

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

May 2003

Domestic Affairs

May 1: Hundreds of thousands of Cubans poured into the country's main plaza for a May Day celebration that aimed to defend the island's socialist system against criticism from abroad. Castro insisted the stepped up repression came that has overtaken the island came because Cuba was under threat from Washington. We would not want those who have, in our opinion, attacked Cuba unjustly (...) to have to suffer the infinite sorrow they will feel if one day our cities are destroyed and our children and mothers, women and men, young and old, are torn apart by the bombs of neo-fascism," said Castro. (Canadian Press, Reuters, 1/5/03)

May 2: Cuban workers got a bonus day off when the government declared it a holiday, partly in recompense for the good turnout at May Day celebrations. (EFE, 2/5/03)

May 2: Representatives from more than 120 trade union organizations from 47 countries gathered in Havana for a one-day solidarity meeting. Fidel Castro was on hand for the gathering, which was held at Havana's International Convention Center. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/5/03)

May 3: Cuban scientists have created an extract from the bark of the mango tree that they claim will help improve the quality of life. The new formula, named VIMANG and which has been presented by a laboratory in Havana, has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-allergic and neuro-protective properties, among other characteristics. According to Daniel Amaro González, researcher at Havana's Center of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, VIMANG is one hundred per cent natural and it can only be obtained from 17 of the over 200 mango species on the island. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/5/03)

May 5: Social scientists meeting in Havana discussed new forms of revolutionary struggle, and the shortcomings and contradictions of present-day capitalism. The workshop featured, among other experts, Istvan Meszaröz, from Hungary; Alfredo González and Marcelo Yera, from Cuba; Michael Lebowitz, from Canada; and Heinz Dieterich, from Germany. (Granma, 7/5/03)

May 6: Cuba has placed in solitary confinement most of the 75 people imprisoned in a recent crackdown on dissent that drew international condemnation, a human rights organisation says. "The immense majority, 60 in all, are in solitary confinement in the punishment wards of the country's maximum security prisons," said Elizardo Sanchez, president of the illegal, but tolerated, Cuban Human Rights Commission. Sanchez said the dissidents were being held in "inhuman conditions" in small cells where they received water and food "that does not meet minimum sanitary requirements". Sanchez, whose group has monitored Cuban prison conditions for years, said writer and poet Raúl Rivero and leading dissidents Hector Palacios and Oscar Elias Biscet were among those in solitary confinement. (Reuters, 7/5/03)

May 8: Fara Armenteros, director of the Unión de Periodistas y Escritores Independientes - Association of Independent Authors and Journalists -, (UPECI), and Gilberto Figueredo, head of the Cartas de Cuba - Letters from Cuba - news service, were the targets of threats from State Security Department officers. The dissidents were warned that they would be prosecuted in accordance with Act 88, should they continue their informative efforts. (Cubamet, 9/5/03)

May 8: During an interview with the Argentine daily newspaper Página 12, Fidel Castro reacted to the wave of criticism against his government, saying he shared the feelings of "abhorrence for the death penalty." However, he claimed that it had to be resorted to, as it was "a matter of life and death." With regard to Nobel Prize Laureate José Saramago's pronouncements against the

arrests of dissidents, Castro added that, "He should have voiced his disagreement without uttering a single word that encourages U.S. aggressive positions against Cuba." (Reuters, 11/5/03)

May 8: Cuban police tightened security around the Panamanian Embassy in Havana as a "preventive" measure, officials told the press. About a dozen police officers were positioned at the embassy's gates in Havana's Miramar neighborhood after word spread that Panama was reportedly willing to grant asylum to a Cuban who fled the island in a small boat and was intercepted just off the US coast in a dramatic incident captured live by television crews. Cuban officials described the police deployment as "merely preventive." (EFE, 8/5/03)

May 9: Fidel Castro closed the 4th International Conference on Rights of the Disabled. Castro told participants that some day the disabled will be as contented and useful as any other member of society. (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/5/03)

May 11: Dressed in black and white to express both mourning and peace, about 30 women gathered at a Roman Catholic church in Havana to pray for the release of their imprisoned dissident relatives. The women attended the Mother's Day Mass at the Church of St. Rita, the patron saint of lost causes, four weeks after their loved ones were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 28 years. The wives and mothers of those arrested in the recent wave said Cuban authorities prohibited them from marching in silence for two blocks near the church, as they've done on past Sundays. "They thought it would be a provocative act," Delgado said. "They were prepared to arrest us." Miriam Leiva, wife of independent journalist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, said state security agents had visited her and other relatives to warn them against marching. (AP, 11/5/03)

May 12: In response to the prospect that the US blockade towards Cuba may increase, Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Parliament, called to intensify the "revolutionary vigilance" and the control of material resources. Regardless of the menaces, the US government will increase the pressure on nations that trade with Cuba for them to stop it, he said during a meeting with the presidents of the 107 Popular Councils in the western province of Camagüey. Alarcón stated that a time of more serious limitations and more difficulty to buy in other countries is coming, which is another reason to increase "revolutionary vigilance" in all its ways and to check and control of all that we have for a determined purpose. (Radio Habana Cuba, 12/5/03)

May 13: Cuba's communist government is using its media to publish and promote a book titled "The Dissidents" containing what it calls evidence that scores of jailed democracy advocates and independent journalists are "mercenaries" at the service of Washington. The book, which will be published in the coming days, presents testimonials and documents that "prove the mercenary nature of the relations of the so-called 'Cuban dissident movement'" with Washington, according to Granma, the communist government's official newspaper. (EFE, 13/5/03)

May 13: Relatives of Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero, sentenced recently to 20 years in jail, called for solidarity and global pressure to gain his freedom and that of scores of other political prisoners on the island. The plea came from Rivero's daughter, Cristina, and Miguel Sanchez, the poet's stepson. The pair announced at a press conference that the writer was being kept incommunicado under miserable conditions at Canaleta prison in Ciego de Avila, some 480 kilometers (300 miles) southeast of Havana. (EFE, 13/5/03)

May 14: In Cuba, the alternative of using firewood or charcoals to prepare meals, given current household fuel shortages, uses up 17-24 percent of the median family income in the province of Guantánamo, according to research data partially published in the daily newspaper Juventud Rebelde. Osvaldo Nuñez Bosch, who conducted the study, pointed that 35 percent of the 143,

000 households in the province cook with either firewood or charcoals, whereas 77 percent alternate them with kerosene. (AFP, 14/5/03)

May 15: A Cuban dissident coalition, Arco Progresista, released two letters; one to the Cuban government asking it to free recently jailed dissidents; the other to the United States, asking Washington to change its policy toward the island. Arco Progresista is "a group of social democratic parties, movements and organizations in and outside of Cuba," a spokesperson told the press. The letters were circulated along with a manifesto and a call to action. It was signed by Manuel Cuesta Morua of the Democratic Socialist Movement, Eduardo Ojeda of the Social Democratic Coordinator, Alberto Sosa of the Cuban Pro-Democracy Movement and Maria del C. Videaux of the Democratic Leftist Women's organization, among others. The manifesto states that Arco Progresista "arises as a political and cultural proposal" committed to "the defense of minority rights, the environment, new social movements and opposition to war, terrorism and unilateralism." (EFE, 15/5/03)

May 17: A court in Cuba has ordered life imprisonment for five men who attempted to hijack a passenger plane last month the island's authorities say in a statement published by the ruling Communist Party daily Granma. A judge in Havana said the men had been found guilty of acts of terrorism when they tried to force a plane on a domestic flight to head to the United States, an official statement said. Three other defendants received jail terms of between 20 and 30 years, it said. (BBC, 17/5/03)

May 17: Cuba is manufacturing the anti-retroviral drugs used in the triple therapy treatment given to HIV/AIDS patients, who receive them free of charge. Melvis Heredia Molina, director of NOVETEC Laboratories -- a part of the West Havana Scientific Center -- told Granma International that this year the company has plans to produce sufficient quantities of the drugs for 1,500 patients. She explained that to date, Cuba only has five anti-retrovirals registered (Zidovudine, Didanosina, Lamivudina, Estavudina and Indinavir), adding that they are working together with the Center for the Research and Development of Medicines (CIDEM) "so that this figure reaches 13." A combination of three drugs is used to fabricate the anti-AIDS "cocktail" treatment. (Radio Habana Cuba, 17/5/03)

May 17: Eusebio Leal Spengler, Historian of the City of Havana and president of a major business enterprise in the Old Havana section of the city, publicly denied rumours of his defection that circulated in the capital. (La Jornada, 29/5/03)

May 20: Construction on furnished apartments for physically disabled elderly persons has been completed in Old Havana as part of the UN Development Program (UNDP). The building, constructed with support from UNPD at Local Level, Italian Cooperation and the Decentralized Cooperation Committee of the Italian province of Florence, has already opened its doors to 11 elderly men and women with an average age of 75. (Granma International, 20/5/03)

May 20: Aldo Santamaría Cuadrado, head of the Cuban navy for two decades, was buried in the Revolutionary Armed Forces Pantheon at Cristóbal Colón Cemetery in Havana. The ceremony was attended by high-ranking government officials, including Raúl Castro, Cuba's vice president and minister of defense. Santamaría was among four top-level members of the Cuban government indicted in November 1982 by a federal grand jury in Miami on charges of conspiring to use Cuba as a safe haven in Colombia-to-Miami smuggling routes for Quaaludes and marijuana. Cuba denied the charges. (The Miami Herald, 21/5/03)

May 21: Cuban doctors in South Africa said they have been "forced" to sign a petition by the Cuban government to support the principles of the revolution in the light of an "imminent invasion and attack from the United States on Cuba". According to a doctor in KwaZulu-Natal, the "urgent" document was faxed by the South African Cuban co-ordinator Dr Jaime Davis to the provincial

co-ordinator with a request to sign and return it within 48 hours. Some Cuban doctors believe the petition is "needed as intellectual support" for the execution of three Cubans who hijacked a ferry last month in a failed attempt to reach the US. (The Natal Witness Group, 21/5/03)

May 21: According to relatives, independent journalist and economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, currently serving a 20-year prison sentence, was urgently admitted to the Guantánamo provincial hospital, following deterioration of his health. "The triggering factor seems to have been his recent transfer to solitary confinement," said his sister Clara Espinosa Chepe. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/5/03)

May 21: A gas cylinder exploded at a military repair unit in central Havana, killing two mechanics and injuring another, officials said. "A cylinder of acetylene blew up while they were repairing a car in a military workshop," a fire brigade official said. The explosion in the Nuevo Vedado neighborhood of Havana, a few blocks from Revolution Square, shook windows of nearby buildings, residents said. "Everything points to an accident," a woman resident said. Acetylene, a flammable gas that smells like garlic, is used for welding. (Reuters, 21/5/03)

May 23: The house where Ernest Hemingway once lived opened its doors for a short time to show off some of his rarely seen possessions, including the certificate for his 1954 Nobel Prize for literature. Just east of Havana at the farm known as Finca Vigía, the house where Hemingway lived from 1940 to 1961 is a museum, where the doors are usually locked and visitors must peek through windows from the outside. The exposition where visitors got a close look at some of Hemingway's belongings coincided with an international colloquium that brought about 60 academics and Hemingway fans to Havana. (AP, 28/5/03)

May 23: Friends and athletes cheered Cuban champion high jumper Javier Sotomayor when he stepped onto the Olympic Stadium track for the first time in almost two years. Sotomayor was there only for a friendly competition with fellow Cuban Marino Drake, but the acclaim was appreciated by the former Olympic gold medalist who retired in 2001. He also enjoyed beating his old rival Drake, Cuba's best high jumper after Sotomayor, by 10 centimeters with the bar at 2.10 meters. "Leaving sports left a huge emptiness in my life," Sotomayor said after competition. Sotomayor still holds the world high jump record of 2.45 meters, set in 1993. Drake is Cuba's No. 2 record holder, at 2.34. He announced his retirement shortly after having tested positive for steroids following a meet in Spain. The lanky athlete has long denied taking the steroid, and refused to talk about that painful period of his life. (AP, 27/5/03)

