada in April 2001. They are devout Catholics who considered the trip a missionary effort as well as a vacation. They brought medicine to a group of nuns in Havana, as they had done on similar trips to Mexico and Haiti, and participated in religious services. "Here are five thousand reasons to repeal the ban on travel by Americans to Cuba," Sarah Stephens, an advocate for the couple from the Center for International Policy, which opposes the Cuba travel ban, said in a written statement. (*AP*, 11/2/05)

**February 12:** Two US residents have been detained in Cuba after a friend reported them missing on their 22-foot boat, but how they reached Cuban waters is unclear. A man called the Coast Guard on February 5 to report his friends were in trouble at sea. He "had been in contact with the two individuals by satellite phone. We talked to this friend to try to get a position. He was telling us they were in distress and adrift, basically broken down," said Coast Guard Lt. Tony Russell. The initial location he offered was near Crooked Island in the Bahamas, but "that just didn't make any sense," Russell said. "The second location given was 18 miles off the coast of Cuba, and then 45 minutes later it was 1,200 yards off the coast of Cuba." That's when the man said his friends had been stopped by Cuban border guards. The

boaters' names have not been released. Russell had no explanation for the boat trip, but US-registered boats are required to get permits to enter the waters off Cuba. (AP, 12/2/05)

**February 12:** Fidel Castro warned the United States against plotting to kill his most important ally, Venezuela's leftist President Hugo Chavez. "I say to world public opinion: if they assassinate Chavez, the responsibility will fall squarely on the president of the United States, George W. Bush," Castro said. The Cuban leader, who was the target of CIA assassination plots after his 1959 revolution steered Cuba toward Soviet Communism, gave no evidence that Chavez's life was in danger. But he said the United States would be responsible for killing Chavez even if the Venezuelan military was to carry out the assassination. He added: "If they can eliminate him, they will." "This comes from a survivor. I have survived," he said in a nearly six-hour speech that began late at night and lasted into the early hours of next day. (*The New York Times*, 12/2/05)

**February 13:** In a move likely to further aggravate tensions between Cuba and the United States, the US government is offering millions of dollars to American universities and other groups under a program aimed at ending Cuba's one-party rule. Many schools traditionally have avoided the political battle between Washington and Havana. But that is beginning to change. Chicago's Loyola University last fall became one of several universities to accept such a grant, \$425,000, which university officials say will be used to continue a program that teaches English to adults in a poor Havana neighborhood. US officials argue the money that funds such programs is crucial to building political opposition to Fidel Castro on the island and preparing for what they describe as Cuba's inevitable transition from dictatorship to democracy. (*Chicago Tribune*, 13/2/05)

**February 14:** During the past year, the Bush administration has exerted pressures and imposed fines on several foreign banks doing business with Cuba. Specifically designed to prevent Havana from depositing US dollars abroad to fulfill its trade obligations, US enforcement actions are part of a broader attempt to further disrupt Cuba's limited access to international financing and hasten the demise of Fidel Castro's decades-long rule over the island. According to the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), claims of foreign banks on Cuba, which refer to financial assets such as loans, debt securities and equities, rose more than 30 percent between 2000 and 2003. By September 2003, these claims totaled \$1.97 billion, with European banks accounting for about 85 percent of all international credit to Cuba. Last May, the U.S. Federal Reserve imposed a fine of \$100 million on USB, Switzerland's largest bank, for allegedly making transactions in American dollars with Cuba in violation of U.S. sanctions. Additional fines were levied against the Italian group Banca Commerciale Italiana and the Spanish bank Santander for illegally transferring funds to the island. As the United States stepped up pressures on banking institutions to curtail their relations with the Castro government, one would expect a substantial reduction in the flow of international credit to Cuba. (*Orlando Sentinel*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** A couple will appeal a judge's fine of \$5,250 for a trip to Cuba they say had a humanitarian purpose, their attorney said. Attorney Kurt Berggren said the fine was excessive, and he will file the appeal for Michael and Andrea McCarthy. The McCarthys, of Port Huron, are devout Roman Catholics who traveled to Cuba in 2001 for a vacation but also took medicines with them and participated in religious services. (*The Seattle Post*, 14/2/05)

