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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: The Cuban Communist Party makes changes among its top-level officials. Dissident Oswaldo Payá releases a blueprint for a new Cuban constitution. The president of the National Assembly of the People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón, speaks about the succession to Fidel Castro. Cuba's Council of State appoints new ministers. Torrential rains cause flash floods and kill some eleven people in Havana. Dissident journalist Guillermo Farinas reaches four months on hunger strike in demand of access to Internet.

Economy: Fidel Castro says that the current rate of growth is higher than 12.5 percent. The Canadian company Sherrit Oil and Gas International and the Cuban-owned oil company Cuba Oil conclude the joint venture's largest project to date. Fidel Castro announces that the 2006 sugar harvest is 10 percent below a plan of around 1.3 million tonnes. A fair promoting exchange and integration among Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela takes place in La Paz.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba secures a seat on the new UN Human Rights Council. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque welcomes the Vienna declaration issued by the EU-Latin America Caribbean summit. During a telephone conversation with Fidel Castro, Iran's President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad expresses gratitude for the stances adopted by Cuba to support the Iranian nation's rights. Amnesty International issues its 2006 annual report on Cuba.

Security: Russia and Cuba sign a number of agreements concerning military technological cooperation.

US-Cuba Relations: The Florida House passes a bill aimed at banning public and private universities and community colleges from sponsoring trips to Cuba. Fidel Castro furiously reacts when Forbes magazine estimates his fortune at \$900 million. An update from the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba is not delivered to the White House, as scheduled for May 20th.



Domestic Affairs

May 1: Some seven million Cubans—close to two-thirds of the population—took to the streets to participate in May Day celebrations across the island. Huge demonstrations called by Cuba's Workers Confederation took place in all

major towns and cities of the island to reaffirm workers support for socialism. Hundreds of thousands gathered at the Havana's historic Jose Marti Revolution Square waving multi-colored flags and banners with patriotic slogans, as Fidel Castro presided over the mass gathering. (*AIN*, 1/5/06)

May 1: Oswaldo Paya, a Cuban pro-democracy activist, has been invited to receive an honorary degree at Columbia University's commencement in May, the university said. Paya said he was honored by the invitation and hoped the Cuban government would let him travel to New York for the May 17 event. "As a Cuban, I feel proud," said the lead organizer of the Varela Project, a petition drive calling for a popular vote on issues including freedom of speech and private business ownership. "This is a recognition of our people and their rights." Paya was to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at Columbia's New York City campus, the university said in a statement. He was chosen because he represents "civic activism, and is a model for non-violent human rights advocacy," said Columbia Professor Gustavo Perez-Firmat. The activist was allowed to travel to Europe in December of 2002 to receive the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, the EU's top human-rights award. But since then, several requests to attend conferences abroad or receive prizes have been turned down by Cuba's communist government, Paya said. (*AP*, 1/5/06)

May 2: A TV soap opera is generating controversy on the streets of Cuba and attracting a record number of viewers. The reason? It is about what until now has been a taboo for Cuban TV: homosexuality. It seems to be the sole topic of conversation in the workplace and the neighbourhoods, even though many men insist angrily that they do not watch "that *telenovela* in which a married man 'discovers himself' through a sexual relationship with a male friend". It is the first time that television in Cuba has dared to broach the subject. It never even screened "Strawberry and Chocolate", a classic Cuban film about the marginalisation of gay people. The soap – "The Dark Side of the Moon" - shows the problems a bisexual man faces in today's Cuba, including his friends' revulsion and rejection by his parents. Actor Rafael Lahera, who plays "Yaser", says that to broach "such a delicate subject in such a macho society" is an important step for Cuban TV. But playing the leading role has not been without problems. "People think I'm gay," he says. And, he adds, he has been turned down for acting jobs because employers do not want a role to be played by a homosexual. Such discrimination is not unusual in Cuba, where in the 1960s and 70s homosexuals were sent to labour farms. Today, gays and lesbians are socially isolated, the police harass transvestites and the government is refusing to authorise sex changes for transsexuals. (*BBC Mundo* , 2/5/06)

May 2: Eliécer Consuegra Rivas, president of the illegal Democratic Alliance of Eastern Cuba, remained besieged for more than 80 hours in his home by groups organized by the Cuban State Security Department. The incident occurred as Consuegra was on his way to an event organized in the province of Camagüey and was threatened by nearly 20 individuals armed with sticks and rocks. (*Cubanet*, 2/5/06)

May 2: Authorities in Cuba, one of the few nations in the world that requires citizens to get official permission to leave the country, have not yet given exit visas to the would-be emigrants mistakenly repatriated by the United States earlier this year. The update refers to "the bridge rafters," as the group of 15 Cubans sent back to the Communist island in January after they reached the support structure of an unused and broken bridge in the Florida Keys are known. Ernesto Hernandez, a member of the group, told the press that they went to the immigration service office in Matanzas, some 100 kilometers (about 62 miles) east of Havana, where they were told that permission had not yet been granted, even though the 30 days involved in the process had elapsed. The members of the group requested the exit permits after obtaining visas from US authorities. (*EFE*, 3/5/06)

May 3: World dance lovers have been called by their Cuban partners to receive lessons and celebrate workshops about dance on the island, from November 27 to December 1, 2006. With the motto *Baila en Cuba* (Dance in Cuba) the cultural tourism company *Paradiso*, officially launched the call, which will include casino, mambo, meringue, and other genres. Havana Libre Hotel and Pabellon Cuba, both in the capital, will be the headquarters of the lessons and workshops given by Maria Teresa Linares, National award winner of music and by Santiago Alfonso award winner of dance. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/5/06)

May 3: The Cuban central province of Ciego de Avila has reported an infant mortality rate of 4.9 for each thousand born alive during the first months of this year. This result is comparable to that of the most highly developed countries and it is closely related to the high priority the Cuban state extends to women before, during, and after pregnancy as well as its assistance to infants. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/06)

May 3: Nobel Prize in physics in 2000, Russian Zhores Alfiorov, visited the University of Havana, where he had an opportunity to discuss with professors and students from that educational institution. Alfiorov noted that the University of Havana was the first to present him with an honorary doctorate degree -several years before he received the Nobel Prize. He also stressed the importance of increasing scientific cooperation between the research institute which he directs and the University of Havana. University of Havana Rector Dr. Juan Vela said Cuban physics owes much to Alfiorov's research, and that the Russian scholar's visit was a tremendous honor for the Cuban scientific community, Granma newspaper reported. (*ACN*, 3/5/06)

May 3: Political scientists, politicians and activists from different parts of the world are meeting in Havana, Cuba, to discuss the work of Karl Marx and contemporary world politics. The meeting has been organized by Cuba's Institute of Philosophy and will be focusing on a number of present day world affairs. Under the theme: "The road leading towards revolutionary power in the 21st Century: classes, social movements and political parties", the meeting will cover among other topics, Marxist thought and the challenges of social development, revolution, change and revolutionary power including the problems of the current capitalist system as well as socialism for the present century. The meeting has so far attracted political professors from countries like Canada, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, China, France, Greece, Sweden, Mexico, United Kingdom, Zambia, as well as Cuba itself. (*The Post*, 4/5/06)

May 4: Cuba's National Weather Institute predicted that there will be an above-average 15 tropical storms this year, and at least nine are expected to become hurricanes. That's because water temperatures in the Atlantic-Caribbean basin remain warm and there is no sign of a counteracting El Nino phenomenon in the Pacific, said Cuban forecaster Maritza Ballester. The first storm will form in late June or early July, she predicted, with three arising in the Gulf of Mexico. "Everything points to an active season," said Ballester, developer of a mathematical model for predicting hurricanes. (*Reuters*, 4/5/06)

May 4: The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) said in a press release that Cuban prisoner Emilio Manuel Pérez, arrested and imprisoned along with other fifteen people by the authorities of Havana in July, 2005, has declared himself on a hunger strike. Pérez is determined not to eat any type of food until they improve the conditions of his imprisonment and his rights are respected. (*EFE*, 4/5/06)

May 5: On World Press Freedom Day, Cuba claimed that its reporters were the freest in the world. "In Cuba (...) we say: we are the freest journalists because we are a part of the people with the most freedom, a country where there is a revolution that is the most just, most ethical and dignified social project that any nation ever had," stated Granma, the newspaper of the ruling Communist Party. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in 2005 there were 24 imprisoned journalists, the highest figure after China. (*Reuters*, 5/4/06)