May 24: A new television channel with educational and cultural programming will begin airing next year in Cuba, Fidel Castro has announced. "In the first quarter of next year we will be inaugurating the fourth television channel, which will also be educational," Castro said in a television appearance. (ABC, 24/5/03)

May 26: The Cuban government denied travel visas to dissident leaders invited to participate in a seminar organized in Turin by the Italian Leftist Democrats Party (DS) to discuss the current situation of the democratic opposition on the island. Those invited were Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, Vladimiro Roca, Manuel Cuesta Morúa; and Oswaldo Payá, chief promoter of the Varela Project. (Encuentro en la Red, 28/5/03)

May 21: According to relatives, independent journalist and economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, currently serving a 20-year prison sentence, was urgently admitted to the Guantánamo provincial hospital, following deterioration of his health. "The triggering factor seems to have been his recent transfer to solitary confinement," said his sister Clara Espinosa Chepe. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/5/03)

May 26: Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez expressed his continuing support for Fidel Castro's regime. He added that, although he is against the death penalty, it is important to give the government a vote of confidence to stay guarded "against the enemy that comes upon us." (Radio Cooperativa, 26/5/03)

May 27: Fidel Castro returned to the island from Buenos Aires. The Cuban leader spent three days in the Argentinian capital along with a dozen other Latin American leaders attending the inaugural ceremonies for Néstor Kirchner. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/5/03)

May 27: The Fifth Meeting on Organic Farming in Cuba got off to a lively start at Havana's International Convention Center. Of the 400 delegates to the Fifth Meeting on Organic Farming, roughly half are from all over Cuba with the remainder representing some 24 different nations, including the United States and Britain. The meeting takes place as Cuba receives a harvest of more than 200,000 tons of organic rice via the labors of rice growers from the urban agricultural sector. (Radio Habana Cuba, Granma International, 27/5/03)

May 29: The finding of a second column of a stalagmite existing in Cuba was reported by Ciego de Avila speleologists, in the cavern system of Boquerones, Northern region of Ciego de Avila province. The formation extends for 6 meters high and 10 centimeters of a uniform diameter exactly located at Las Cortinas Cave, next to the basin of the former Jatibonico River, right in the boundaries to Sancti Spiritus province. (AIN, 29/5/03)

May 29: Dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe, serving a 20-year jail sentence, must be immediately transferred to Havana as his life is at risk both in prison and at the Guantánamo hospital, said his wife Miriam Leiva. In an open letter to the public, Leiva indicated that the Guantánamo provincial hospital -located about a 1, 000-km away from Havana-, where he was admitted after numerous attempts, lacks the necessary requirements to provide effective care for "a patient in critical condition." (Notimex, 29/5/03)

May 29: Cuba's Roman Catholic cardinal defended the church's role on the communist-run island, rejecting criticism that it was not doing enough to support the political opposition. Cardinal Jaime Ortega has called for political freedom in communist-run Cuba but said the church will not join forces with opponents of Fidel Castro. "The church's mission is not to be the opposition party that unfortunately does not exist in Cuba," Cardinal Ortega said in a talk on the future of Cuba. "I wish there were one, two or three different parties, but there are not," he said. Cardinal Jaime Ortega also called for reconciliation among Cuban Catholics during the conference attended by hundreds of people. The audience included US Interests Section Chief James Cason and other foreign diplomats, opposition members and well-known cultural figures with ties to Fidel Castro's government. "The church's mission is not to be on the side of the opposition," said Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana and the island's only Roman Catholic cardinal. "In the same way, you cannot ask the church to support the government." (Las Vegas Sun, Reuters, 29/5/03)

May 31: Cuba, source of some of the world's best tobacco, faces the constant dilemma of promoting its hand-fashioned cigars abroad while trying to persuade its own citizens to kick the smoking habit. As the World Health Organization marks World No Tobacco day, nearly a third of the 11 million people in this Caribbean island still light up, said Francisco Safora, of Cuba's Institute for Hygiene and Epidemiology. "We aren't exempt from contradictions." Still, that's down from the 46% of the population who smoked four decades ago, Safora said. About 15,000 people die from preventable cancers in Cuba annually - 30% of those cases directly related to tobacco. (AP, 31/5/03)

May 31: Fidel Castro alerted in Buenos Aires that the information circulating about Cuba has been distorted for a long time using every technique available to alter the truth and present lies. "I say nothing less than this: They can make any criticism and express any opinion that they want

about us, but the problem is that information about Cuba has been distorted for a long time, using every technique to twist the truth and sell lies,"Castro said. In an interview with Clarin, the Cuban leader maintained "if true and real information were known, they could criticize us all they want, but to understand the truth, if we were as they paint us, we would not have the help of the people". (Prensa Latina, 2/6/03)

Economy

May 1: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Cuba signed a bilateral agreement on maritime transport. Among other objectives, the accord seeks to lower transportation costs between the two countries. (Opciones, 1/5/03)

May 2: Toronto-based Sherritt International Corp. has made electricity generation, along with coal, oil and gas and metals, one of its four core business units. Sherritt also has interests in Cuba, in soybean-based food processing, cellular telecommunications and tourism. Yesterday, the company said it "continues to evaluate" the long-term prospects of its Cuban assets, some of which have been less profitable than expected. (The Globe and Mail, 3/5/03)

May 2: The latest potato harvest will not meet projected production goals, said an agricultural specialist who asked not to be identified. Among the causes for the shortfall, the specialist cited late planting, inadequate cultivation and the loss of some seed. Potatoes are put in cold-storage and distributed as part of the population's basic food basket. But after November last year, potatoes disappeared from the markets. (Cubonet, 2/5/03)

May 4: Some 770,000 foreigners visited Cuba during the island's tourist high season between January and April, a 19 percent increase over the previous year, Cuban Deputy Tourism Minister Marta Maiz said. She said the number of visitors during the first four months of the year was 2.0 percent higher than the same period in 2001, "which was one of the best high seasons in Cuba in years." The deputy tourism minister said this year's increase was achieved despite "all the situations in the world that are influencing the tourism industry on an international level." She said the island's top tourist sites were the capital Havana; Varadero, in the west; Jardines del Rey, in central Cuba, and Holguín in the east. (EFE, 4/5/03)

May 5: More than 1,000 specialists from 60 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and other regions will take part in the International Tourism Convention in Varadero, Cuba's largest beach resort. The conference - the largest of its type ever held in Cuba - will focus specifically on Mexico, the source of more tourists to the island than any other Latin American country, Cuba's Deputy Tourism Minister Marta Maiz told the press. Mexico will be represented by some 80 delegates. Also attending will be Wendy Haskett, the director of the World Tourism Encounter, which will be held in Mexico in mid-September. (EFE, 5/5/03)

May 7: Fires destroyed more than 36,000 hectares (90,000 acres) of woodland in Cuba between 2000 and 2002, and though this year's forecast is encouraging, foresters advise caution. Between late April and early May 2002, 12,500 hectares (30,000 acres) of forest went up in smoke, the official Juventud Rebelde newspaper reported. In 2002, 353 forest fires burned 23,118 hectares (57,000 acres), the newspaper said. The chief of the forest-fire prevention department of Cuba's Forest Rangers Corps, Martin Chavez, said smoldering cigarettes and cigarette butts caused 33 fires between January and June 2002, but other blazes were caused by fishermen, hunters and farmers who use fire to clear the ground. (EFE, 8/5/03)

May 9: According to Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, despite the fact that international tourism has dropped overall since the terrorist attacks of September 11th -- nearly two years ago -- the island's tourist industry is recovering quite well. Lage spoke at the closing of the island's annual

Tourism Convention, which took place at the Varadero Beach Resort. (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/5/03)

May 11: Cuba ranks first on Spain's list of negligent borrower countries and is the nation that most often defaults on debt repayments to the Spanish state. In fact, the Caribbean island accounts all by itself for nearly a third (32.53 percent) of all missed payments of outstanding debts to Spain by sovereign debtor countries. (Europa Press, 11/5/03)

May 11: Tourism, remittances, agriculture and nickel are now the pillars of the Cuban economy, which is no longer dependent only on the sugar industry, a sector that has been in the doldrums lately. Remittances from Cubans living abroad generate \$800 million to \$1 billion each year, according to unofficial data, making these transfers the second-largest source of foreign currency in the country after tourism. But while tourism and the nickel industry continue to grow, the agricultural sector still plays a major role in the economy, accounting for more than 40 percent of Cuba's gross domestic product and 60 percent of hard currency income from exports. Agriculture produces more than half the basic food products consumed in Cuba, according to an article in the most recent edition of the weekly newspaper *Negocios en Cuba*. Last year, production of roots, tubers and garden vegetables exceeded 10 million tons and close to 7 million tons of that total was harvested from urban crops. (EFE, 11/5/03)

May 11: Despite the drop in sugar production over the past several years, sugar still accounts for almost one-third of total agricultural exports in Cuba. Sugar industry, historically the most important in the country, produced only 3.6 million tons last year and forecasts for this year are much lower. According to some analysts, this year's sugar harvest, which is almost over, will not exceed 2.5 million tons. (EFE, 11/5/03)

May 11: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced that Venezuela and Cuba will sign some 15 cooperation agreements as part of the "new integration plan" being promoted by his administration. The new agreements are part of the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement signed by Chavez and Fidel Castro in Caracas in October 2000. Under that Comprehensive Agreement, Havana can pay for some of the 53,000 barrels of crude oil it buys from Venezuela with medical, educational and sports services, among others. (EFE, 11/5/03)

May 13: The Swiss Embassy in Cuba and the local Basic Industry and Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration Ministries signed an agreement aimed to decrease electric energy consumption. Swiss Ambassador in Cuba Jean-Claude Richard stated that the project will allow Cuba to purchase modern equipment that can reduce electric power consumption by almost 50 percent. The advantage of the investment by the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (COSUDE) lies in its sustainability. While it creates an electric energy fund for companies and institutions, it will reduce petroleum consumption and the emission of carbon dioxide to the environment. (Prensa Latina, 13/5/03)

May 14: Dozens of sugar mills across western and central Cuba reopened after being shut for days due to rain, as the beleaguered industry made a final push to top 2 million tonnes of raw sugar before the season ends, local analysts said. Local analysts said the industry would be lucky to produce more than 2 million tonnes of raw sugar before milling ended, with current tonnage estimated by Reuters at between 1.9 million and 2 million tonnes. "They reached 1.9 million tonnes last week and hope to top 2 million. If they are very lucky they could reach 2.1 million," said a local analyst who asked not to be named. (Reuters, 14/5/03)

May 14: Lord Colin Berkeley, the co-president of the British Cuba Initiative, has expressed his interest in strengthening ties with Cuba. The visiting dignitary is meeting with top Cuban officials during his stay on the island. Following a gathering with Antonio Carricarte, president of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, Lord Colin Berkeley said that "isolation [toward Cuba] is not the

road to take" -- stressing that it is necessary to strengthen and extend bilateral relations. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/5/03)

May 15: A photovoltaic wind central with the highest rate of energy production in the island was settled at "La Cana" height, located at Guantanamo province the most Eastern region and sun capital of the island. A TV signal centre and another radio linking station, located to almost 200 thousand meters by the sea, are the main benefits of this system whose main energy source is the wind. Specialists to Science, Technology and Environment Ministry and of the Electronic Techniques Centre were in charge of the mounting of this photovoltaic wind center. (AIN, 15/5/03)