**February 14:** Cuba became the United States' 25th-largest agricultural export market in 2004 with food purchases jumping 55 per cent, despite a decline recently as always tense relations deteriorated further, a report showed. "With the completion of the 2004 data, Cuba's purchases of \$391.9 million ranks the country as the 25th largest agricultural market for U.S. companies, compared with 35th in 2003, 50th in 2002, and 144 in 2001," said John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. The New York-based organization monitors trade between the two countries and issues an annual summary based on US government data and other sources. (*Reuters*, 15/2/05)

**February 15:** Nearly 150 Cuban refugees convicted of crimes and imprisoned in the years following the 1980 Mariel boatlift have been released. The Miami Herald, citing an unnamed federal official, reported that at least 147 Mariel convicts have been released since last month's Supreme Court decision that found the indefinite detention of illegal

immigrants is unconstitutional. About 600 Mariel convicts remain in prisons and jails nationwide, said Manny Van Pelt, spokesman for the federal Department of Homeland Security. Most are expected to be released in the next few months, he said. (AP, 15/2/05)

**February 16:** Fidel Castro called the US-led war in Iraq a "brutal bombing spectacle," and criticized the Bush administration for its spending on the war. Castro said the billions of dollars being spent in Iraq "won't cure AIDS, won't cure any disease, won't cure anybody." Meanwhile, he said in the speech to a workers' congress in Havana, Cuba exports thousands of doctors to needy countries. "Mr. Bush put forth 15 billion dollars, and with that the world moved on to the stage of the Iraq war, that brutal bombing spectacle," Castro said in remarks lasting nearly three hours. "But what is needed over there is a man, a revolutionary doctor who can save lives. And that's what we have." (*The Washington Post*, 18/2/05)

**February 17:** Immigration advocates claimed US federal immigration officials were doing too little to help newly released Mariel detainees adjust to life outside a cell. Federal officials said they've heard only isolated complaints, but they acknowledge that more may come as more Mariel refugees are released in the next few months. Celestino Leyva Núñez and Carlos Bueno Rodríguez said they are Cuban Mariel refugees released under the recent Supreme Court ruling, men who spent long months in detention and were finally freed -- only to become homeless. "The Cuban Mariels are being released without work cards to communities where they have no ties and have no desire to live," said Sue Weishar, director of immigration and refugee services for Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans. "It is not fair to the Cubans and it is not fair to the communities." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/2/05)

**February 17:** US Central Intelligence Agency Director Porter Goss identified Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti and Cuba as "potential flashpoints" or areas of instability in Latin America in 2005. In the case of Venezuela, Goss said that (President Hugo) "Chávez is consolidating his hold on power by using technically legal tactics to target his opponents and is meddling in the region, supported by Fidel Castro." (*La Crónica de Hoy*, 17/2/05)

**February 17:** The US government's strict enforcement of a four-year-old law allowing farm sales in Cuba is threatening to slow the limited but expanding trade between the countries, a top Cuban official said. Late last year, American agricultural companies found that payments made by Cuba were not credited to US bank accounts while US officials studied whether shipping the products before full payment is received constitutes a line of credit. If the American government decides no US food products can leave port until paid for in advance by the Cuban government, deals "could be dramatically reduced," said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. "This harms American producers as much or more than Cuba itself," said Alvarez, speaking at a news conference to announce a \$22 million contract for the island to buy milk from Dairy America of Fresno, California. (AP, 18/2/05)

**February 17:** Cartoons and time capsules are the newest weapons in a four-decade-old war of words between the United States and Cuba. Long-simmering US-Cuba tensions have heated up since last May when President Bush tightened sanctions and said he would step up propaganda against Fidel Castro and support for Cuban dissidents in a move to hasten the downfall of communist rule on the island. Cuba's state-run television has fired back by broadcasting cartoons lampooning the top US diplomat in Havana, James Cason, as the point man for a transition to a post-Castro Cuba sought by the Bush administration. The cartoons about my alter-ego "Transition Man" clearly show that the Cuban regime realizes that a transition is not only inevitable but fast approaching," Cason said in a statement. (*Telemando, Reuters*, 17,22/2/05)