May 6: Fidel Castro presided over the closing ceremony of the Cuban Sports Olympiad. The president of the Cuban Sports Institute, Christian Jimenez, formally declared the event as concluded and described it as "a celebration of sports and solidarity." (*AP* , 7/5/06)

May 7: According to the most recent statistics presented by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Cuba's suicide rate is the highest in the entire hemisphere and one of the highest in the world. According to PAHO Basic Health Indicators 2005, in the period 2000-2005, Cuba had a suicide rate of 18.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, well ahead of runner-up Uruguay's 15.9 and far higher than that of countries like Peru with 2.3 and Guatemala with 1.9. The phenomenon has had a greater impact on groups between the ages of 24 and 45. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 7/5/06)

May 8: Fernando Martínez Calzadillas, president of the illegal Western Cultural Civic Center (Centro Cívico Cultural de Occidente) was sentenced to 4 years in jail by a military tribunal for the alleged crime of bribery. The trial took place on April 28th, less than twenty-four hours after of his arrest, and Martínez Calzadilla was immediately transferred to the Kilo 5 y medio Prison to serve his sentence. He denied all charges, but the State Attorney of the military tribunal relied on testimony of two witnesses who accused Martínez Calzadilla of selling false documents to some youth who wanted to leave the armed forces. (*Puente Informativo*, 8/5/06)

May 8: The province of Sancti Spiritus has undertaken its most ambitious housing project yet with plans to building some 7,470 houses in one year. The undertaking is part of a nationwide effort that aims to construct some 100,000 new housing units a year. According to Juan Marcos Mendez, director of the Sancti Spiritus provincial housing system, even though the beginning wasn't the best (only 253 houses finished in January), a total of 1,351 were built in the first quarter. While still below the programmed figure, it more than triples those built in the first eight months of 2005. The surge, however, has not been equal in all places. While Jatibonico, Fomento, Taguasco and the city of Sancti Spiritus lead the way, Yaguajay, La Sierpe, Cabaiguan and Trinidad are so far lagging behind. In Trinidad, for instance, in the first quarter of this year only 11 new homes have been built, barely 1 percent of plans for the year. The province has doubled its production of building materials, but it still is not meeting the demand, especially for masonry work. (*Granma*, 8/5/06)

May 8: Cuba, along with Uruguay and Argentina, has the oldest population in America. Approximately 15.8 % of Cuban citizens are already over 60 years old and it is expected that two decades from now 25 % of Cubans will belong in the senior citizen category. Three factors seem to influence these statistics: a significant reduction in the birth rate, an increase in the lifespan of the elderly and a large exodus of young people (more than 20,000 a year migrate to the United States alone). These are a part of the conclusions of the "4th Ibero American Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics", which concluded in Havana with the participation of scientists from Latin America and Spain. (*BBC Mundo*, 8/5/06)

May 8: Cuba is falling well short of the government's targets for housing construction due to problems with transportation and delays in delivery of materials, the state-run media reported. Between September 2005 and last month, work began on 182,000 units, fewer than half the 380,000 projected by the government, the official Communist Party daily *Granma* said. The paper noted that of the 119,000 housing units planned for 2006, only 28,196 had been completed as of April 30. "The needs accumulated during the years of the special period (Havana's term for the crisis caused by the loss of subsidies after the collapse of the Soviet bloc) led to an avalanche of (housing) requests that will be satisfied with justice, giving priority to those who contribute most to society," *Granma* said. More than 52 percent of Cuba's housing stock is in bad shape, according to a government report issued last September. (*EFE*, 8/5/06)

May 8: Arco Progresista, a coalition of moderate opposition organizations, requested that, to be consistent with its aspiration to integrate the new UN Human Rights Council, the Cuban government amnesty political prisoners and put an end to the harassment against dissidents. In the declaration, AP also called upon the government of Fidel Castro to improve imprisonment conditions and "promote institutional and educational advocacy of human rights." (*AFP*, 8/5/06)

May 8: Hassan Pérez Casabona, second secretary of the Young Communist League of Cuba (UJC), was designated president of Habaguanex S.A., replacing Eusebio Leal, Historian of the City, who had led the company since its foundation. (*Cubanet*, 8/5/06)

May 8: According to *Palabra Nueva*, a magazine published by the archbishopric of Havana, the Catholic Church will implement a new Pastoral Plan in Cuba from 2006 to 2010, starting on September 8, Day of the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, patron saint of the island. The goal of the new Pastoral Plan is to give a leading role to the community, wherein the faithful must potentiate their spirituality to participate in the transformation of the Cuban reality, said Ortega. (*MartiNoticias*, 8/5/06)

May 8: The wife of Cuban political prisoner Nelson Aguiar Ramírez was denied access to the premises of the Cuban Council of State. Dolia Leal, who participates in demonstrations with the Ladies in White demanding the release of her husband, showed up at the offices of the Council of State to turn in a letter addressed to Fidel Castro, but the Council employees refused to allow her to enter the building and to receive the letter. According to Leal, she had to leave without turning in the letter while other citizens were entering the premises without any objections. (*Netfor Cuba*, 8/5/06)

May 9: For the second time in less than 15 days, the ruling Cuban Communist Party made changes among its top level officials, this time by appointing new secretaries for the provinces of Matanzas and Villa Clara. "At the request of the Political Bureau," the replacements were made in plenary meetings held in both provinces on May 8, according to a press release carried by the official newspaper Granma. In Matanzas, it was decided that Víctor Fidel Gaute be replaced by Pedro Betancourt, a mechanical engineer, until then member of the provincial executive bureau, while in Villa Clara, Omar Ruiz, also a member of the Communist party, replaced Roberto López. The reasons behind these changes were not specified. (*AP*, 10/5/06)

May 10: Dissident Oswaldo Payá released a blueprint for a new Cuban constitution that would allow free elections and create a system that decentralizes authority. The 170-page document, compiled by Payá's Christian Liberation Movement with input from Cubans on and off the island, contains a blueprint for a modified constitution and new electoral laws and rules of association. Copies of the proposal were released to international journalists exactly four years after Payá delivered to Cuba's parliament the first batch of 25,000 signatures gathered for his Varela Project. Payá's earlier democracy drive gained international recognition and prompted the government to declare socialism "irrevocable." The latest document was produced after two years of discussions with Cubans on issues that included education, health, religion, the economy and freedom of expression. Thousands participated in the effort, said Payá, whose group called for a popular vote on the proposed changes. Two keys to the draft constitution are "humanity and reconciliation," Payá said. It does not call for an overhaul of Cuba's social or public services. "Those are things that must be maintained," he said. Reconciliation between political opponents is important because "we know there are wounds," Payá said. "We don't think we have a monopoly on the truth." Propaganda and confiscation of private property are among things prohibited in the proposed constitution. The right to own a business and criticize those in power are among the expanded rights. "No one can be antagonized because of their opinions or criticisms, even if these are directed against the government, government officials or any other person or sector of the society," the document says. [[Propuesta de Constitución](#)] (*AP*, *Sun Sentinel*, 11/5/06)

May 10: Fidel Castro praised the Cuban community genetics program, which results are being presented at the first International Congress of this specialty, in Havana. Addressing the meeting, Castro was concerned on learning the number of labs existing in the country and how many specialized technicians are working in them. "There is no more humanitarian work," said the statesman after listening to some of Cuba's achievements in detecting congenital malformations, the number of experts working in this specialty, and the resources destined to develop the national genetics network. He also spoke of the social workers' labor in several Battle of Ideas programs of the nation, including the three-year program to identify handicapped people on the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/5/06)

May 12: Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, leader of the illegal Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, said she was told that she would not be allowed to leave her house in Havana on May 20, Cuban Independence day. Last Independence Day, Roque helped organize an unprecedented assembly of about 200 members of country's opposition movement. She was imprisoned in 2003 and released the following year for medical reasons. In recent weeks she has complained of harassment, including an attack on April 25, when she reported that she was punched by a man outside her home. In a letter Roque wrote to a Cuban lawyer, she said a group of people she did not know who gathered outside her home told her she would no longer be able to receive packages. "The manner in which the government wants me to live my life is unbearable..." she wrote in the letter. (*AP*, 12/5/06)

May 13: Ladies in White, wives and relatives of Cuban political prisoners, demonstrated along two kilometers of Havana's streets paying tribute to Cuban mothers on the eve on Mother's Day. Over 15 women dressed in white walked with flowers in their hands from Laura Pollán's home to 23 and I in El Vedado, where they laid a wreath under a commemorative plaque to Leonor Perez, mother of Cuba's national hero Jose Marti. (AFP, 14/5/06)