May 15: Cuba's top citrus official forecast a record crop of more than a million tonnes by 2005 and said the industry was recovering from storms that slashed last year's output by 50 percent, in an interview published by the official daily Granma. "The recovery is being consolidated and by the end of 2005 production should be more than the record 1.017 million tonnes of the 1989-90 harvest," Percy Ruiz Medina, president of state-run Grupo Empresarial Fruticola, told Granma. Some 60 percent of Cuba's orchards are dedicated to oranges, 30 percent to grapefruit, and 10 percent to limes, of which 80 percent is processed into juice, 5 percent exported fresh and sold to the tourism industry, and the rest used for domestic consumption, Ruiz added. Israeli-based investors, operating through the BM Group, have a 50 percent interest in Cuba's most important processing facilities, and provide financing for the crop. Italian investors have also put money into the juice business. (Reuters, 15/5/03)

May 15: Cuban Vice-president Carlos Lage inaugurated a new plant generator of electricity in the Oil Distributor Enterprise in Matanzas, an investment that will allow to save over US\$ 1 million 400,000 annually. When talking to the workers, Lage said that all the electricity of the nation is already produced with Cuban oil. The current consumption of Cuban electric plants includes 92 percent of crude and natural gas from the national hydrocarbon deposits, and eight percent of fuel oil produced by national refineries. (AIN, 15/5/03)

May 15: Mexico remains the chief Latin American market for Havana Club Cuban rum, despite a noticeable drop in sales of that product in 2002. With a purchase of 30, 000 cases of the spirit last year, Mexico is the main market for it in the region, with Chile coming up very close behind, according to Sergio Valdés, Marketing Director for Havana Club International SA (HCI). (El Universal, 15/5/03)

May 18: A major British trade mission has been in Cuba. It is the first such visit since Cuba drew international condemnation for imprisoning 75 political dissidents, and executing three hijackers. A group of 16 British companies - from Rolls Royce to Virgin Atlantic - have spent a week in Havana, all hoping to trade with the Cuban government. (BBC, 18/5/03)

May 19: On the 44th anniversary of the first Agrarian Reform Act, Orlando Lugo Fonte, the president of National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), explained that from the 25% of cultivable land in Cuba - around one million hectares - the cooperative-campesino sector contributes 53% of root vegetables produce, 56% of fresh vegetables, 90% of tobacco, 75% of corn, 76% of beans, 73% of fruits, 73% of coconut, 58% of coffee, 63% of cacao, 61% of honey and 18% of sugar cane. In terms of animal farming, ANAP associates contribute 36% of milk, 57% of pork; have 68% of the island's sheep, 86% of its goat herds, and 77% of its horses.(Granma International, 25/5/03)

May 19: Cuba could experience a US\$ 180 million loss in exports if the current sugar cane harvest turns out to be, as indicated by forecasts, the worst in the last 60 years. This year's harvest of the Cuban crop will be 1.5 million tons lower than the 3.6 million tons harvested in 2002, ranking it below the outputs for 1935 and 1936, with 2.6 and 2.5 million tons respectively, according to figures on record. (IPS, 19/5/03)

May 19: Brazilian Minister of Health Humberto Costa announced that he will visit Havana in July to negotiate possible purchase agreements for medicines. A pilot programme already exists for studying the use of Cuban medicines to combat malaria and dengue fever in Brazil. The two countries have cooperation agreements in that area and Brazil purchases Cuban meningitis vaccines. Costa spoke following a meeting by the Brazilian delegation with Cuban officials who are also in Geneva for the annual meeting of the WHO. (Estado, 19/5/03)

May 20: Pescanova, a Spanish producer of frozen fish, has donated a state-of-the-art shrimp boat to the Cuban Fishing Ministry, officials said. Pescanova donated the Rio Saiñas, which cost \$3 million to upgrade and has a capacity to hold and process five tons of catch, during a ceremony in the city of Cienfuegos, the official daily Granma reported. (EFE, 22/5/03)

May 23: The subsidiaries of French automaker Renault in Brazil and Argentina will export production to Cuba, replacing exports by the parent company, according to a report published by a leading financial newspaper in Brazil. Renault's subsidiary in Brazil has already closed a deal to export 200 units of the company's Clio model, produced in Sao Jose dos Pinhais, a city located in the southern state of Parana, by the end of the year. The local subsidiary of Renault confirmed it has already shipped two lots of 15 cars each to the Cuban market in the last few days. (WMRC Daily Analysis, 23/5/03)

May 23: The most likely expansion for Canadian Sherritt International Corp. in the near term may be nickel and cobalt mining assets in Cuba, said Ian Delaney, Sherritt's chairman. Nickel supply is tightening internationally, he said, because virtually no new mines have gone into production in the past decade and as a result "we are very bullish on the nickel-cobalt world." Sherritt-owned mines in Cuba currently produce 33,000 tonnes of nickel annually and he said he would like to see the output increase to 80,000 tonnes. Cuban nickel is mined from so-called laterite deposits, which are close to the Earth's surface and relatively inexpensive to mine. "If we were to look around for a place to expand in the world (...) the cheapest new nickel would be in Cuba," he said. (The Globe and Mail, 23/5/03)

May 23: For the first time, Cuba has managed to certify and export four lines of organic agricultural produce – coffee, cacao, honey and citrus fruits – to Europe and Japan. With these sales, revenue is rising as organically cultivated produce fetches prices of between 30-40 % higher than the non-organic equivalents. They are cultivated in the most easterly region of the country, where various farms, essentially those managed by campesinos, do not use pesticides. With respect to coffee – currently undergoing a crisis on the international market – more than 4,000 hectares were certified and sales of 103 tons at 40% higher prices were recorded. (Granma International, 23/5/03)

May 26: Cuba stands high among countries that are key to Panama's goods re-exportation activities, said in Havana Melitón Arrocha, Panamanian Foreign Trade Vice-Minister. He added that it is now most important "to use the Colón Free Zone in the Island's behalf, as a vehicle for the marketing of Cuba's top quality products." (Opciones, 26/5/03)

May 27: Spain's Sol Melia, which runs some 20 hotels in Cuba, is expanding into the cays off the Caribbean island. The company's Cuba marketing and sales director, Gabriel Garcia, told the press that by year's end the chain hopes to open Melia Cayo Santa Maria off central Villa Clara province. The 360-room facility, targeting couples and families, will join a second hotel, in this case, in the Sol line, that the chain is developing on the cay. When the hotel is finished, Sol Melia's holdings will span 9,000 rooms, or 22 percent of the island's total, with more than half of those located on cays north and south of the island. (EFE, 27/5/03)

May 27: Cuba's worst sugar harvest in 70 years appeared all but over after gathering around 2 million tonnes of raw sugar, as moderate to heavy rain made cane cutting impossible and closed

mills across much of the country, sources said. Local analysts forecast the harvest would be called off in many areas, as it was too costly to resume for just a few days or weeks. "The Sugar Ministry will look at the situation on a province to province basis to see if it is worth reopening the mills," a government economist said. "Ministry officials have told me that in many cases they do not think it will be," he added, asking that his name not be used. (Reuters, 27/5/03)

May 27: With 8 countries in attendance, the International Show of Technology and Products for the Tourist Industry (TECNOTUR) opened in Havana. The exhibition is second in importance only to the International Tourism Convention. (Radio Rebelde, 27/5/03)

May 28: Cuba's Central Bank reiterated that it will withdraw old currency from circulation as of June 1, 2003, including all bills printed before 1990, in the denominations of 1, 3, 5, 10 and 20 Cuban pesos. Citizens can buy products in the network of establishments operating in the national currency, keep them for their numismatic value and or change them for dollars at the exchange houses. (AIN, 28/5/03)

May 28: The Cuban government has invited the Brazilian state-owned oil company Petroleo Brasileiro SA (Petrobras) to search for oil in the Gulf of Mexico. The Cuban ambassador to Brazil, Jorge Lezcano Pérez, said that the Spanish giant Repsol-YPF SA had already carried out prospective work in the area, which indicated that there could be substantial oil reserves there. Pérez said the initial idea is establishing a partnership between Petrobras and Cuba. A Petrobras spokesperson told OJG Online that the company is interested in the offer, and a deal could be struck later this year. (Oil and Gas Journal, 28/5/03)

May 28: Cuba's economy should grow a modest 1.5 percent this year as the communist government struggles with the effects of a world crisis on its crucial tourism industry and the price of petroleum, economists in Havana say. A newly released report from the semi-independent Center for Studies of the Cuban Economy said that 2003 will be the third subsequent year that the nation's economic growth has fallen below original government expectations. Government officials had originally set 3 percent as their economic growth target for this year. The center's 1.5 percent projection is "modest compared with the projections of previous years, but much more in line with the nation's current reality," said the report. (AP, 28/5/03)

May 28: Not all the employees of the René Ramos Latour nickel processing plant, operating as a joint venture with Canadian Sherritt International Corp., are being properly looked after and are, therefore, quitting their jobs. Service workers do not receive US\$ bonuses; are not fitted with adequate work clothing; and, according to management sources, cannot use the company's bus shuttle service to commute to and from work because of fuel shortage. (Cubanet, 28/5/03)

May 29: Cuba is studying the expansion of the use of the Euro, noting that its circulation in tourist areas has been quite successful. According to the island's Minister of Tourism Ibrahim Ferradaz, expanding the use of Europe's common currency will soon take place in tourist areas located in the eastern provinces of Las Tunas, Camagüey and Holguín. (Radio Habana Cuba, 29/5/03)

May 31: Caught in the middle of a major restructuring of its sugar industry, Cuba has pledged to invest millions of dollars over the next five years in a program seeking to boost sugar cane derivatives. In statements to the press in Havana, the director of the Cuban Institute for Research on Sugar Cane Derivatives, Luis Galves, said that the program expects by-products to bring in 20 to 25% of revenues for the industry. If you are currently in the business of producing cane sugar, noted the Cuban expert, you only have two alternatives left for survival: cutting down on production costs and boosting derivatives. (Radio Habana Cuba, 31/5/03)

Exile Community

May 1: The Cuban American National Foundation met with Bush administration officials to advocate boosting the signal power of TV and Radio Marti and giving more money to assist dissidents in the wake of the recent crackdown. But the prominent exile group lobbied against further restricting travel or remittances that families send to the island. At least one other group, the Cuba Liberty Council, has advocated suspending all remittances and travel to the island. But foundation members said the US should strengthen its pro-democracy programs already in place. (The Miami Herald, 2/5/03)

May 2: Leading Cuban-American organizations in southern Florida are endorsing proposed legislation in the US Congress, lifting restrictions on travel to Cuba by US citizens. The draft bill, "The Freedom to Travel Act, S. 950," was introduced in the Senate by the Cuba Working Group. According to Alfredo Durán, Secretary of the Cuban Committee for Democracy, lifting the travel ban "is welcomed by the majority of Cuban-Americans." He said that recent polls of Cuban-Americans show increasing support for ending all restrictions imposed on US citizens to travel to the island. Silvia Wilhelm of Puentes Cubanos said: "Now, more than ever, we must build bridges of support with the Cuban people, and lifting the travel restrictions will be a major step forward to accomplish such a difficult but necessary task." For his part, Delvis Fernández, President of the Cuban-American Alliance Educational Fund, stated that "respectful engagement, commerce and freedom to travel will best serve the interests of both nations." (Radio Habana Cuba, 2/5/03)

May 7: Cuban exiles are planning to carry out a plebiscite. The goal is to conduct a community-wide secret-ballot referendum among the exiles, containing four questions. These include whether they agree to legitimize "the free nation of Cuba" in exile, as well as investing a "national (democratic) transition commission" with powers to take the consultation to exiles in other cities. They are also asked if they support the Varela Project, and whether they should coordinate efforts with the dissidents in the island. (El Nuevo Herald, 7/5/03)

May 11: Alina Fernández, daughter of Fidel Castro, said in an interview published in the Brazilian press that the recent arrests of dozens of dissidents in her country shows that dialogue is useless on the island. "(The regime) showed with this that dialogue is absolutely useless in Cuba," Fernandez told the Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper in a telephone interview from Miami, where she lives. In the interview, Fernandez also criticized the United States, accusing Washington of allowing leaks in the 30-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. "The Americans have been accomplices of the Castro regime for a long time, although they don't admit it publicly. Fidel is in power because Washington accepts that. The embargo itself is not truly imposed because people from the United States pass over it and go through other countries," Fernandez said. (EFE, 11/5/03)