**February 17:** Daniel McNeel, executive director of Gulfport, Mississippi, and Pedro Alvarez, head of ALIMPORT, Cuba's food import company, have renewed an agreement to increase shipments from that harbor to Cuba. The accord with Gulfport, the third most important southern US seaport, was first signed in 2003. McNeel said he would be pleased if the renewal would help boost bilateral trade exchange. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/2/05)

**February 18:** The American Farm Bureau Federation supports a bill introduced in the Senate to facilitate and increase US agricultural exports to Cuba. The Agricultural Export Facilitation Act of 2005 would authorize Cuba to make payments directly to US banks; clarify that Cuba's payments do not have to be received before exports leave US shores; make it easier for US citizens to travel to Cuba to market agricultural products; and expedite temporary visas for Cuban nationals to visit the United States to inspect goods before they are shipped. "We applaud these changes, which would clarify Congress' intent when it enacted trade sanctions reforms in 2000 and streamline the procedure that allows U.S. farmers and ranchers to export their products to Cuba," said AFBF President Bob Stallman. (*Texas Agriculture*, 18/2/05)

**February 18:** US President George W. Bush announced that he is extending for another year restrictions on naval and air operations in the vicinity of Cuba. These measures were implemented following an incident on February 24, 1996 when two Cuban Air Force fighter jets shot down two small Cessna aircraft manned by anti-Castro exiles on international waters north of the island. (*EFE*, 18/2/05)

**February 21:** As part of a broad strategy to spur political change in Cuba, the US government has been quietly sending hundreds of thousands of dollars to activists seeking to undermine Fidel Castro's one-party state, according to documents and interviews. The cash assistance is being channeled through the US-financed National Endowment for Democracy and pays the salaries of more than two dozen freelance writers for a Miami-based web site that posts articles critical of the Cuban government. The cash also supports opposition figures, human-rights activists and political prisoners and their families, including prisoners jailed in 2003 during the government's crackdown on dissidents. Supporters argue the cash payments, totaling about \$200,000 a year, help keep opposition alive in a country where most dissidents are fired from their jobs and ostracized. Elizardo Sanchez, an activist who leads the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation in Havana, said his organization would not accept funds from the US government because it could compromise the commission's independence and open it to further attacks by Cuban officials. But Sanchez said he saw nothing wrong with US funds paying freelancers for their work or supporting activists, political prisoners and their families. "It's normal that the NED helps," he said. "The function of the NED is to promote democracy in the world." (*Chicago Tribune*, 21/2/05)

**February 22:** Members of the Cuban Cultural Center, an arts group that usually sponsors Cuban exhibitions and concerts, adopted an independent library in Cuba. They chose one in Las Tunas, Cuba, the Felix Varela Independent Library, which is named for a Cuban priest famous for his work for immigrants and the Roman Catholic Church in Lower Manhattan in the 1800's. The library itself, like some 100 others that have been founded since 1998, offers Cubans an alternative to the official media or state-run libraries. They carry newspapers and magazines from around the world or books considered taboo by the regime. (*The New York Times*, 22/2/05)

**February 22:** In a blow to growing US agricultural sales to Cuba, the Treasury Department ruled that American exports to the island cannot leave US ports until Havana pays cash. The "clarification" comes after a lengthy review of provisions in the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000, which permits limited cash sales of food and agricultural products to Cuba. Most other exports are barred by the 42-year-old US trade embargo. The review stemmed from concerns about possible violations of TSRA, which had led some banks to delay crediting Cuban payments to the accounts of US exporters, said Treasury officials. TSRA requires that Cuba pay cash but seemed unclear on whether payments had to be made before the US goods left American ports or -- a more common international trade procedure -- after the goods arrived at Cuban ports. The clarification "doesn't affect the ability of US exporters to send shipments to Cuba, but rather ensures that they receive payments before the goods are shipped to the island," said Treasury spokeswoman Molly Millerwise. [[OFAC Issues Clarification](#)] (*The Miami Herald, Sun Sentinel, Reuters*, 23/2/05)