May 13: Cubanet correspondent Odelín Alfonso was held for a few hours at a National Revolutionary Police station in the Havana district of Arroyo Naranjo after being arrested with his wife on their return from a meeting organised by the Ladies in White. Two days before the meeting, a member of the State Security (the political police) had told him not to attend. He has been fined for "resistance and outrage." (RWB, 17/5/06)

May 15: Fidel Castro furiously denied a story in Forbes magazine that he was worth \$900 million and said he would step down if the magazine could prove the assertion. The financial magazine ranked Castro as the seventh wealthiest ruler in the world in its annual tally of the "Fortunes of Kings, Queens and Dictators." Castro went on television brandishing a copy of the US-based magazine to tell Cubans the story was a "repugnant slander" by a capitalist publication. With Communist Cuba's Central Bank governor at his side, Castro challenged Forbes to prove the allegation. "If they can prove that I have a bank account abroad, with \$900 million, with \$1 million, \$500,000, \$100,000 or \$1 in it, I will resign," he said at the end of a four-hour broadcast. "It is so ridiculous to say I have a fortune of \$900 million, a fortune with no heirs. What would I need all that money for, if I will soon be 80 years old? Castro, in power since a leftist revolution in 1959, says his net worth is nil and that he earns only 900 Cuban pesos (\$40) a month. (Reuters, AP, 15/5/06)

May 15: A group of Cuban migrants sent home after reaching an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys said they are becoming frustrated waiting for final Cuban government approval to leave for good. Members of the group were traveling from the central province of Matanzas where they live to Havana, where they will seek an appointment at the US Interests Section, migrant Ernesto Hernandez said by telephone. "It has been 48 days, we have the US visa, we have passports," said Hernandez. He said all they lack now is the "white card," the exit permit that Cubans must get from the communist-run government to leave the island. The 14 members of the group applied for the exit permits about six weeks ago at Cuba's migration office in Matanzas province. Hernandez said the approval process generally takes 15 days. (AP, 15/5/06)

May 16: Fidel Castro attended the launching of the book "*Cien Horas con Fidel*" (A Hundred hours with Fidel), a compilation of talks the Cuban leader held with Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet between January 2003 and December 2005. A panel made up of Castro and Ramonet, accompanied by the Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, and book publisher Pedro Alvarez Tabío, was in charge of the book launch. The international press was not invited to attend the event. (EFE, 16/5/06)

May 17: The president of the National Assembly of the People's Power of Cuba, Ricardo Alarcón, denied that the succession of Fidel Castro "should be a taboo topic" in the island since, he explained, "it is regulated in the Cuban Constitution." In his opinion, the Commander in Chief's position as head of government will be aptly filled by "any of the many leaders born before or after (the revolutionary victory of 1959)," who already have "20 years of replacing experience." Alarcón admitted that it is a natural fact of life that some day Castro will pass away. "I do not believe in human cloning, I think that every person is replaceable (...) the question would be what will come after Fidel's generation (...) and this generation has been giving way to other generations for a while now." At the moment, according to Alarcón, "in Cuba there are thousands of leaders much younger than Fidel that were born with or after the revolution and who already have 20 years' worth of practical leadership experience (...) we (the Cubans) know who they are, although there's no mention of them in the foreign press." (Europa Press, 17/5/06)

May 17: Cuban medical researchers said that they have found the only effective solution to date for treating advanced diabetic foot ulcers and avoiding the lower-limb amputations that are often required. The director of commercial

development at the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center, Ernesto Lopez Mola, said at a press conference that the institute's international patent for its drug CITOPROT-P had been accepted by Australia, Singapore and South Africa for treatment of the condition. He said that the development of the product focused on patients with category 3 and 4 ulcers, the most severe on the Wagner scale. "There is no alternative to CITOPROT-P in the world at this time," he said, adding that the treatment includes ulcers with neuropathic and ischemic origins and had a 56 percent success rate in patients treated in Cuba. (*EFE*, 17/5/06)

May 17: The director of the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) of Cuba, Luis Herrera, questioned a study carried out in Germany that proclaimed the ineffectiveness of the cholesterol-lowering drug policosanol (PPG), produced and distributed by the island. "Not everything that is published on internet is true," said Herrera in reply to questions on the results of a study by researcher Heiner Berthold, from the University of Colone. (*AFP*, 17/5/06)

May 19: Cuban scientists have unveiled a new infant pentavalent vaccine that protects against hepatitis B, tetanus, whooping cough, diphtheria and haemophilus influenza type b, according to Prensa Latina. Known as Heberpenta, the new vaccine has been developed by scientists from the research institute Instituto Finlay and the Bioproducts National Centre (Biocen). The new product combines five antigens and has proved to be safe and efficient during clinical trials. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 19/5/06)

May 19: Martha Beatriz Roque, leader of the illegal Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba, disclosed a letter that she sent to her attorney Amelia Rodríguez Calá, from the "Salvador Allende" law firm, in downtown Havana, in which she requests her attorney to intervene to put an end to the harassment that she is subjected to or make the necessary arrangements for her to return to the penitentiary establishment where she will serve out the remainder of her sentence. Roque, who received a 20-year prison sentence during the crackdown against political dissidence of 2003, is under medical extra penal license due to health reasons. (*MartiNoticias*, 19/5/06)

May 21: Fidel Castro said that camping facilities in Cuba do not have a profit motive but are instead geared for the population's educational and recreational benefit. The Cuban leader addressed a celebration for the 25th anniversary of the Popular Camping Program, attended by leaders of the Young Communist League, university students, social workers among others. Castro pointed out that the program provides Cubans with a well organized and healthy way to enjoy their holidays. The Cuban leader praised the work of the personnel in charge of the program, mainly young people. He noted: "We are attending to this recreational activity and we will continue to do so and better," adding that the population will also have more knowledge and culture. (*ACN*, 21/5/06)

May 21: The Cuban national civil defence exercise for the reduction of disasters 'Meteoro 2006' took place nationwide to organize and check the planning of measures to face the risks caused by hurricanes and heavy rains. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in this exercise organized by the Provincial, Defense Councils, Municipal and Area groups and work subgroups, State entities and social institutions, members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior, political and mass organizations and the population of the areas. Among the main objectives was the raising of preparedness for the execution of administrative orders, decisions and plans with a view to the reduction of disasters; to increase the preparation of workers and the population in general to reduce the vulnerabilities of each place, and to face the effects of meteorological phenomenon. (*Granma*, 22/5/06)

May 21: Dr. Eduardo Bernabe Ordaz, director of the Havana Psychiatric Hospital for more than 40 years, passed away in the Cuban capital, due to a chronic kidney malfunction. Dr. Ordaz, born in 1921 in the Havana locality of Bauta, was a member of the Cuban Society of Psychiatry and Psychology, as well as other international organizations. For four decades, he revolutionized the treatment of mentally disabled patients, bringing them out of isolation and abuse so they could participate in society. Cuban exiles in the United States and other Castro critics have alleged the hospital has used torture tactics against political dissidents. Cuban officials have called the claims "ridiculous." Ordaz also served as a

delegate to the Cuban Parliament from 1976 to 2003. He was buried at Havana's historic Colon Cemetery, in a sanctuary for members of the Armed Forces. Hundreds attended, including other revolutionary commanders such as Ramiro Valdes and Guillermo Garcia. (*Granma, The Miami Herald, AP, 21/5/06*)

May 23: Experts from 29 countries gathered in Cuba to attend the third International Symposium for Fighting Vectors, a Pan-American conference which analyzes the control of disease-carrying insects. Specialists from Cuba's National Hygiene and Epidemiology Agency, and the National Workers Health Institute will give details of Cuba's progress in fighting these disease carriers. The meeting was designed to fight *Aedes Aegypti* and other malaria- and dengue-fever carrying mosquitoes. The two diseases strike more than one million people each year. The meeting, which is being held in the city of Varadero, 134 km east of Havana, is being attended by the Cuban public health minister, representatives of the Pedro Kouri Institute and the Pan-American Health Organization. (*Xinhua, 23/5/06*)

May 23: Marta Arjona, who chaired the National Council of Cultural Heritage in Cuba, died in Havana. Born on May 3, 1923, Arjona devoted her life to the defense of the Cuban identity and cultural legacy. She was an outstanding ceramist and sculptor, and an advocate of the Cuban revolution. In a recent interview, she said her greatest contribution to new generations has been to arouse their interest in museums and the preservation of the Cuban heritage and history. The Doctor Honoris Causa for Arts is one of the highest recognitions Marta Arjona received. (*Prensa Latina, 23/5/06*)