May 13: Cuban exile groups have issued a call for demonstrations in Latin American, European and U.S. cities to protest against the extreme crackdown launched by Fidel Castro's government. Most of the protests will take place in São Paulo, San José (Costa Rica), Berlin, Madrid, Stockholm, Washington, New York and Miami. (Encuentro en la Red, 13/5/03)

May 14: Representatives of South Florida's politically hefty Cuban exile community said they hope Washington's expulsion of 14 Cuban diplomats is only the first punch in a combination designed to knock out Fidel Castro's regime. "This is a first step the US government has taken in the correct direction, but we hope there will be others to show Fidel Castro that his behavior is unacceptable in a civilized world," Ninoska Perez Castellon, the director of the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC), told the press. "The expulsion is totally justified as part of the battle against Cuban spies disguised as diplomats," said Mariela Ferreti of the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF). Both the CLC and CANF, two of the country's most important exile organizations, have met over the past few weeks with officials from Washington and suggested concrete measures to be taken against Cuba, such as aid to dissidents within Cuba and the adoption of an official policy clearly aimed at "regime change." (EFE, 14/5/03)

May 15: José Basulto, a Cuban-American activist, wants the Bush administration to launch a media blitz into Cuba. He believes US programming would be a more effective weapon than tighter economic sanctions in responding to the latest crackdown against dissidents by Cuba's longtime leader, Fidel Castro. "The graphic depiction of life outside will make Cubans realise that there is an alternative way of living," says Mr Basulto. The Cuban-American National Foundation, the most significant Cuban lobbying group, opposes measures that would cut contacts. "We have told them [the US administration] not to over-react," says Joe García, the foundation's executive director. (Financial Times, 15/5/03)

May 18: In New York, pro and anti-Fidel Castro activists demonstrated across from the Cuban Mission to the United Nations. At the same time, a coalition of Cuban-American artists and writers condemned Cuba's latest crackdown on dissidents. The artists' coalition issued a statement asking governments to demand freedom for the imprisoned dissidents and to take steps to end the Castro government. Cuban-American actress Carmen Pelaez read the statement. (VOA, 18/5/03)

May 20: The Cuba Libre Solidarity Committee organized in Paris a protest demonstration against political repression in Cuba, and requested that each member of the French Parliament sponsor a Cuban political prisoner. (Encuentro en la Red, 21/5/03)

May 26: The offices of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) in Washington are up for sale and have a price tag of \$3.3 million. Joe García, a senior Foundation staff member, indicated that the sale of the building should not be construed as a CANF withdrawal from Washington. "It is about our new approach to freedom in Cuba, which cannot be won in Washington, or the streets of Little Havana, but on the streets of Cuba itself," he stressed. (El Nuevo Herald, 26/5/03)

Foreign Affairs

May 1: More than 160 foreign artists and intellectuals, including Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez, have come out in defense of Cuba even as many of their peers condemn recent repression on the Communist-run island, one of the campaigners said. Latin American Nobel laureates Garcia Marquez, Rigoberta Menchu, Aldolfo Perez Esquivel and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, also a Nobel prize winner, have signed a declaration of support, Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova said. US singer Harry Belafonte and US actor Danny Glover are also among the personalities who have signed the two-paragraph declaration "To the Conscience of the World". The two-paragraph message of support appeared to condemn US foreign policy without referring to it by name. "A single power is inflicting grave damage to the norms of understanding, debate and mediation among countries," it said. "At this very moment, a strong campaign of destabilisation against a Latin American nation has been unleashed. The harassment of Cuba could serve as a pretext for an invasion." Whilst supporting national sovereignty, the message does not specifically express support for Castro's policies. (The Washington Post, BBC, 2/5/03)

May 2: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, travelled to France to attend the first meeting of the NAM Troika, invited by his Malaysian counterpart, Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, whose country currently chairs the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). (Granma, 7/5/03)

May 3: Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, travelled to Saudi Arabia in response to an official invitation extended by his Saudi counterpart, Prince Saud Al-Faisal. Subsequently, the Cuban delegation will proceed toward Manama, capital of the Kingdom of Bahrain. (Granma, 7/5/03)

May 3: Severe criticism of the lack of freedom of expression in Cuba and Venezuela, and denunciation of the dangers incurred by Colombian journalists as well as other continental foibles, were the highlights during the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day in Latin America. Cuban opposition activists reminded that 28 Cuban independent journalists were meted out lengthy prison sentences. However, the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC) spoke in defence of Fidel Castro's government and denounced "the media campaign against the island." (La Jornada, 3/5/03)

May 3: Nicaraguan poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal asked Cuba's critics to also condemn, just as forcefully, human rights violations committed by the U.S. in Iraq and elsewhere. (La Jornada, 4/5/03)

May 3: The Committee to Protect Journalists places Cuba second in the list of the 10 worst places in the world to be a journalist. In a report released to coincide with World Press Freedom Day, the group says journalists face imprisonment and harassment in countries such as Vietnam and Cuba. (VOA, 3/5/03)

May 3: Members of Nicaraguan solidarity groups have frustrated a demonstration in front of the building of the Cuban embassy in Managua. According to reports from the Nicaraguan capital, the diplomatic mission was protected by local police while solidarity activists arrived to express their support for the Cuban government. The Cuban embassy's commercial attaché in Managua, Manuel Guillot, told reporters that two individuals attempted to chain themselves to the front of the embassy. For more than four hours, members of Cuba solidarity organizations confronted the individuals. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/5/03)

May 4: Syrian Minister of Housing and Building, Mr. Hussam Al- assuad, and Cuban Ambassador to Syria Mr. Claudio Ramos Borrego, have signed a cooperation agreement in the field of works of housing and building. (WorldNews.Com, 4/5/03)

May 5: A forum on freedom of the press and Washington's latest threats against Cuba is taking place in Havana. Cuban journalists and a number of media representatives from Latin American countries are participating in the discussions, which are being sponsored by the Cuban Union of Journalists (Union de Periodistas de Cuba). (Radio Habana Cuba, 5/5/03)

May 5: After expressing concern for human rights and "public freedoms" in Cuba, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), César Gaviria, announced that he is awaiting a pronouncement by the hemispheric body with regard to Fidel Castro's government. (AFP, 5/5/03)

May 5: Cuban Ambassador Alfonso Fraga visited the Chilean Foreign Ministry headquarters shortly after the Minister of Foreign Affairs acknowledged that the diplomat would be called in to be handed a formal protest. Ambassador Fraga just told the media that "it was a private meeting." (AP, 5/5/03)

May 5: Reporters Without Borders protested against the confiscation of videotapes from French freelance journalist Bernard Briçon while he was in Cuba reporting on the recent crackdown on 78 dissidents who were given heavy prison sentences last month. A tape of an interview with the wife of one of 26 journalists jailed was among the items seized. (Reporters Without Borders, 5/5/03)

May 6: A statue in remembrance of Mother Teresa of Calcutta was placed in the garden bearing her name at the Saint Francis of Assisi Convent, in the municipality of Old Havana. The Ambassador of India, Dr. B. Balakrishnan, unveiled the sculpture. (AIN, 10/5/03)

May 7: Four Cuban tutors have arrived in the Eastern Cape as part of a capacity building programme to assist teachers in mathematics, science and technology teaching, according to the South Africa government news agency, BuaNews. The provincial education department spokesman Professor Danie Breytenbach told the agency that they formed part of a contingent of 24 Cuban tutors who are to be deployed in seven provinces. The exchange programme forms part of an agreement between South Africa and Cuba to upgrade the technical skills of local teachers. (Business Day, 7/5/03)

May 8: Chilean author Isabel Allende accused the governments of Cuba and the U.S. of violating human rights. "Just as I cannot accept U.S. human rights violations in Iraq, I cannot approve of what is happening in Cuba," said the writer. (AFP, 8/5/03)

May 8: Cuban Ambassador to Iran Jose Ramon Rodriguez in a meeting with Secretary General of Iran's Anti-Narcotics Headquarters (IANH) Ali Hashemi called for sharing Iran's experience in combating drug trafficking and drug abuse by the youth. Iran has shouldered many in this field and has valuable experience, Rodriguez said adding: "Cuba is interested to stem the increasing trend of drug abuse among its youth." (Tehran Times, 8/5/03)

May 8: Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso said her government was waiting for a Cuban who arrived in Florida to file an asylum petition. The unidentified man entered the United States with three of his countrymen after fleeing the communist island in a small boat. Moscoso told reporters that for now, only one of the men had expressed interest in going to Panama, "and the documents requesting asylum are coming." "We have to review the case, but we're discussing it (now)," she said. Regarding the asylum request, a Panamanian foreign ministry spokesman told the press that "no written documents have arrived yet, and everything has been only verbal so far." (EFE, 8/5/03)

May 8: Three imprisoned Cuban dissidents were granted the International Human Rights Award, bestowed annually by the Fundación Hispano-Cubana (Cuban Spanish Foundation). The laureates are Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet, and human rights activists Jorge Luis García Pérez and Juan Carlos González Leyva. (El Nuevo Herald, 9/5/03)

May 10: The Chilean government, in retaliation for the Cuban refusal to grant visas for members of parliament who wished to meet with Cuban dissidents, will restrict the number of visas issued to Cuban authorities, said Chilean Foreign Minister Soledad Alvear. (El Nuevo Herald, 11/5/03)

May 10: Peruvian novelist Alfredo Bryce Echenique put in a good word for embattled Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, claiming that his Colombian colleague has "saved thousands from (Castro's) firing squads". He said to his own personal knowledge, the author of A Hundred Years of Solitude had "got thousands of people in Cuba out of the clutches of the firing squads and hid them and saved their lives." Now the Colombian Nobel winner "considers that he is being treated unfairly since he's old and he's ill and for once in his life has not responded to criticism". "It's unfortunate, really, as both writers (Susan Sontag and Garcia Marquez) are fighting for the cause of human dignity," Bryce Echenique concluded. (EFE, 10/5/03)

May 11: Chilean author Jorge Edwards urged the Latin American intelligentsia not to stifle their criticisms of Fidel Castro's record of human rights crimes and violations committed since his ascent to power 43 years ago. (AFP, 11/5/03)

May 11: Spanish President José María Aznar once again condemned Fidel Castro's regime that, he said, continues "to crush, imprison, and execute by firing squad" those who do not share his ideas. Aznar's statements were made during a Spanish municipal electoral campaign meeting. (DPA, 11/5/03)

May 11: The foreign ministers of the 15-nation Caribbean Community (CARICOM) want Cuba to grant clemency to the 75 dissidents who were recently convicted of attempting to undermine the socialist government and to improve its human rights performance, CARICOM said in a statement. While saying that governments have the right to respond to threats against the state or to the criminal act of hijacking, the ministers "expressed their concern at the conduct of the recent trials" and said they were "deeply disturbed at the severity of the sentences imposed" on the dissidents and upon three hijackers. "Ministers therefore strongly appealed to the Government of Cuba to show clemency towards those recently imprisoned," the ministers said at their meeting on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. (EFE, 11/5/03)

May 11: Fidel Castro dismissed the possibility that former President Carlos Menem may again assume Argentina's highest office, saying "the little gentleman doesn't have the slightest chance of winning the election." In an interview with the Argentine daily Pagina 12 in Havana, Castro spoke of his relationship with Menem, their mutual fondness for cigars and wine, and the candidate's assertion that his opponent in the runoff, fellow Peronist Ernesto Kirchner, would transform Argentina into another Cuba. "Not a single child starves in Cuba, infant mortality is the lowest in Latin America and life expectancy will reach 80 years, with almost zero unemployment," Castro said. "It would undoubtedly be much better (to have this type of Cuba) than the Argentina that Menem destroyed and that now has thousands of children starving to death and 60 percent of the population (living) below the poverty line," Castro said. (EFE, 11/5/03)