**February 22:** The Treasury Department made clear that Cuba must make cash payments before the shipment of US agriculture and medical products to the island. The ruling drew quick criticism from farm-state senators, with one

threatening to block nominees to Treasury posts. "I'm outraged at this attempt by Treasury Department bureaucrats to choke off US agriculture sales to Cuba," Senator Max Baucus of Montana, top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said. Baucus has also joined senior Republicans, including Intelligence Committee Chairman Pat Roberts of Kansas and Larry Craig of Idaho, in promoting legislation to remove what they say are the bureaucratic obstacles being put up by the administration to farm trade. Senate Finance Committee chairman Charles Grassley, an Iowa Republican, also said he was considering a response to the new rule. (*CNN, Reuters, 22/2/05*)

**February 23:** Cuba is considering halting purchases of American farm products worth \$400 million a year because of new Bush administration rules demanding payment before shipment to the island, Cuban officials said. One official said the payment rules announced by the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control made Cuban shipments vulnerable to confiscation by Cuban exiles with legal claims against Fidel Castro's government. "If they manage to obstruct trade, Cuba will find alternative suppliers," the president of Cuba's National Assembly or legislature, Ricardo Alarcon, told the press. He said the measure would hurt US agricultural producers, who have sold \$790 million in food to Cuba since December 2001. "They are shooting themselves in the foot," Alarcon said. Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import agency Alimport, said Cuba would honor its commitments with American suppliers, though trade will inevitably decline. "Of course, we are not going to continue buying. The shipments could be seized once Cuba has paid for them," said one Cuban official who asked not to be named. (*Reuters, 23/2/05*)

**February 24:** A Cuban government tobacco company lost its right to the Cohiba cigar name in the United States, allowing New York-based General Cigar Holdings to market cigars bearing the famous trademark in this country. The US Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Cubatabaco could not hold the trademark in the United States because of the trade embargo with Cuba. In its ruling, the appeals panel reversed a lower court's opinion that had stopped General Cigar from selling products under the Cohiba name in the United States. "We hold that the Embargo Regulations bar Cubatabaco's acquisition of property rights in the US," the appeals court said. (*Reuters, 24/2/05*)

**February 26:** The US Department of Homeland Security is denying a published report that Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, the archbishop of Havana, was detained at Miami International Airport for three hours and threatened with deportation back to Cuba. El Nuevo Herald, citing two unnamed eyewitnesses, reported that immigration authorities at MIA harassed the prelate, who was traveling on a diplomatic passport issued by the Vatican. Zack Mann, spokesman for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said that Ortega was "detained briefly" for about an hour after he arrived aboard a charter flight from Havana about 11:50 a.m. "We can confirm that he did arrive and was processed just as any other foreign arrival would be processed when visiting the United States," Mann said. "All procedures were absolutely followed. "He was treated in the utmost courteous manner." Neither Ortega nor the Archdiocese of Miami could be reached for comment. (*The Miami Herald, 27/2/05*)

**February 26:** A member of the San Diego Port Commission bucked policy by going to Cuba and striking a tentative deal with a food importer. Kourosh Hangafarin, appointed to the panel less than a month ago by Mayor Dick Murphy, signed a deal between the San Diego Unified Port District and Havana-based Alimport, The San Diego Union-Tribune reported. The deal would require commission approval at a public hearing. The news stunned Bill Hall, head of the commission, who said he told the Union-Tribune he was upset when Hangafarin faxed him the contract between the port and Alimport. "I am concerned by it; I don't like it," Hall told the newspaper. "Basically, he didn't act in accordance with policy, but he's new to the board, so I'm going to look at what the repercussions may be." (*North County Times, 26/2/05*)

**February 28:** The State Department listed prisoner abuse in Cuba, violence in Haiti and intimidation of the media and the opposition in Venezuela as areas of concern for human rights in Latin America. The concerns were part of the department's 2004 Human Rights Report, detailing conditions around the world. The report reserved its sharpest language for countries such as Cuba, Syria, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. During her introductory remarks at a media briefing on the report, Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, called Cuba's record "a blight on

the stunning advancement of freedom worldwide." [[Cuba: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004](#)] (*The Miami Herald, EFE, 1/3/05*)