May 24: Following a proposal by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party's Central Committee, Cuba's Council of State has appointed Gladys Maria Bejerano Portela as audit minister. Portela had been serving as vice minister of that sector since 2001, and will replace Lina O. Pedraza Rodriguez, who will be promoted to other responsibilities at the Central Committee, *Granma* daily reported. (*Prensa Latina, 24/5/06*)

May 24: Despite recent moves by the Communist government against other sectors of the island's small "self-employed" community, vendors of used books around one of this capital's most emblematic plazas are betting on staying put, saying their presence adds cultural cachet to the historic downtown. Starting in the 1990s, the independent book dealers or street vendors proliferated on the island, especially in Havana, after being granted licenses to operate on their own, rather than working for the state. The booksellers set up their wares in the park in the center of the Plaza de Armas, now also known as "La Plaza de los Libros" (Plaza of the Books). (*EFE, 24/5/06*)

May 24: Torrential rains caused flash floods that demolished dwellings and killed seven people in Havana. Firefighters recovered the bodies of Josefa Fundora, 62, and a second person. Both were swept away when a creek blocked by debris suddenly overflowed in the district of Marianao in western Havana. "I was sleeping when the water rose and almost took me," said neighbor Antonio Avila, 84, an invalid who had fought in Fidel Castro's guerrilla force in the 1950s. "Luckily, a young man helped me leave my house." A resident who asked not to be named said the houses destroyed next to the creek had been declared uninhabitable 20 years ago but authorities had failed to provide alternative housing. The victims lived in Havana's municipalities of Marianao, Center and Old Havana, Lisa and Cerro. The downpour came as Cuba prepares for another busy hurricane season. Casualties from natural disasters are rare in Cuba due to the Communist government's effective civil defense system. (*Reuters, Granma, 24/5/06*)

May 24: Cuban dissident Guillermo Fariñas, on an open-ended hunger strike since January 31, was submitted to minimum access surgery to extract blood and air out of his left lung, reported his mother, Alicia Hernández. Fariñas remains in critical condition at Arnaldo Milián Castro Hospital, in Santa Clara. Refusing food or water in demand of free access to Internet, he is being administered medication and hydrating fluids intravenously. (*EFE, 24/5/06*)

May 24: Cuba's first satellite platform for radio and TV broadcast will cover five channels and five radio stations and bring telecommunication to new zones of the country for the first time, especially in mountain areas. Recent investments allowed the installation of satellite receptors and parabolic antennas in social institutions with joint work by Radio Cuba and Telecomunicaciones de Cuba (ETECSA). Specialist Maria Cristina Bravo, of Copextel Marketing

and Communications Division, said the platform airs broadcasts of Cubavision, Cubavision International, Tele-Rebelde, Canal Educativo and Educativo 2. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Cuban models twirled turquoise ribbons and flaunted papier-mache topped in a fashion show that paid homage to the art behind Cuba's long tobacco tradition. Designs inspired by Cuban cigar labels ranged from earthy to extravagant, seductive to serene in the "Art and Fashion" show, which aimed to blur the line between the two. "This is the art of dressing, the portable art," said Jesus Frias, a designer and an organizer of the event held in a cozy theater inside Havana's National Museum of Fine Arts. The models acted and danced on stage as they showed off the designs, each spending several minutes in the spotlight accompanied by opera, rock and traditional Cuban music. (*AP*, 25/5/06)

May 24: Cuban human rights activist, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, denounced that he is suffering constant and systematic acts of provocation and threats to his person and his home by Cuban State Security. The activist and his father were awakened suddenly when a huge stone was violently thrown against the gate of their house in the city of Ciego de Avila. According to testimony by Juan Carlos, a post of military personnel that constantly keeps a vigil on him has been established facing his house. When he walks through the streets of Ciego de Avila, State Security agents threaten to beat him up, they shout insults at him, and chant pro-governmental slogans at him, humiliating him publicly. Gonzalez Leiva was incarcerated without a trial and suffered physical and psychological tortures for 26 months for having peacefully demonstrated along with other members of the Cuban Foundation of Human Rights at a hospital in Ciego de Avila where an independent journalist who had been brutally beaten by forces of State Security was taken. (*Netfor Cuba*, 29/5/06)

May 24: Fidel Castro acknowledged that the intense rains that fell in Havana the day before had dealt the Cuban capital a "hard" blow. The downpours deluging the city flooded low-lying areas, transformed dozens of streets into rivers, washed away garages and homes, paralyzed traffic across a good part of the city and forced the evacuation of hundreds of people. "I understand that there have been some (fatalities) as a result of that sudden phenomenon that didn't give us time to do anything at all," Castro said at the beginning of a special television speech in which he focused on denouncing the US strategy vis-a-vis the Communist island. Castro said that the rains caused the Quibu River in western Havana to rise some seven meters (almost 23 feet). "The water rose very quickly, causing effects of different types (...) the wind, the water. Some automobiles remained in the [underground parking lots] with no time to move them," he added. (*EFE*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Cuban writer Leonardo Padura was granted a Brigada 21 Award with his novel, 'La neblina del ayer' ("Yesterday's mist"). According to the jury, Padura's novel was the best in Spanish language. Brigada 21, an organization aimed at paying tribute to black literature, will grant its awards during a ceremony held at the Negra y Criminal bookstore, in Barcelona. (*Europa Press*, 24/5/06)

May 24: There's hardly a spot on Cuba untouched by its slavery past, not unlike most Caribbean islands. Ports where African slaves were brought in or taken away, fortresses built with their sweat and tears and sugar mills where they labored to fuel the economy dot the island. Later came the caves where runaway slaves found refuge and plazas that hosted rebellions. An international effort sponsored by UNESCO aims to identify and preserve these sites in such places as Cuba, Jamaica, Aruba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The project, called "Sites of Memory on the Slave Route," hopes to turn the sites into cultural tourism destinations and show the world the influence Africans and their descendants have had in the region. "The African mark is the one that defines Cuban culture," said Miguel Barnet, a renowned Cuban writer and ethnographer. "Of course we have a significant Spanish influence with the language and all, but what really characterizes us, what really makes us different, is, without a doubt, the presence of the African element." The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization project "tries to recognize the history of the 20 million Africans who contributed their culture even though they came (to the Americas) as hostages," Barnet said. (*AP*, 25/4/06)

May 25: The director and the assistant director of the Security and Protection Agency at José Martí international airport remain under arrest at Villa Marista, head office of the Department of State Security, under suspicion of embezzlement and repeated theft. Roberto A. Fernández Rodríguez and Liván Tápanes, the director and assistant director, respectively, of the company in charge of airport security, are accused of having stolen 18 thousand dollars, a Lada vehicle, 90 tires, several mattresses and other articles. (*Cuba Verdad*, 25/5/06)

May 26: Fidel Castro described as excellent the assistance offered to the Pakistani people by the medical brigade of the Cuban Henry Reeve Contingent that returned from the Asian nation. The Cuban Revolution leader welcomed the last group of Cuban doctors who returned to Havana at José Martí International Airport. The Cuban doctors assisted the victims of the earthquake that hit the Asian nation last October 8, 2005. Also present at the airport were Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, Deputy Health Minister Gonzálo Estevez and other government officials. (*CAN*, 26/5/06)

May 26: Academics and intellectuals who live in Cuba and proclaim themselves supporters of the current sociopolitical system have begun to question publicly the validity of "statist socialism" in a post-Fidel era, while acknowledging the possibility of a return to capitalism in the island. Such proliferation of critical analysis of the present and the immediate future of Cuba, a country where the local media does not usually cover these topics, has struck analysts and diplomats in Havana as significant. According to local experts, "it is unknown whether the considerations of these academics are the reflection of their own personal views and social analysis or of those of high-ranking Cuban officials who seek to create favorable subjective conditions for the future." (*Milenio*, 26/5/06)

May 27: Cuba appointed Jose Hernandez Bernardez as the new Light Industry minister in place of Estela Dominguez Ariosa, who held this post since October 2003. An official note published on Granma daily points out that the Council of State's decision, proposed by the Politburo of the Communist Party's Central Committee, aims at strengthening that ministry's work. The new official, 55, was the Economy and Planning vice minister since February 2003 and previously president of the Assembly of Peoples' Power in southern-central Cienfuegos province. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/5/06)