May 11: In an interview published by the newspaper Página 12, Fidel Castro made reference to statements he made last April 26, when he accused Aznar of encouraging former U.S. President Bill Clinton to launch an all-out war in Yugoslavia in 1999. "I ask Mr. Aznar to admit or deny this," denounced the Cuban president. (Europa Press, 11/5/03)

May 12: Venezuela and Cuba signed 15 accords at an event in which Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez invited his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro, to visit the country to discuss bilateral relations. The agreements, made official at an event in the Miraflores presidential palace, address the health, farming, construction, tourism and technology sectors within the framework of a broad cooperation pact signed in October 2000. (EFE, 12/5/03)

May 13: Czech Catholic Bishop Vaclav Maly, a former anti-communist dissident, has departed for Cuba to get acquainted with the situation in the country, including the life of local church and civic society, church representatives told the press. Maly went to Havana in his capacity as head of the Iustitia et Pax Council, the Czech Bishops Conference's body dealing with human rights observance at home and in the world. (CTK, 13/5/03)

May 14: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said that relations between Cuba and Grenada have historic implications. Following a meeting in Havana with his Grenadian counterpart, Elvin Nimrod, the Cuba's top diplomat told reporters in the Cuban capital that collaboration and mutual respect constitute the basis of relations between Havana and St. Georges. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/5/03)

May 14: Cuban Medical Services International (SERMINCUBA) has begun a program of assistance for small and medium business people in the Argentinean city of Bahia Blanca that will soon be extended throughout the country. The program is based on an agreement signed in Buenos Aires to maintain permanent Cuban health care collaboration, including medical attention in different pathologies and consulting services by Cuban doctors. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/5/03)

May 14: Award-winning Paraguayan author Augusto Roa Bastos said he joined in the call for support for Cuba despite worldwide condemnation of recent abuses to "bear witness to my permanent solidarity" with the island nation, the official Cuban press reported. "Cuba is one of the

few symbols of resistance and defense of sovereignty," said the winner of the 1989 Cervantes Prize, according to Granma, the official Communist Party newspaper. (EFE, 14/5/03)

May 14: Dr. Néstor Marimón, chief of the Department of International Affairs at the Cuban Public Health Ministry, told the press that during forty years, 52, 202 health workers have gone to 93 nations including the First World. He highlighted the Health Integral Plan (HIP), that began in Central America in 1998, and up to now, over 400 doctors and other health specialists have given their help. (AIN, 15/5/03)

May 19: Cuba has formally withdrawn its application to join the European Union's Cotonou trade accord as strained relations continue after a recent political crackdown by the communist government of Fidel Castro. In a front-page notice of Granma, the state-run daily newspaper, Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations said it was withdrawing its Cotonou application - a decision made last Friday - because the European Commission decided to postpone indefinitely its review of Cuba's request to join. The Cotonou accord is a programme that offers former European colonies favoured trade and development aid. (Financial Times, 19/5/03)

May 19: Cuban Ambassador to Mexico, Jorge Bolaños Suárez, said that relations between Cuba and Mexico "are neither what they used to be nor what both peoples deserve them to be, but I remain hopeful that all lost ground will be recovered." (La Jornada, 20/5/03)

May 19: Cuba will always appreciate the fraternal gesture of friendship from the Caribbean countries that insisted on its inclusion in the Cotonou Agreement, although the Cuban government withdrew its request, a Foreign Affairs Ministry statement said. A statement by Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX) withdrew the request to the European Union (UE) to be admitted on the agreement, at the same time acknowledged the effort and support to the nations of the area to contribute to its integration to Caribbean. (Prensa Latina, 19/5/03)

May 19: Five Cubans who built a boat in hopes of sailing to Florida got lost on the high seas and drifted for six days before landing on an island off Mexico's Caribbean coast, authorities said. The men told Mexican migration officials that they had packed three days worth of food and other supplies and left the Bay of Pigs before dawn May 12. They probably would be returned to Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 19/5/03)

May 19: Deep divisions are again surfacing within the Organization of American States, as the 34-member group addresses Cuba's human rights record. Canada, Chile and Uruguay introduced a US-backed statement condemning rights violations on the communist-run island. But, the measure was withdrawn after several member nations, including Brazil and Venezuela, failed to endorse it. Later, 16 OAS members endorsed a revised text, which expressed deep concern about the sharp deterioration of the human rights situation on the island. (VOA, 20/5/03)

May 20: Dutch intellectuals called for the release of the dozens of Cuban writers and journalists imprisoned by Fidel Castro. The protest, organized by the Association of Dutch Journalists, involved placing 77 typewriters, each bearing the name and sentence of the Cuban writers or journalists, many of whom are human rights activists, in front of the Cuban Embassy in The Hague. On the typewriters one could read names such as that of poet and journalist Raul Rivero, beneath which appeared: 20 years in prison. (EFE, 20/5/03)

May 21: Cuba and Japan called to strengthen their bilateral links when opening the 5th Inter Chancellery Political Talks at the Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX). Conversations are headed by MINREX vice Minister Jose Guerra Menchero and Japanese Chancellery general director for Latin America Ken Shimanouchi. (Prensa Latina, 22/5/03)

May 21: Czech Catholic Bishop Vaclav Maly returned from a one-week visit to Communist Cuba, where he met families of the imprisoned dissidents as well as Catholic Church representatives, Maly told reporters. Maly was invited to Cuba by Cuban peace activist Oswaldo Payá, the leader of the opposition Christian Movement for Liberation. He was accompanied by people from the People in Need humanitarian organisation which has been working in Cuba for a couple of years already. Maly got acquainted with the situation of the Catholic Church in Cuba and expressed his support to the families of imprisoned dissidents. (CTK, 21/5/03)

May 21: A declaration condemning human rights violations in Cuba has been submitted before the 16th EU-Latin America Inter-parliamentary Conference by several European and Latin American political groups. (El Nuevo Herald, 22/5/03)

May 22: Jose Ramón Machado Ventura, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party and chief of the Organization Department of the Central Committee, received a Vietnamese Communist Party delegation. Granma Daily reports the visitors, presided by Vu Tien Chien, member of the Central Committee and Secretary of the Yen Bai province, is heading a visit to exchange party daily experiences with their counterparts in Cuba. (AIN, 22/5/03)

May 22: The Cuban left-wing dissident organization Arco Progresista (Progressive Coalition) chastised Fidel Castro's government for withdrawing Cuba's request for accession to the Cotonou Agreement with the European Union (EU) and demanded "political rationality" to avoid isolation within the international community. (AFP, 22/5/03)

May 23: Another cargo of 6,7 tons of medicines arrived in Buenos Aires as a donation of Cuba to those damaged by the inundations in the Argentinean city of Santa Fe. (AIN, 23/5/03)

May 23: A Cuban stowaway who endured -40 temperatures in the wheel well of an airliner has been allowed to stay in Canada. Víctor Alvarez Molina was detained after the jet landed in Montreal in December, 2002. He was later freed pending the immigration hearing. The Immigration and Refugee Board ruled yesterday there are sufficient grounds to allow him to stay in Canada, saying his life would be in danger if he were to return to Cuba. He served in the Cuban military. (Canadian Press, 23/5/03)

May 23: Mexico suspended the deportation of five Cuban "raftpeople" that washed upon its shores, sent off course by ocean currents. According to a National Migration Institute (INM) press release, the Cubans submitted an appeal for refuge to avoid repatriation. (El Nuevo Herald, 24/5/03)

May 24: Fidel Castro will be invited to attend next year's Rio Group summit, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced at the end of the pro-democracy group's 17th conference. "I confess. I see no reason for Cuba to be out of the Rio Group," da Silva said. "Since it was first created in Brazil, I don't know why they have not been invited. We are going to investigate that, and, next time, Cuba will be invited." (The Miami Herald, 25/5/03)

May 24: The wife of Cuban writer Raúl Rivero has written an impassioned letter from Havana pleading with Nelson Mandela to facilitate leniency for her husband who recently began a 20-year sentence in Cuba for treason and subversion. Blanca Reyes sent the letter to the Daily Dispatch newspaper in East London because she said she did not know how to contact the former president directly and hoped that he would read it in the newspaper. "I know that you should never have been in prison and that my husband should be free," she said. Mandela's spokeswoman, Zelda la Grange, had not responded to an email request for comment. (SAPA, 24/5/03)

May 24: Fidel Castro left for Argentina to attend inauguration of the South American country's president-elect, Nestor Kirchner. (Granma, 25/5/03)

May 25: According to government sources, outgoing Argentine President, Eduardo Duhalde, met with his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro, in Parliament shortly before handing over power to his successor, Néstor Kirchner. (El Nuevo Herald, 26/5/03)

May 25: A Cuban plane carrying medicine, medical staff and equipment arrived in the Algerian capital to aid in the disaster sparked by the earthquake that struck the North African nation. The aid was the first to arrive from a Latin American nation, and includes a large medical team, most notably trauma specialists. (EFE, 25/5/03)

May 25: The coordinator for the Mexican non-profit organization Promotora Internacional de Derechos Humanos -International Promoter of Human Rights- demanded of the Cuban government freedom for the Cuban people, particularly for "over 700 political prisoners" serving "unjust sentences" in that country. (Notimex, 25/5/03)

May 25: Argentine senator Pablo Walter handed Fidel Castro a copy of the Varela Project during the Legislative Assembly session for Peronist President-elect Néstor Kirchner's swearing-in ceremony, according to the Argentine Commission for Human Rights in Cuba. A note from the Commission said that Mr. Walter told Castro he was delivering the copy on behalf of Librado Linares and Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés, two Cuban non-violent opposition activists, recently arrested and imprisoned. (Encuentro en la Red, 27/5/03)

May 25: Equatorial Guinea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Pastor Micha Ondó Bile, arrived in Cuba at the head of a delegation that will attend the 5th Session of the Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Collaboration. (Granma, 26/5/03)

May 26: Fidel Castro said in Buenos Aires that Argentines gave a strong blow to the symbol of Neoliberal globalization by supporting Nestor Kirchner in the recent elections. "I felt a great satisfaction and jubilation at the election results in our beloved Argentina. The worst side of savage capitalism, the worst of Neoliberal globalization was struck," Fidel Castro told a multitudinous meeting on the steps of Buenos Aires University Law School. "I am not mentioning a name, no one should feel offended, and no one should feel alluded to," added the Cuban president, who arrived in Buenos Aires to participate with 12 other heads of regional nations at Kirchner's Sunday inauguration. (Prensa Latina, 27/5/03)

May 26: Fidel Castro was decorated with the Medal of the City of Buenos Aires by Major Aníbal Ibarra, who is of a center-left political tendency. Several international news agencies reported that the ceremony took place at a park of the Recoleta neighborhood, where a large crowd formed by members of the solidarity with Cuba in Argentina movement attended. (AIN, 26/5/03)

May 26: The Plenary of the South African Communist Party Central Committee, ratified the solidarity of South Africa with Cuba, in this crucial moment for the Island. When analyzing the present international situation, the Plenary stated that the US, happy for its unilateral successes in Afghanistan and Iraq, is centering its attention in other nations now, including Cuba, Granma daily highlights. (AIN, 26/5/03)

May 27: Pedro Sáez Montejo, member of the State Council and of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, traveled to Nigeria, to attend the swearing in ceremony of the elected president of that African country, his Excellency, Olusegun Obasanjo. (AIN, 27/5/03)

May 27: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque has called attention to improved relations between Cuba and Argentina. Speaking with reporters in the Argentinean capital, Pérez Roque said that Fidel's visit to Argentina further enhances the process begun by outgoing Argentinean President Eduardo Duhalde, who separated his administration from the anti-Cuba positions of previous governments. He recalled that during the presidential campaign, newly-inaugurated President Néstor Kirchner supported his predecessor's decision not to lend himself to Washington's manipulations against Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/5/03)

May 27: The organization Reporters Without Borders (RWB) informs that it could lose its consultative status at the UN, following the decision of the UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to ask for a one-year suspension of RWB at Cuba's request. (AFP, 28/5/03)

May 27: Havana Historian Eusebio Leal, painter and sculptor Alfredo Sosa Bravo and several Cuban medical brigades were decorated by the Real Foundation of Toledo, Spain, Granma newspaper reported. The Culture, Art, and Humanities Awards respectively will go to the hands of Leal, Sosa Bravo and a group of doctors, who accomplished missions outside of Cuba, said the newspaper. The distinction to the historian, who heads the restoration of Old Havana, declared World Heritage, had previously been granted to Alfonso Peña de Morena, for leading the reconstruction of Toledo's historic center. (Prensa Latina, 27/5/03)

May 28: Amnesty International (AI) accused Cuban officials of continuing to apply "drastic measures to stifle dissent," noting that more than 50 people were on death row at the end of 2002. In its annual report, AI said, likewise, that the embargo imposed by the United States on the island for more than 40 years contributed to a climate in which the exercise of basic human rights could be restricted. The organization noted that its last visit to Cuba was in 1988, because Havana had not responded to its requests for authorization to enter the country since that time. The report covers 2002, prior to the communist regime's crackdown last April, when 75 peaceful dissidents were rounded up and given jail terms averaging 20 years. Amnesty said that "more prisoners of conscience" were in Cuban jails at the end of 2002 "than at any other time last year." (EFE, 28/5/03)

May 28: Educational institutions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic have signed cooperation agreements providing for the training of teachers and doctors. The Dominican Action for Education and Culture Foundation (APEC) and its counterpart in the central Cuban city of Camagüey signed the agreement in this Eastern province. According to the protocol, which was signed by the rectors of both universities and the president of APEC, the agreement allows for the training of science professors. Courses will be given at the APEC headquarters in Santo Domingo by professors from the University of Camagüey, located some 300 miles east of Havana. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/5/03)

May 28: Argentina will soon appoint a new ambassador to Cuba -- a position left vacant for more than two years. According to the Presidential Secretary General of Argentina, Oscar Parrilli, the upcoming appointment was one of many topics discussed during the meeting between President Néstor Kirchner and visiting Fidel Castro. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/5/03)

May 29: A major Spanish publishing house has released a collection of news articles by Cuban poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, imprisoned in the Island. The book, entitled Sin Pan y sin Palabras (Without Bread, without Words), has a preface by Cuban novelist Eliseo Alberto. (El Nuevo Herald, 29/5/03)

May 30: For peace and against fascism is the main slogan of the 6th edition of the Overseas Chinese Festival, opening in Havana. The program includes the presentation of a mural in a

space on Zanja, Manrique and Campanario streets, neighboring China Town, that will be called Shanghai Park. A Mahjong (typical game) competition will take place at the Min Chih Tang Society, while in the Arts and Traditions House a collective exhibition with paintings and sculptures will be presented. Another highpoint will be the ceremony to grant the Poster Award to Frank Diaz Donikian, winner of the contest for the 7th Overseas Chinese Festival, on the culinary knowledge of the Asian country. The international conference, with Chinese emigration as the main theme, will start at the Aldama Palace, in Old Havana, with the participation of delegates from seven countries. The Meeting of Entrepreneurs titled Experiences and Perspectives will session during the second day of the Festival. The closing of the celebration in Havana's China Town coincides with the anniversary of the first arrival to Cuba, from Canton, of the "Coolies" in 1847. (Prensa Latina, 30/5/03)

May 30: Renzo Rossellini, famous Italian director Roberto Rosellini's eldest son, taught a course at the San Antonio de los Baños International School of Cinema and Television, where important figures of world cinema have visited. Apart from the additional recognition received from his being a descendant of one of the pillars of the Italian neo-realism movement-, Renzo Rosellini has developed an outstanding career as a producer and distributor. The school was founded by Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez outfitted with cutting-edge technology, and has had, since the very beginning, important figures as teachers, including Gabo himself and George Lucas, Matt Dillon and Francis Ford Coppola from the US. The school is located 35 kilometers southwest of Havana. (AIN, 30/5/03)

Terrorism

May 3: In a strongly worded letter, Secretary of State Colin Powell has urged Pentagon officials to move faster in determining which prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay can be released, defense officials said. Powell's April 14 letter to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld questioned the continued detention of about 660 prisoners from 42 countries who were captured during the war against al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations. A Pentagon official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the "strongly worded" letter made it clear that the secretary of state wanted the Defense Department to quickly determine which prisoners could be released. (AP, 4/5/03)

May 4: Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said that prisoners at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba must be questioned by several agencies before they can be released and he blamed this "very slow" process for their continued detention. The defense secretary responded that he, too, would like to see the process move more quickly. But, Rumsfeld said, the prisoners' cases are being reviewed by agencies including the FBI, the Justice Department, the State Department, the Pentagon, the CIA and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. (AP, 4/5/03)

May 7: Four men, arrested in Panama for allegedly plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro, requested the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) to expedite the proceedings against them or terminate their preventive detention. (EFE, 7/5/03)

May 8: Cuban officials said "an irrational thirst for revenge" --and not the facts-- led the US government to once again brand Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism. "Cuba condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism," the socialist government said in a lengthy statement published in the Communist Party daily Granma --its first response to the US accusations. The government said the Bush administration is trying to engender "the right conditions for a possible military attack against Cuba," a charge the United States denies. (Knight Ridder Tribune, 9/5/03)

May 16: The Panamanian media is promoting the release of Luis Posada Carriles and three other Cuban-Americans, charged with attempting to blow up the auditorium of Panama City University during a political meeting in November 2000 -- a plot designed to kill Fidel Castro. According to Granma newspaper, in recent days Panamanian television has transmitted an extensive report on

the "injustice" being committed in the case of Luis Posada Carriles. The television report calls Carriles "the persecuted politician of the Castro regime," an old man suffering from various illnesses who "will have to wait for the conclusion of the legal procedure delayed by the prosecutors." (Radio Habana Cuba, 16/5/03)

May 22: The US has included Cuba in a list of six countries that "do not cooperate fully" with Washington in its antiterrorist crusade. The list is part of an official notice published in the Federal Register, concerning countries to which US weapons exports are prohibited on account of their involvement in international terrorism, as provided by the Arms Export Control Act. (AFP, 23/5/03)

May 23: An El Salvadoran court has initiated procedures with Panamanian authorities for the extradition of Cuban American Luis Posada Carriles, detained in that country since November 2000 for allegedly plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro. (El Nuevo Herald, 24/5/03)

May 23: Prisoners detained by the United States at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba are a step closer to standing trial following two key legal appointments made by the Americans. The Pentagon has named a chief prosecutor and defence counsel for trials before military commissions. The new chief prosecutor, Colonel Fred Borch, said he was looking at more than 10 cases, but the final decision on which prisoner to try rested with President George W Bush. Colonel Will Gunn, the defence counsel, said he would push for trials to be as open as possible, saying the US would be judged on the fairness of the process. (BBC, 23/5/03)

US-Cuba Relations

May 1: Attorney and historian Pedro Roig has been appointed to head the Broadcasting to Cuba Office's Radio and Television Marti, the US government-sponsored institution said. Roig has hosted two Radio Marti programs on economic issues over the past seven years, as well as "Uno contra Uno" on the television station. The attorney and historian is a past president of the Miami Inter-American Academy and has been an active member of the Cuban-American National Foundation. (EFE, 1/5/03)

May 1: Fidel Castro accused the United States of wanting to attack Cuba, speaking at a May Day celebration. "In Miami and Washington they are now discussing where, how and when Cuba will be attacked," the Cuban president told a crowd of hundreds of thousands gathered for the celebration in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution. Castro said US officials "provoke and encourage" attacks like the recent hijackings of Cuban planes and boats. (The Chicago Tribune, 1/5/03)

May 1: President Bush's pick for assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Roger Noriega, called for greater international pressure on Cuba's communist government and help for the wounded dissident movement battling Fidel Castro. "We must redouble our bilateral and multilateral efforts to hasten the inevitable democratic transition on the island," Mr. Noriega told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his confirmation hearing. (The Washington Times, 2/5/03)

May 2: Fidel Castro's latest crackdown on dissidents has cost him the spotlight at the TriBeCa Film Festival, the New York cinema showcase. Castro is the subject of *Commandante*, a documentary directed by Oliver Stone and made with Castro's co-operation, that was to have been screened at the festival. But HBO, the cable network that bought the film, has pulled it in the wake of the Cuban leader's crackdown. (Financial Times, 2/5/03)

May 3: Miami prosecutors are going to extraordinary lengths to keep a group of Cubans behind bars, mainly to send a message to island residents and their leader, Fidel Castro, that the United States will be tough on hijackers. The US attorney's office has tried twice, and failed, to block the

release of the six defendants on bond before their trial. Now prosecutors say they may ask the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta to overturn a judge's bail order. (The Miami Herald, 4/5/03)

May 3: New Mexico Governor, Bill Richardson, cancelled plans for a trip to Cuba with members of a civil group from that state, pointing that his visit would be inappropriate "in light of Cuba's recent actions against human rights." (El Nuevo Herald, 3/5/03)

May 4: The Bush administration has compiled several options -- ranging from mild action to confrontation -- in reaction to Cuba's recent offensive to smash the pro-democracy forces on the island. The most radical options would virtually dare Fidel Castro's regime to unleash a new raft exodus across the Florida Straits and risk military hostilities with the United States, although most observers expect the Bush administration to settle on a much more moderate approach. Senior Bush administration officials say the White House will soon announce measures in response to Cuba's arrests of about 75 pro-democracy activists. (The Miami Herald, 4/5/03)

May 4: Secretary of State Colin Powell, just returned from talks in Damascus and Beirut, said in Sunday talk show interviews that, every nation in the Western hemisphere has rejected Cuba's communist ideology, and all are finding their own way "down a democratic path with market reforms. (...) They are having different levels of difficulty with respect to practicing democracy. Democracy isn't an easy system. But Cuba sits there isolated, getting poorer, getting broker, more irrelevant on the world stage, and sooner or later this regime will pass. It is an anachronism and history will catch up with it." (Washington File, 4/5/03)

May 6: Three Cuban men swam about two miles to shore near Key Largo after their boat was intercepted by Coast Guard vessels and they jumped overboard. After navigating some dense mangroves near the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, the men were taken into custody by the US Border Patrol. They will be processed at the Krome Detention Center in southwest Miami-Dade County, immigration authorities said. A fourth man, identified by relatives as Jorge Parrado, had been on the rickety wooden boat with the other three, but he got tired and was taken aboard a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission vessel. Parrado likely will be interviewed by immigration authorities to determine whether he has a credible fear of persecution if returned to Cuba. According to his family, Parrado was once a permanent US resident and lived here for seven years, but he returned to Cuba and ended up serving 12 years in a Cuban prison. (Sun Sentinel, 7/5/03)

May 6: Cuba doesn't expect to be attacked by the US but if an Iraq-style American invasion takes place, the Cuban people will "fight 100 years" and will never surrender, the communist republic's foreign minister said. "There is absolutely no reason for any U.S. attack against Cuba. We are a peaceful nation, which acts responsibly, despite the repeated provocations by the American government in order to deny the US any pretext for an attack against our country," Felipe Perez Roque told reporters in Bahrain, during a brief visit to the kingdom. (Gulf News Online, 8/5/03)

May 7: The United States has pledged increased support for activists in Cuba who are working to bring about peaceful, democratic change on the island, says Adolfo Franco, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) assistant administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean. In a briefing about Cuba before the House Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Franco said USAID will work with "all our partners throughout the hemisphere" to encourage support for Cuban democratic activists "and especially for Cuban political prisoners and their families." (Washington File, 8/5/03)