May 28: Life expectancy in Cuba is reaching 80 years, according to health specialists in the 4th International Conference on Satisfactory Longevity, which took place in Havana in the National Hotel. Doctor Eugenio Selman-Houssein Abdo highlighted the conditions developed in Cuba to maintain good quality of life conditions, including nutrition, health, physical activity, culture, motivation and the environment. "Cuba guarantees education and healthcare free of charge, full access to sports and culture. We also have a high-quality health infrastructure that includes 430 multi-disciplinary teams for gerontology services and a pharmaceutical industry that produces 80 percent of the medications used in the country," Selman stated. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/5/06)

May 29: The Cuban National Peoples' Power Assembly (Congress) will carry out in June a series of national and international activities, including the ordinary session period on June 10 at Havana's International Conference Center. In the meeting, Cuban deputies, assembled in 10 permanent commissions, will analyze the situation of sectors they represent and the work done prior to the session, as well as draw their own conclusions. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/5/06)

May 29: The Cuban rowing duo of Karl Aguilar and Serguei Torres won a gold and silver medal at a World Cup Rowing competition that ended in Duisburg, Germany. Aguilar and Torres won the 1,000 meter event, defeating the Polish team of Tysynski-Tonsky and the Hungarians Metka-Joob. The other Cuban duo, Aldo Pruna and Raidel Ramos finished fourth. (*Granma*, 29/5/06)

May 30: As human rights group Amnesty International launches a global campaign to try to halt censorship of the internet by governments, BBC correspondents report from some countries where web users face difficulties. Cuba has vowed to be a force to be reckoned with in the digital era. Thousands of Cubans are being trained in a new school for computer technology on the outskirts of Havana. Free computer clubs have been set up across the country. Even the smallest rural schools are being provided with their own terminals. But at the same time the government is working

hard to prevent its citizens from surfing the net without restraint. Shops in Havana might appear to sell high-quality computers, but actually making a purchase is impossible for Cubans without special approval, which is rarely granted. Similar restrictions are in place for anyone who might want to open up an account with the state internet service provider. Exceptions include senior government officials, academic researchers, and foreigners. Thousands of Cubans get around their governments restrictions and access the internet via the black market. User IDs and passwords are sold by state employees whose jobs give them legal access. Some log on via home made computers built from smuggled parts. A legal alternative is to go to one of the cyber cafes that are being set up across the country. But these have another barrier - cost. Half an hour surfing the web costs around \$3. That might be comparable to the price in other parts of the world, but in Cuba, where the average salary is \$15 a month, it is substantial. (*BBC*, 30/5/06)

May 30: Elderly Chinese immigrants still walk the streets of Havana's "Barrio Chino," or Chinatown, where they play mahjong and eat lunch together, practice tai chi and read magazines from their homeland. There are just 143 natives of China currently registered in Havana -- most of them men, according to Cristina Nip, a descendant who runs Chinatown's social work program. After decades on the Caribbean island, they say they feel just as Cuban as Chinese. Of the latest flood of immigrants who came to Cuba more than 50 years ago, many have never gone back to visit China, others just once or twice. In 2003, the Cuban and Chinese governments hosted a trip home for five of the immigrants, and plans are in the works to organize visits for about a dozen more, Nip said. (*AP*, 30/5/06)

May 30: With an evening of verse at the hands of a dozen of poets reciting in different languages, the Eleventh International Poetry Festival got underway in the Basilica Menor of the San Francisco de Asis church in Old Havana. Simultaneously, dozens of poets share their work with the public at the provincial offices of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC). UNEAC is sponsoring this event, which is part of the Proyecto Cultural Sur (South cultural project). A number of events took place prior to the inauguration of the poetry festival —dedicated to employing metaphors and verse to save Humanity. (*Granma*, 30/5/06)

May 31: Frail and fed through an intravenous tube, hunger-striking Cuban dissident journalist Guillermo Farinas finished a fourth month defying communist authorities and demanding Internet access even to his death, relatives and dissidents say. The 42-year-old journalist and opponent of Fidel Castro's rule is in hospital in the central province of Villa Clara where he is rejecting solids and liquids, sustained only by an IV solution, they said. Over four months his weight has plunged from 78 to almost 50 kilos (172 to 110 pounds), they added. Fellow dissidents have pleaded urgently with him, in a letter signed by 100 of them, not to keep endangering his life. But he vowed in a letter he released five days ago, that: "My hunger strike will continue until my death unless Cuban authorities give me the right" to get on the internet and obtain information freely. In the letter from Farinas released by dissidents, Farinas pleaded with the new United Nations human rights council to sanction Cuba for denying Cubans the right to communicate and seek information freely. "I demand that the Castro government instal Internet in my home to set a precedent, as all Cubans want to communicate freely with the civilized and democratic world," wrote Farinas. Dissident sources say this strike was his 20th protest hunger strike. (*AFP*, 31/5/06)

May 31: Cuban health authorities approved the use of the first monoclonal antibody obtained from transgenic plants in the country, the Cuban News Agency (ACN) reported. The Center for State Control of Medication Quality (CECMED), attached to the Ministry of Public Health, gave the green light to the use of the Cuban-made monoclonal antibody, as a reagent in the purification of the active pharmaceutical ingredient of the vaccine against hepatitis B (Heberbiovac-HB). The antibody, which is produced by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB) in Havana, contributes to reducing the cost of vaccines. The CECMED certifies that both the monoclonal antibody and the new process to produce it follow nationally- and internationally-accepted quality standards for the pharmaceutical industry. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/5/06)

Economy

May 1: Fidel Castro painted a rosy picture of the Cuban economy, telling more than a million workers and students gathered for the island's annual May Day celebration that the current rate of growth was higher than 12.5 percent. Cuba has grown stronger, Castro said, in part because of the hardships imposed by the US government's long-standing trade embargo against the island. "Thank you, Yankee empire, because you've made us grow, you've made us reach new heights," he said in a speech of more than three hours. Castro said the economy grew 11.8 percent in the first quarter of this year as compared to the same period in 2005. The current rate of growth on the island has since surged to more than 12.5 percent, he said. Cuba uses its own new method to calculating economic growth that takes into account the country's vast social safety net and subsidized services. That makes Cuba's growth figures difficult to compare with those of other countries, prompting the United Nation's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean to leave the island's numbers out of its report last year. Castro reported growth in sectors including construction, transportation and domestic commerce, which has soared 30 percent thanks to an increase in the purchase of household appliances under a government campaign to prod Cubans to buy more energy-efficient devices, he said. (*AP*, 1/5/06)

May 1: Fidel Castro took advantage of the massive May Day celebration in Havana to emphasize the economic achievements of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas that Cuba had signed with Venezuela and which Bolivia has just joined. The accords with Caracas, he said, are "a big step on the road to unity and to true integration among the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean." He said that trade with Caracas exceeded \$3.67 billion last year and in this year's first quarter had already amounted to more than \$1.2 billion. (*EFE*, 1/5/06)

May 1: Cuba's raw sugar output amounted to 1.1 million tonnes as of April 30, Fidel Castro said. That would be below last year's harvest of around 1.3 million tonnes which marked the lowest since 1908. Castro, speaking at a May Day rally, said many mills would grind on into May though he admitted harvesting and milling would become more difficult as summer set in. Summer heat and rain usually begin by May, slowing the harvest and dropping yields. Cuba planned to produce 1.3 million to 1.5 million tonnes, similar to the 2005 crop, and shut down by May. But a slow start and supply problems have meant milling has averaged around 70 percent of capacity, below the 79 percent planned, according to official media reports, Castro said that on February 14, when he held an industry meeting, just 200,000 tonnes had been produced. He praised the efforts since then, in particular planting for future seasons. The Caribbean island consumes a minimum 700,000 tonnes of sugar per year and 400,000 tonnes are destined for a toll agreement with China. Cuba, once the world's biggest raw sugar exporter, has reduced acreage by more than 60 percent since 2003 and dismantled 71 of 156 mills. (*Reuters*, 1/5/06)

May 2: The Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forest Technicians (ACTAF) is solidly behind deforestation activity taking place across the island through a planting program being carried out in every community of the country. Eduardo Martinez, the secretary of Information and Communication of ACTAF, which gathers more than 17,000 experts, said the initiative includes the implementation of urban and rural silviculture, and the promotion of the importance of forests. Martinez highlighted the involvement of young people in the sowing and care of plants in vacant spaces within cities, such as parks, school yards, workplace grounds, and thoroughfares, where trees can provide many benefits. (*AIN*, 2/5/06)