May 8: Presidential hopeful Joseph Lieberman sent a message of encouragement to Cubans across the Florida Straits and appealed to the Bush administration not to back away from its pledge to promote democracy on the island -- during a campaign stop at Radio and TV Martí. The

Connecticut Democrat repeated the same thought: "This is the moment to put the pressure on," he said. "There is in Cuba a Lech Walesa" to lead the liberation, he added. Lieberman was referring to the Polish labor leader and politician who was president of Poland from 1990 to 1995. Walesa also was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. While Lieberman spoke of the need for regime change, by using economic and diplomatic pressure, he stopped far short of endorsing military action. He also thought Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's recent moves were the mark of a leader about to fall. "Could this be happening because of a fear Castro has he's losing control?" Lieberman wondered. (The Hartford Courant, 9/5/03)

May 9: The Mississippi Coast Trade Council has received notice it's been approved to receive a travel license for Cuba. The license is from the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Controls, said Mike Olivier, executive director of the Harrison County Development Commission and current president of the trade council. He said the purpose of the council is to represent companies, particularly Mississippi companies, that are interested in selling products from a list approved by the federal government. (The Sun Herald, 9/5/03)

May 10: Cuban grassroots organizations comprised of intellectuals and academics, condemned Washington's decision to prohibit educational people-to-people exchange between Cuba and the United States and expressed their solidarity with their American counterparts. Cuba's Academy of Sciences and the Association of Writers and Artists released a communiqué denouncing the violation of what they termed "the legitimate and elemental rights of our American colleagues." (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/5/03)

May 12: US government efforts to promote political change in Cuba have shifted away from the subtle "people-to-people" contacts favored by the Clinton administration to a more confrontational approach, including direct support for dissidents, two US officials say. One senior US official called the new focus a "pressure cooker" approach. He and another official, who is also a former diplomat, said that recent developments in Cuba, including the crackdown on opponents of Fidel Castro's government, the execution of three ferry hijackers, and a Cuban government threat to close the US Interests Section, were Cuba's reply to a "significant shift" in US Cuba policy. The two officials spoke separately and on condition of anonymity. (Dallas Morning News, 12/5/03)

May 12: The Bush administration is insisting that Cuban diplomats in Washington call the State Department when they need maids, drivers, plumbers, electricians or air conditioning repairmen. The State Department imposed the demand, a senior administration official said, because US diplomats in Havana have to go through the Cuban Foreign Ministry to obtain such services. The administration also is insisting that Cuba's Washington-based diplomats buy their cars abroad, matching a similar demand made of official Americans in Cuba. The official said there is suspicion that Cuban personnel sent in response to service calls have other skills, such as planting bugs. Efforts to obtain comment from Cuban officials were unsuccessful. (AP, 13/5/03)

May 13: The Bush administration denied a report that tougher measures have been implemented against Cuban diplomats in Washington. State Department officials admit that Cuba policy is under review and new measures are expected to be announced soon, but said that "none of the measures [cited by the AP] have, at this time, been implemented." (The Miami Herald, 13/5/03)

May 13: The Bush administration is expelling 14 Cuban diplomats for engaging in "activities inconsistent with diplomatic status," a US official said, using diplomatic language that can refer to spying. "It is seven here (Washington) and seven in New York," a State Department official said. Those expelled were from the Cuban interest section in Washington and from the Cuban interest section in the United Nations, an American diplomat said earlier in Havana. The United States did not release the names of those expelled. The expulsion becomes effective in 10 days, the official said, noting Cuba had been notified. Cuban Interests Section officials told EFE they were aware of the order expelling the seven UN-mission diplomats but not that pertaining to their own staff. (Reuters, EFE, 13/5/03)

May 14: The US government's expulsion of 14 Cuban diplomats is an "aggressive step" aimed at provoking a confrontation between the two countries, the Cuban Foreign Ministry said. The ministry also said in a published statement that it will take its time responding to "this new provocation." "The Foreign Ministry rejects this new aggressive step by the United States government against our country and our diplomatic representatives in Washington and New York," read a ministry statement published in the Communist Party daily Granma. "With these actions, the American government shows, once again, that it has openly launched a course of provocations and foreign meddling against Cuba." (Prensa Latina, 12/5/03)

May 14: Cuba demanded that the United States provide "so much as a single piece of evidence of illegal activity" on the part of the 14 Cuban diplomats expelled from the country. The head of the Cuban Interest Section in Washington, Dagoberto Rodriguez, told a news conference that the expulsion was nothing more than a U.S. attempt to fuel tensions and seek "a pretext for an attack against Cuba." (EFE, 14/5/03)

May 14: Two congressmen introduced yet another bill to lift the US travel ban on Cuba. Representatives Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, and Bill Delahunt, Democrat-Massachusetts, said the best way to promote a freer Cuba was not to isolate the country but to spread democratic ideals through travel. "Cuba does not resemble anything close to a democracy," Mr. Flake said. "Americans will see the situation far more like it really is." Mr. Flake said US policy was effectively "allowing Fidel Castro to have the only microphone there." Mr. Delahunt said ordinary Americans could counter that because they would be "our best ambassadors." A similar bill has been introduced in the Senate. Isolating Cuba, the lawmakers say, has failed to bring change. (The Dallas Morning News, 15/5/03)

May 14: The Cuban government said that "over the past month, the U.S. extreme right has stepped up its attacks (on the island) ... amid the imperial euphoria that prevails in Washington," following the U.S. victories in Afghanistan and Iraq. Randy Alonso, moderator of the Round Table talk show that airs on Cuba's state-owned radio and television every night, on Tuesday commented on recent statements by officials in President George W. Bush's administration. "The American extreme right and the terrorist Mafia (Miami's Cuban exile community), intoxicated with the warlike and fascist euphoria that pervades the White House, are redoubling their vociferations against Cuba and demanding of the government even more aggressive actions against the island," Alonso said. Rogelio Polanco, editor of the official daily Juventud Rebelde and one of the journalists on the Round Table panel, insisted that "all in all, the new language of the White House and (other) American authorities reveals there is military and hostile intent." (EFE, 14/5/03)

May 14: Miriam Leiva, wife of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of the Cuban dissidents in jail, sent a letter to US President George Bush asking him not to reinforce measures against Cuba: "It would be used as pretext to enhance the repression on those who have overcome fear, and express their ideas, continue informing as independent journalists, are human rights activists or pacific opponents", the letter says. "It would augment the hardship of the Cuban people, if the remittances were curtailed." "Hundreds of thousands of American visiting Cuba could contribute to the flow of ideas, and the progress of democracy". "The possible sale of medications and food could demonstrate if in fact the Cuban government is capable of buying, or if the lack of them is due to its economic and productive inefficiency". (Cubanet, 14/5/03)

May 14: White House and State Department officials not law enforcement officials -- were behind the expulsion of 14 Cuban diplomats from the United States for "inappropriate activities," including spying, F.B.I. officials said. Bureau officials said there was no specific espionage event that touched off the action, adding credence to Cuba's charge that the expulsions were part of a new political strategy. "It was not our recommendation to take this action at this time," said a senior F.B.I. official. The decision to expel Cubans was made "at the highest levels" in the State Department and the White House, and the policy makers then turned to the bureau for names of

intelligence operatives, said the official, who asked not to be named. (The New York Times, 14/5/03)

May 14: Organizers of educational study groups that travel to Cuba are expressing dismay over newly-tightened US restrictions that will soon make it even harder for Americans to travel to the island. Currently Americans seeking to travel legally to Cuba must do so under the aegis of an educational, humanitarian and religious organization possessing a special license from the Treasury Department. (AFP, 14/5/03)

May 14: The United States has denied visas to the wives of Gerardo Hernández and René González -- two of the five Cuban prisoners in US jails. Adriana Pérez O'Connor and Olga Salanueva, the wives of Gerardo and René, respectively, had applied for visas to visit their husbands. The US rejection is the third time visas have been denied for the two women. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/5/03)

May 14: "I think you are familiar with the record of espionage by the Cuban regime against the United States," state department deputy spokesperson Philip Reeker told reporters at a daily briefing. "It's a long record," he said. "In response to certain inappropriate and unacceptable activities, the United States has decided to take strong action." Reeker said seven people at the Cuban interest section in Washington were declared "persona non grata, requiring their departure from the United States." Another seven diplomats from Cuba's United Nations mission in New York were also asked to leave. The 14 envoys have 10 days to leave the United States. (The Toronto Star, 14/5/03)

May 15: A group of US-bound Cuban migrants jumped into the ocean to elude Coast Guard crews and have tried to swim ashore in the Florida Keys, treading water until they tired and surrendered. The last holdout treaded water for nearly three hours before giving up and crawling aboard an inflatable Coast Guard boat. Six Cuban men aboard a small boat were spotted about 3 miles (5 km) off the upper Florida Keys. When Coast Guard vessels approached to prevent them from entering the country illegally, they jumped overboard. Three surrendered quickly but the others tried to swim away, Coast Guard Petty Officer Carleen Drummond said. (Reuters, 15/5/03)

May 15: The Bush administration's decision to expel 14 Cuban diplomats had its genesis in an FBI memorandum sent to the State Department last October citing concern about Cuban intelligence activities, officials asserted. US officials vigorously defended the mass expulsion, even as questions arose about its timing, the lack of public disclosure of evidence to support charges of espionage and whether genuine national security concerns led to the action - and not political motivations. Administration officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, laid out the chronology of what they said was ongoing concern about Cuban intelligence activities. For its part, the FBI issued a statement saying that Cuban espionage activity is a major concern, and denying a New York Times report that the White House and State Department had pressed for the expulsions for political reasons. (The State.Com, 15/5/03)

May 16: Two Cubans charged with assaulting US Coast Guard personnel who tried to intercept them as they tried to reach the Florida coast were released on \$70,000 bond. Javier Morales Molina, and Reinaldo Molina Morales, had been held at a Monroe County jailhouse after being charged in a Miami federal court, according to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. (EFE, 16/5/03)

May 17: Director Oliver Stone has returned to Cuba to ask Fidel Castro about a recent crackdown on dissidents and interview some of his opponents for a controversial documentary that HBO considered incomplete. "The interviews and information will be added to the documentary," Stone's publicist Tony Angellotti said from Los Angeles. (Reuters, 17/5/03)

May 17: Fidel Castro says his government's recent and speedy firing-squad execution of three ferry hijackers was "a matter of life or death" - not for the summarily convicted men but for the Cuban regime which he says was the target of a US plan aimed at sparking war. In an interview published in the Mexican daily Milenio, Castro attributed the plan to "Miami's terrorist Mafia working in conjunction with the US extreme right." "The pre-conceived plan was meant to spark a wave of hijackings, an immigration crisis to be used as a pretext for a naval blockade, which would inevitably lead to war," Castro said. (EFE, 17/5/03)

May 18: A fugitive contractor named in the racketeering case against former US Representative James A. Traficant Jr. was arrested on a plane in Panama City, Panama. Robert Bucci, 57, of Youngstown, was returning to his home in Cuba when US marshals arrested him before takeoff, US Marshal Peter Elliott said. Elliott said his agency learned that Bucci was in Panama, which unlike Cuba, has an extradition policy with the United States. (AP, 20/5/03)

May 18: In an appearance on ABC's This Week television program, Cuban legislature president Ricardo Alarcon denied the expelled Cuban diplomats were spying. He said Cuba refuses to take similar action with US diplomats at the US interest section in Havana. "No, because that would be a repeat to play their game," said Mr. Alarcon. "I think that the interest section was one of the very few constructive steps that were taken in the '70s." (VOA, 19/5/03)

May 18: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón says that Jeb Bush, the brother of US President George W. Bush, is urging the US to take military action against the island. Appearing on the ABC television network's talk show "This Week," the leader of Cuba's Parliament accused the governor of Florida of actively working for a 'regime change' in Cuba. "Well, you have, first of all, those in Miami that are calling for even a military action against Cuba, including the governor," Alarcon said. Later, he said: "I am convinced that not very far from President Bush and his entourage are people that are not just willing, but actively working toward that (...) The brother (Jeb Bush) was very open, calling publicly in Florida to do in the neighborhood, in the nation of Cuba, what you just did to Iraq." (Radio Habana Cuba, AP, 19/5/03)