May 2: The National Foreign Trade Bank (Bancomext) followed through on a court order issued by the Italian Court that allowed the bank to recover, initially, more than 35 million dollars' worth of resources deposited in Italy in accounts corresponding to the debt of National Bank of Cuba (Bancuba). (*Notimex*, 3/5/06)

May 4: Russia's economic relationship with the island is regaining the momentum lost following the collapse of the Soviet Union, affirmed Russian Ambassador to Havana Andrei Dimitriev. The Russian diplomat pointed that one of the areas in which his country is interested in expanding its trade relations with Cuba is the transport sector. (*AFP*, 4/5/06)

May 4: All 105 farmers belonging to the “Emilio Herriman” co-operative of credit and services, in Granma, mainly rice producers, announced the loss of more than 58 wagons’ worth of rice due to the decision made by the sector’s leadership to stop the rice harvest in the province, causing the grain to over-ripen and, consequently the loss of this year’s crop. In an open letter, the signatories denounced a number of violations that have been taking place in Granma, which have prompted many to consider selling their land. Issues such as a delay in excess of three months in the payment of the crops on the part of the state, as well as an outstanding debt of approximately 17 million pesos to the local farmers were brought to the fore. Furthermore, arbitrary adjustments in the prices of the product have caused some of the affected farmers to give up on this year’s crop. (*Cubanet*, 4/5/06)

May 6: Fidel Castro handed over the keys of vehicles to two electrical workers representing 101 technicians from Havana’s electricity works. The new Chinese-manufactured motor vehicles will be used in the upgrading of the national electric grid. This was the first consignment of specialized vehicles which will replace the old fleet of gas guzzling Zil 130 and 131, GAZ and KAMAZ trucks. The Cuban leader explained that though the primary purpose of the vehicles was to conserve electrical power, the new more efficient vehicles will also contribute to fuel savings. Castro described these improvements as being vital for humanity, at a time when the planet is burning 84 million barrels of oil daily—with the United States squandering 22 million of that sum— while potential and proven world reserves have begun to shrink. (*Granma*, 5/5/06)

May 7: More than 1,000 firefighters were working to put out a blaze in western Cuba that has destroyed between 600-700 hectares (1,500-1,750 acres) of forest. Brigades of workers from the forest protection corps, or CGB, along with volunteers, were trying to control the blaze stretching from the El Caguazal area, where it started, to Punta de la Sierra in far western Pinar del Rio province, local media reported. The media said that fighting the fire was being complicated by the fact that access to the area was very difficult, adding that steam rollers, cistern trucks, helicopters, and water-carrying airplanes were all being used to try and douse the blaze. An expert with the CGB's fire management department, Raul Gonzalez Rodriguez, said the fire was detected on May 3 and since then it had "affected the (region's) plantations and natural pine forests, according to preliminary reports." (*EFE*, 7/5/06)

May 8: A team of Cuban experts which is in Ghana to assist in the eradication of malaria through the use of Biolarvicides called on the Minister of Health, Major Courage Quashigah (rtd). The team from the Labiofam Grupo Empresarial, a biological research and technological enterprise in Havana, Cuba, specializes in the production of vaccines for plants, animals and humans. Led by Mr Felix Quintanar Pulido, Vice President of Labiofam, they would explore the possibility of constructing a Labiofam plant, conduct a feasibility study and visit most endemic areas during their one-week stay. The Cuban experts would meet Ghanaian stakeholders, have a roadmap and sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the project. (*ANDnetwork* , 8/5/06)

May 9: Cuba has struck a deal with Spanish, Norwegian and Indian oil companies to drill in the mile-deep (1.6-km) waters of the Gulf of Mexico, industry sources and diplomats said. The possibility of striking oil in Cuban waters just 90 miles (120 km) off US shores at a time of soaring fuel prices and rising global demand has set off a political debate over whether US companies, sidelined by American sanctions, should be allowed to explore there. Contracts will be signed May 23 in Havana between Spanish major Repsol YPF, Norway's Norsk Hydro and ONGC Videsh Ltd, the overseas arm of India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp., they said. Drilling will most likely not begin until 2008 due to a tight market for deep-sea exploration rigs as the world's search for oil intensifies under pressure from the high prices, one industry official said. Repsol found good-quality light oil in Cuba's economic exclusion zone of the Gulf of Mexico in 2004, but not in commercially viable quantities. (*Reuters*, 9/5/06)

May 9: Cuba successfully drilled a sloped well more than five kilometers in length from the coast out to sea and proclaimed it a commercial success as it will produce 200 tons of crude oil daily. The Canadian company Sherrit Oil and Gas International and the state-owned oil company Cuba Oil concluded the joint venture’s largest project to date, announced Granma newspaper. (*AP*, 9/5/06)

May 9: In 2005, Cuba received over 2,3 million of tourists, an increase of 13,2% in relation with 2004, the Minister of Tourism, Manuel Marrero, announced. Marrero was opening the 23th Fair of International Tourism, FITCUBA 2006, in Havana. (*Europa Press*, 10/5/06)

May 10: A new exclusive brand of rum will be released shortly onto the international market, as part of the activities to commemorate the centenary of the Pinilla distillery in Manzanillo. The product, to be called Ron Viejo (Old Rum), will be at least twelve years old and aged in American oak casks. This will impart the distinctive aroma and flavor for which the rums from this distillery are famous. The new rum will be sold in ceramic bottles in a presentation pack and will include a set of small ceramic mugs to commemorate the centenary of the distillery and the new brand. (*ACN*, 10/5/06)

May 10: Cuba launched a campaign to attract tourists from Venezuela and China, a goal that has become the focus of the 26th International Tourism Fair. "They are two developing markets and we are putting our money on them," said the Cuban Minister of Tourism, Manuel Marrero, during the opening remarks of the Fair. Canada, Great Britain, Spain and Mexico - followed by Holland, Brazil and Argentina - were the main sources of tourists for Cuba in 2005. (*AFP*, 10/5/06)

May 13: Venezuelan Petroleos de Venezuela, or PDVSA, has joined the hunt for oil in Cuba that has already attracted companies from Canada, Europe, China and India to the communist-ruled island, the government in Havana said. In a statement published in the internet edition of the Communist Party daily Granma, the Cuban government said that state-owned PDVSA had signed an accord with its counterpart, Cuba Petroleo, or Cupet, for exploration and production "in the short and medium term". PDVSA is already heavily involved in downstream activities in Cuba. The government statement said the new accord followed a two-day meeting in Havana of senior PDVSA and Cupet officials. (*Platts Commodity News*, 14/5/06)

May 15: According to released reports, Cuba closed the year 2005 with a fiscal deficit of 4.2 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), whose growth, estimated at 11.8 %, is calculated by the government using parameters different from those established by international standards. The balance sheet for the 2005 budget, reviewed by the Cuban Parliament, indicated an income of 25, 211,4 million pesos and placed expenditures at 27,156,4 million pesos, pointing to a deficit of 1,945 million pesos. The report does not clarify whether the authorities factored in the USD/CUC rate of exchange when making these calculations. (*AFP*, 15/5/06)

May 15: Cuba's central bank has sold 400 million euros in bonds to Cuban and foreign banks, the authority's president said. Francisco Soberon, appearing on television with Fidel Castro, said the one-year bonds were successfully placed in London at an interest rate of seven percent. "They were all bought by foreign and Cuban banks on the very day of the issue," he said. Financial sources told the press the bonds were bought by Cuban banks and "friendly" foreign banks operating in Cuba. Cuba defaulted on its Paris Club debt in 1986 and has been considered one of the world's biggest credit risks since the collapse of the Soviet Union. (*Reuters*, 15/5/06)

May 16: Heavy rainfall forecast across Cuba will most likely end the sugar harvest with output at no more than 1.2 million tonnes, according to scattered media reports and local experts. "At least half of the 42 mills opened this season have already closed, and with summer heat and rain setting in most, if not all, of the remainder should end operations," said a local expert, who requested anonymity. Summer heat and rain usually begin by May, slowing the harvest and dropping yields. Cuba planned to produce 1.3 million to 1.5 million tonnes of raw sugar, similar to the 2005 crop, and shut down by May. Fidel Castro said when the month began that output was 1.1 million tonnes and implied just 100,000 tonnes were produced the last two weeks of April. "Not even a magician could have produced more than an additional 100,000 tonnes this month. With luck we will reach 1.2 million," another local expert said. (*Reuters*, 16/5/06)

May 17: The Public Transit Association (ASTRO) has considerably increased the prices of bus fares. In the case of the route Santiago - Havana it went from 55 to 145 pesos. Fares for the bus trip between Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo escalated from 8 to 24 pesos, while in the case of the routes providing service from Palma Soriano to Holguín, it shot up from 5.50 to 29 pesos, and from 11.50 to 52 pesos for the trip to Camagüey. (*Cubanet*, 17/5/06)

May 17: Fidel Castro said the 2006 sugar harvest was 10 percent below a plan of around 1.3 million tonnes, but said output would have been lower if not for a big push by workers in recent months. "The plan is 100,000 tonnes more, around 10 percent," Castro said in a speech broadcast on Cuban TV. The day before, in a closed-door speech of current output, Castro said output was just 13 percent of plan on February 14, when he held an emergency meeting with the industry. Castro met again with industry leaders earlier this month to review plans to increase raw sugar production in 2007 and 2008 in order to take advantage of high prices. Castro did not say how many mills were still in operation. (*Reuters*, 18/5/06)

May 22: Venezuela's crude sales to Fidel Castro's Cuba stand at 98,000 barrels a day, the Venezuelan oil minister said. "They stand at 98,000 b/d and they should remain there this year," Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez told reporters. The figure is slightly higher than the 90,000 barrels a day announced in early January, and an indication that Venezuela's economic ties with the island nation continue to strengthen. Oil sales to Cuba increased to 90,000 b/d last year, sometimes reaching 92,000 b/d in some months, according to government estimates. (*Dow Jones*, 23/5/06)

May 23: Spanish oil company Repsol YPF teamed up with Norway's Norsk Hydro and India's ONGC Videsh to explore six offshore blocks in Cuban waters where good-quality oil was found two years ago, the companies said. The prospect of finding commercial quantities of oil in Cuban waters of the Gulf of Mexico at a time of soaring prices has set off a political debate over whether US companies, sidelined by American sanctions against Cuba, should be allowed to explore there. Under the deal signed with Cuba's state-owned Cuba Petroleo (Cupet), operator Repsol will have a 40-percent share in the project, while Norsk Hydro and ONGC Videsh will each have 30 percent. Exploration plans include 1,158 square miles (3,000 sq km) of three-dimensional seismic studies to be completed in June, said Egil Gløppen, Hydro Oil & Energy international business development director. But drilling is not expected to begin until 2008 due to a tight market for deep-water exploration rigs as the world's search for oil intensifies to take advantage of tight demand and high prices for crude. (*Reuters*, 23/5/06)

May 23: Cuban and Chinese officials met in Havana to evaluate new ways to enhance cooperation in the field of transportation. The meeting was attended by Cuban Transport Minister Carlos Manuel Pasos; the director of the Cuban Institute of Civil Aeronautics Rogelio Acevedo and the vice-president of China's CATIC company Yang Ying. CATIC company is one of China's major twenty enterprises, out of a total 500 dedicated to import and export operations. (*CAN*, 23/5/06)

May 24: A fair promoting exchange and integration among Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela began in Bolivia's capital. The event, within the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) Latin American integration project that promotes solidarity and mutual social and economic development, includes the participation of a wide gamut of businesses from the three countries, said Julio Montes the Venezuelan ambassador in La Paz. Montes noted that business people from Argentina and Brazil will also be on hand. Those two countries, along with Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela, have opposed the competing Free Trade Area of the Americas plan promoted by the United States. (*Granma*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Bolivia is planning to develop a project on the industrialization of the coca leaf with a donation of a million dollars provided by both Venezuela and Cuba, the vice-minister for the Coca and Global Development, Félix Barra, said. "These two countries would be giving us one million dollars", Barra said to the press. (*El Universal*, 24/5/06)

May 25: Sherritt International Corp. held its annual meeting in Toronto. The bulk of Sherritt's businesses are based in Cuba, where it has nickel and cobalt mining operations, oil and gas production facilities, and an electricity-generating operation using natural gas. The importance of the Cuban assets was reflected by the fact that two ministers from the Cuban government flew to Toronto to attend the Sherritt annual meeting. (*Globe & Mail*, 26/5/06)

May 26: The governments of Laos and Cuba have entered into an agreement to continue cooperation in the health care sector from 2006 to 2010. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in Vientiane by Mr Chaleun Yearpaoher, President of the Laos-Cuba Friendship Association and Mr Pedro Luis Hildalgo Pardo, Deputy Minister for Health in Cuba. Under the agreement, Cuba will dispatch medical and healthcare experts, including heart specialists and obstetricians to help upgrade medical personnel in Laos. (*KPL*, 26/5/06)

May 26: A business fair among Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela closed in the Bolivian capital city of La Paz after two days of activities resulting in business plans estimated at USD 12.1 billion, Bolivian authorities reported. A second event is expected soon. Bolivian Vice-Minister of Industry, Trade and Exports Gustavo Barberi, noted positive achievements in this first event, within the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) and the Peoples' Trade Treaty (TCP). "These are accomplishments and strides. This is what is intended for progress, welfare, reduced poverty, and generation of opportunities. This fair has meant it. In this regard, it has been quite a success," Barbieri told the press. (*El Universal*, 27/5/06)

May 28: The woes of Cuba's service sector, including low quality and slowness, especially in the administrative area, are a drag on the island's economy, with workers wasting countless hours on bureaucratic procedures, the official Juventud Rebelde newspaper reported. Leocadio Pascual Diaz, the Labor and Social Security Ministry's top specialist on the service sector, told the newspaper that current work schedules led to absenteeism, with workers taking time off to deal with paperwork. The newspaper said "everything gets complicated" if to slowness and deficiency in services and procedures were added "the multiple difficulties of transportation and the inopportune and short periods available for acquiring many foods and other products." "You either go to work or stand in line to avoid losing them," Juventud Rebelde said, adding that "the time has come to take a look at the rigid and overprotective structure under which most services were established." (*EFE*, 28/5/06)

May 30: Cuban customs officials seized nearly 25,000 boxes of contraband cigars last year in efforts to decrease smuggling of the world-famous stogies, the island's domestic news agency AIN reported. Travelers to Cuba can leave the island with 23 cigars without receipts, but for any amount above that, they must have proof of purchase from cigar stores approved by Habanos S.A., Cuba's cigar marketing firm. Cigars are one of the island's most important exports, worth about \$340 million annually. But the prestige of Cuban cigars and a rise in tourism in recent years have combined to increase the black market for the product, prompting customs agents to tighten their controls. Eighty percent of the cigar contraband is discovered at Havana's Jose Marti International airport, often found on people traveling to Panama or Mexico, customs official Colonel Pedro Pupo told AIN. Officials seize the rest at airports in Santiago de Cuba, Varadero and Holguin, he said. (*AP*, 30/5/06)

Exile Community

May 3: Sylvia Iriondo, president of the exile group Mothers and Women Against Repression and for Cuba, said in Brussels that "the European Union policy of dialogue with Cuba has been a great failure, since it has only served to strengthen the Castro regime and continue the repression." "The more the measures are eased, the more the repression increases in Cuba," Iriondo said. Iriondo, who visited the European Parliament at the invitation of Transnational Radical Party Eurodeputy Marco Panella, was accompanied by Angel de Fana, a former political prisoner, Manuel

Vazquez Portal, one of the 75 dissidents jailed in the spring of 2003, and Blanca Gonzalez, the mother of jailed journalist Normando Hernandez. (*EFE*, 3/5/06)

May 9: More than a labor of love, new movie "The Lost City" was a labor of life for Cuban-born actor Andy Garcia. Garcia, 50, directed, produced, scored and starred in the film about pre-communist Cuba that begins playing in theaters around the United States after a limited run in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. The actor, whose movies include "Ocean's Eleven" and "Ocean's Twelve," labored 18 years to raise money and make "Lost City," but he said the seeds of his story go back to when he was 5-1/2 and fled the country and the communist regime under leader Fidel Castro. Garcia's greatest achievement, he said, is that a movie about Cuba and its people exists at all. "There was a story waiting to be told," he said. (*Reuters*, 9/5/06)

May 12: Cuban exile groups and energy experts deemed as impossible and politically-motivated bills submitted to the US Congress that would allow American companies to negotiate a partnership with Cuba for joint oil exploration of its coasts. Alfredo Mesa, Executive Director of the Cuban-American National Foundation, denounced the bills, claiming that "their only interest in Cuba is economic." "They are not concerned about the abuse of human rights in Cuba," he explained. The initiatives were sponsored by the Republican legislators Jeff Flake and Larry Craig. (*AP*, 15/5/06)