May 18: A spokeswoman for Governor Bush discounted charges aired by the president of the Cuban National Assembly that the Florida governor is conspiring to overthrow Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Bush's press secretary, Alia Faraj, said that the governor has been consistent on his views toward Cuba. "Governor Bush has been very clear in his position that he does not condone Castro's repressive regime," she said. "Americans should continue to show their support for the brave men and women who continue to seek change through continued support of an economic embargo and travel restrictions." (AP, 18/5/03)

May 19: An illegal Cuban migrant who was detained off the Florida Keys earlier this month has been sent to the US Navy station in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The migrant, identified in court documents as Ramon Aguilar Hernandez, was brought there by US Coast Guard officials, Petty Officer Carleen Drummond said. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services spokeswoman Ana Santiago declined to comment. (Sun Sentinel, 19/5/03)

May 19: Cuba's leading dissident accused the Communist government on the island of manipulating fears of an American invasion to justify its harsh line on opposition. Oswaldo Paya, the leader of the Varela Project petition drive seeking personal and political freedoms, emphasized that any resolution to Cuba's political situation must be peaceful and home-grown. He added that Cuban officials have seized upon President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq to alarm the Cuban public over a possible American invasion, even though Bush administration officials have rejected that possibility. "The proposition is that we continue with this order without rights or face a supposed invasion from the United States," Paya said in a telephone interview from his Havana home. (The New York Times, 20/5/03)

May 20: US President Bush marked Cuban Independence Day by denouncing Fidel Castro and expressing hope his rule will soon end. "My hope is for the Cuban people to soon enjoy the same freedoms and rights as we do. Dictatorships have no place in the Americas. May God bless the Cuban people who are struggling for freedom," Bush said in a message played on US-backed Radio Marti, which is beamed into Cuba. At the White House, the US President met with Cuban dissidents and former political prisoners. At the emotional meeting, which lasted longer than expected, Bush reasserted his support for the democratization of Cuba, but ruled out an invasion of the island, according to Housing Secretary Mel Martinez, himself a Cuban-American. Isabel Roque, the sister of Marta Beatriz Roque, an independent economist imprisoned in March, echoed the housing secretary's sentiment. "We do not want the Marines to invade Cuba. We just don't want our hands to be tied," she said. (Reuters, EFE, 20/5/03)

May 20: There were no plans for US President Bush to announce any new steps to punish Cuba for the recent dissident jailings. The Bush administration was wary of a suggested ban on cash remittances to Cuban families from relatives in the United States, officials said. There is concern the move could make humanitarian conditions worse and do little to weaken Castro's communist government. But the administration is discussing ways to aid pro-democracy forces, such as increasing broadcasts from the United States or giving dissidents communications equipment such as fax machines, an activist said. It was also seeking to rally additional international opposition against Castro. (Reuters, 20/5/03)

May 20: Harry Reid, Democrat from Searchlight and deputy minority leader of the U.S. Senate, stated that he "will introduce legislation that will call upon the State Department and the Organization of American States to convene a special tribunal to try the political and military leaders of Cuba, including and most importantly Fidel Castro". (Las Vegas Review-Journal, 20/5/03)

May 20: Grammy-nominated Cuban classical guitarist Rey Guerra, is asking for asylum in the United States, along with part of his family, so he can "seek new horizons." "I got tired of the paternalism and always being told what to do," Guerra said from his parents' home in Hialeah, west of Miami, where he is staying along with his wife, Giselle Rangel, and the youngest of their four children, 6-year-old Gabriela. Guerra said the prevailing tendency in Cuba is "to use the cultural movement to promote a political ideology, and artists have lapsed into total inertia, because they don't see any other way to survive." The musician, who was born in Santa Clara in 1958, has given recitals and concerts at prestigious venues like New York's Metropolitan Opera, Washington's Kennedy Center and Moscow's Tchaikovsky Hall. (EFE, 21/5/03)

May 20: A Republican congressman from Nevada, Senator John Ensign, said in a speech to the Cuban American National Foundation in Miami that the White House must maintain the embargo of Cuba. "I look at Cuba today and see a lot of European and Canadian businesses that have been operating there for years -- making a tidy profit at the expense of the Cuban people -- yet Cuba has not been transformed, and Castro has not changed one iota," Ensign said. The lawmaker said he would introduce a bill that would provide \$30 million to finance a transition government for Cuba, and another \$20 million for human rights activities through the Organization of American States and for dissidents, activists, relatives of prisoners and others seeking to build civil society. (The Herald.Com, 21/5/03)

May 21: US director Oliver Stone, just back from a return visit to Cuba to update his portrait of Fidel Castro, rejected accusations that the film is sycophantic and contended that the aging communist leader is more threatened by Washington than ever. The director of "JFK" and "Platoon" said that he spoke for "20 hours" with Fidel Castro, who told him "incredible" things. "This last year, there was much provocation by the United States. It is very complex," the director said. "In those 20 hours, he spoke about everything. It's an incredible document about a 70-year-old man who, after (surviving) six US presidents, is seriously threatened by the seventh, who

poses him the greatest threat of his life, perhaps even greater than the (1962) nuclear crisis." (EFE, 21/5/03)

May 21: Cuba's communist regime again rails against the Bush administration, accusing it of "shamelessly violating" international regulations by using a high-tech aircraft to broadcast to the island. An editorial appearing on the front-page of this morning's Granma newspaper - entitled "Gracias, Führer" -- takes aim at greetings to the Cuban people by US President George W. Bush. Calling the greeting yet another gross provocation, the editorial notes that Washington simultaneously launched four new frequencies of the radio station Radio Martí -- as well as what is called "a special surprise" with the inauguration of a television signal that broadcast from 6 until 8 p.m. The editorial said that, unfortunately for Washington and Miami, the signal was poor and very few people were able to watch it. The newspaper went on to cite what it mockingly called "a very sweet and moving" May 20 message in Spanish by President George W. Bush on the occasion of the 101st anniversary of the proclamation of the Cuban Republic, an event that is not commemorated in Fidel Castro's Cuba. (EFE, Radio Habana Cuba, 21/5/03)

May 21: The Coast Guard returned 126 illegal Haitian and Cuban migrants to their homelands, officials said. Twenty-five Cuban migrants found in five separate cases since May 10 were repatriated to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba. (Sun Sentinel, 21/5/03)

May 21: Four Cuban migrants reached Keys shores near the Seven Mile Bridge, the US Border Patrol confirmed. Border Patrol spokesman Keith Roberts said Border Patrol officers responded after the four men turned themselves in to the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. They told Border Patrol officials they made landfall in the area of Mile Marker 47. (The Keys News, 21/5/03)

May 22: Cuba is "taking its time" to respond to the US expulsion of Cuban diplomats, according to Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque's brief statements to the media. (El Tiempo, 23/5/03)

May 21: Already in the country are the seven officials of the Cuban diplomatic mission in the US capital who were declared as personas "non gratas" by the State Department. Anselmo Lopez, who held the post of consul in Washington, told the press that he rejected the American charges and stressed that his work was limited to tending to the legal affairs of the large group of Cubans in that nation. (AIN, 22/5/03)

May 22: Abel Prieto, Cuban Minister for Culture, highlighted the presence in Cuba of almost 60 North Americans as a sign of friendship and solidarity, when speaking at the closing of the International Forum on Ernest Hemingway. He said he was convinced that a fraternal relation between both countries is possible, and that culture may help, particularly through the figure of that writer, who lived the third part of his life in the island. (AIN, 22/5/03)

May 22: On orders from the White House, the Pentagon deployed a special airplane this week to beam the signals of Radio and TV Martí to Cuba, using a technology that one administration official said "breached the wall" of Cuban jamming efforts. "The political green light is on" to make the controversial US-operated stations more effective at reaching Cubans, said the senior official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. An Air Force EC-130 plane conducted the transmissions between 6:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. on May 20, several officials said. It operated within US airspace, not passing into Cuban territory. (The Herald.Com, 22/5/03)

May 24: Cuban dissident Elizardo Sánchez stated his opinion that, despite any moderation the US government may exhibit, its Cuban counterpart "will go on stirring up the spectre" of a possible military invasion of Cuba. Sánchez, the chairman of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, told the press in an interview that it is not necessary for Washington to launch a military action against Havana. "It would be absurd and foolish, because the Cuban government does not constitute a military threat to the US government," said Sánchez.

"Furthermore, the political situation of the island will be changed by the march of history itself."
(Notimex, 24/5/03)

May 26: Fidel Castro justified the recent executions of three hijackers who seized a ferry in an attempt to flee the island, saying they were players in an effort to spark war between the United States and Cuba. "It is the enemy's plan to bring about war between the United States and Cuba," the Cuban leader told reporters in Buenos Aires. He attended the inauguration of Argentine President Nestor Kirchner. "When it comes to defending the lives of 11 million Cubans, you cannot hesitate," he said. (AFP, 26/5/03)

May 27: The Clevelander Hotel bar was the site of the landing of five Cuban migrants. After arriving by boat, the five men walked across the sand and made the bar their first stop in South Florida. Bartenders gave them Clevelander T-shirts, then called Miami Beach police, who turned the group over to Border Patrol. The men's names had not been released by authorities. (The Miami Herald, 27/5/03)

May 28: A Democratic senator, Max Baucus of Montana, has put a "hold" on the nomination of Roger F. Noriega to serve as assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere. A Baucus spokeswoman said the legislative move blocking further action has nothing to do with Noriega's qualifications. Rather, Baucus is using the "hold" on Noriega to pressure Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist to allow an up-or-down vote on the full Senate floor for his proposal to relax US restrictions on travel to Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 28/5/03)

May 28: Two Cuban migrants charged with brandishing weapons against the US Coast Guard, in a dash to reach land in the Florida Keys, pleaded not guilty in federal court. The case marked the first time that felony charges were filed against Cuban migrants who reached US soil after eluding federal authorities in the Florida Straits, the 90-mile stretch of water that separates Cuba and Florida. (Reuters, 28/5/03)

May 29: Thousands of US firms are registering their trademarks in Cuba, in anticipation of the day the US trade embargo is lifted. Registration costs about US\$300, plus a US\$250 official fee payable to the Government. (Caribbean Update, 29/5/03)

May 29: Cuba considers the US decision to auction two hijacked Cuban planes the "consummation of a robbery". With an auction in Cayo Hueso (US) airport the United States will finalize "the theft" of the DC-3 and AN-24 civilian aircraft, hijacked in Cuba and forced to fly to US territory, asserted Randy Alonso, moderator of the daily informative Roundtable broadcast. Alonso reiterated the responsibility of the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act for encouraging illegal immigration to the US territory, condoning robbery of airplanes and boats, which the US often confiscates and sells. (Prensa Latina, 30/5/03)

May 29: Border Patrol agents took four Cuban men into custody after they were found on a beach, having survived a weeklong trip in a homemade wooden boat. The four men were found near Gulf Stream, about 16 miles south of West Palm Beach. They were taken to Krome Detention Center in Miami-Dade County for processing, officials said. It's only the second instance since October of Cubans coming ashore in Palm Beach County. Most fleeing migrants usually try to reach land in Miami or the Florida Keys, in part because the boat trips there are considerably shorter. (AP, 30/5/03)

May 31: The organizer of an annual boat race to Cuba said that many of the items on the 20 competing sailboats were confiscated by federal agents when they returned to Key West. Michele Geslin, organizer for the Key West Sailing Club Conch Republic Cup, said customs officials confiscated crew members' cameras, trophies and paperwork. She said crew members also were told that they could be fined for having taken their boats to Cuba without an export license.

Organizers said that has never happened before in the history of the race, which has been run for more than a decade. (Orlando Sentinel, 1/6/03)

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