May 16: Young Cuban Americans gathered around a telephone at Princeton University in April to hear Rolando Rodriguez Lobaina talk fervently from his home in Cuba, about growing discontent among the island's youths and their yearning for freedom. Three days later, Cuban authorities arrested the dissident leader. They held him until May 12. Rodriguez was released after Raices de Esperanza, the Cuban-American youth group that he addressed at Princeton, mounted an international campaign to denounce the Cuban government for oppressing political discourse and to demand that he be freed from prison. Rodriguez, director of the Center for Alternative Studies for the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, delivered an impassioned speech to Raices in a conference call with his brother, Nestor, in late April. "Freedom of expression, freedom of association, free access to sources of information, the right to investigate, to doubt, that is simply enough to motivate our struggle," Rodriguez told about 100 Raices members. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/5/06)

May 27: Cuba's daily newspaper Granma observed the passing of Dr. Eduardo Bernabé Ordaz, chronicling his climb from shoeshine boy to guerrilla fighter and then head of the Psychiatric Hospital of Havana for some 40 years. The obituary, however, omitted mention of allegations that political dissidents were given electroshocks as a form of torture at Ordaz's hospital, better known as Mazorra. "He was a tool in the bloody machine to destroy people's minds," said former political prisoner Jorge Alejandro Ferrer, 60, of Southwest Dade. "I was tortured in this place where they were supposed to cure people. My life was destroyed in that place." In published reports over the years, Ordaz acknowledged holding dissidents but for legitimate reasons. But Armando Lago, co-author of the 1991 book, "The Politics of Psychiatry in Revolutionary Cuba", said Ordaz had signed an agreement with Cuba's State Security department giving it control over "punishment pavilions" at Mazorra. 'Dissidents held there would get electroshock between their legs. When the families came to complain, he'd say, 'I have no control over what goes on over there,' " Lago said. Witnesses, including Ferrer, said Ordaz also used patients as household help. Although there was no proven therapeutic value to the hospital orchestra or sports teams, life for the true mental patients was probably pleasant, Lago said. The torture, he alleged, was reserved for the 5 percent of patients who were political dissidents. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/5/06)

Foreign Affairs

May 1: The Mexican Federal Preventive Police (PFP) reported the arrest of 17 undocumented Cuban emigrants during two inspections carried out in the states of Chiapas and Veracruz. In an unprecedented move, a high-ranking National

Institute of Migration (UNM) official acknowledged that Mexican Immigration authorities have opened at least 20 cases against UNM employees suspected of alleged involvement in the trafficking of Cuban emigrants. (*AFP*, 2/5/06)

May 2: The Organization of American States (OAS) is expressing concern about the human-rights situations in Venezuela and Cuba. In its chapter about Cuba, the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed concern about the lack of free and fair elections "based on universal suffrage and secret balloting as an expression of sovereignty of the people" in that Caribbean nation. The OAS report recounted a series of acts of harassment carried out against political dissidents of the Cuban government during 2005. The human-rights commission said it received information on the continued practice of the Cuban courts to judge the accused based on ideological and political criteria. The commission said it also continued to receive reports of acts of repression and censorship against those wishing to express themselves freely in Cuba. Another abuse in Cuba, according to the commission, concerned the harsh prison conditions of most prisoners in that country, in particular, of political dissidents. A group of 75 dissidents sentenced in April 2003 remains imprisoned under poor conditions, the commission said. [[IACHR Annual Report: Cuba](#)] (*US Fed News*, 2/5/06)

May 2: Cuba remained in 2005 the Latin American nation where news-gatherers have most to fear from the state, holding onto the dubious distinction of being "the world's second-largest prison for journalists" after China, according to Reporters Without Borders. The wave of repression launched by the Castro regime in the spring of 2003 continued last year, as three additional independent reporters joined the ranks of the 21 jailed at the beginning of the crackdown, the Paris-based group says in its annual report. RSF, as the organization is known, is releasing the document to coincide with the observance of World Press Freedom Day. (*EFE*, 2/5/06)

May 2: Honduras is looking into whether its extensive territory is used for the illegal trafficking of Cubans headed to the United States, reported Foreign Minister Milton Jiménez. According to Jiménez, "contact is being made with the United States and Cuba to investigate this issue so that it can be stopped immediately". (*AP*, 3/5/06)

May 3: The Cuba entry in the online reference site Wikipedia shows just how difficult it is for the volunteer-run website to tackle politically charged subjects. One editor complained that Havana sympathizers were transforming a scholarly enterprise into "their own private Fidel Castro fan page." A user was tossed out after threatening to sue another for libel. The fuss is over the Cuba entry in Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia created, edited and administered entirely by volunteers with the altruistic purpose of becoming a Web-based knowledge repository for humanity. But the Cuba entry, like those on President Bush and abortion, has been snared in intense political divisions over everything from the impact of US sanctions on the communist-ruled island to whether it should have a separate section on its human rights record. Russia and North Korea do not. There have been so many dueling edits -- 30 entries on April 27 alone -- that the article has been placed off-limits to first-time or unregistered users. The article has notices alerting readers that the neutrality of four sections is under dispute. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/5/06)

May 3: A week after being beaten up by Castro supporters, Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque urged the European Union to modify its policy toward the Communist-ruled island, saying the bloc's suspension of diplomatic sanctions encouraged the regime to step up repression. Roque, who was attacked in Havana April 26 by a mob she said had "the go-ahead from the regime," took part in a teleconference staged by Cuban exiles at the seat of the European Parliament in Brussels. "We're in a high-risk situation," Roque said, adding, ahead of the review of the common EU policy toward Cuba set for next month, that the European offer of a dialogue with Havana had not only failed to lead to a softening of the Castro regime's position but had actually resulted in its hardening. "Everything has indisputably worsened," Roque said. In January 2005, the Council of Europe accepted a Spanish proposal and lifted diplomatic sanctions against the Cuban government imposed in 2003 in response to the arrest and conviction of 75 dissidents. (*EFE, Europa Press*, 3/5/06)

May 3: The government of President Vicente Fox will request Cuba that three fishermen convicted in Havana on human trafficking charges be allowed to serve their sentences in Mexican territory. "What the Mexican Foreign Office has been requesting is that these Mexican fishermen be allowed to serve their sentences in national territory," said the spokesman of the presidency, Rubén Aguilar. (*BBC*, 3/5/06)

May 3: A summary of the visit to Cuba and their joint communiqué, including with Fidel Castro, of Presidents Hugo Chavez (Venezuela) and Evo Morales (Bolivia) is circulating throughout the United Nations. The document includes the accord signed by the three presidents on April 28 and 29 for the application of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and the Caribbean (ALBA) and the People's Trade Treaty. The press note distributed by the permanent Cuban mission to the UN is titled "A New Model of Integration in Latin America and the Caribbean based on equity and respect, and sustained in brotherhood and solidarity". (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/06)

May 3: An International Forum on Solidarity with Cuba held in Havana proved the increasing support offered by trade unions around the world to the cause of the Cuban people. The event was attended by over 1,000 delegates from 70 nations who defended the right of the Cuban people to self-determination —without US interference— and learned of the proposed world campaign to be carried out between September 12 and October 6 to free the Cuban Five, anti-terrorist fighters imprisoned in the US, Granma daily reported. In a special address, Ricardo Alarcon, president of the Cuban National Assembly, alerted the unionists of the need to provide information about the true situation of people's struggles through the alternative media, given the deluge of distorted news flooding from the corporate media. (*ACN*, 3/5/06)

May 5: Cuba put forward its candidacy to the recently created UN Human Rights Council. In a press release issued in New York, Cuba assured that all of its experience would be transposed to the new Human Rights Council to be used to avoid the "pernicious confrontational practices and unjust condemnation against underdeveloped nations," according to a report by Prensa Latina news agency. Cuba is among the eleven Latin American and Caribbean nations that so far have made public their interest in being elected to one of the eight seats assigned to the region in the new Human Rights Council which will replace the UN Human Rights Commission. (*Granma*, 6/5/06)

May 5: Cuba's national ballet is about to receive an injection of Alberta artistic flair. Alberta Ballet artistic director Jean Grand-Maitre will fly to Havana next month to set Mozart to dance for the National Ballet of Cuba. "It's thrilling for me, because the Cuban National Ballet is one of the finest companies in the world," Grand-Maitre says. "Their school trains brilliant dancers (a result of the Russian cultural infusion during the heyday of Fidel Castro) and I've had a chance to work in Germany and the US with many of the wonderful dancers Alonso herself has trained." His involvement comes at the request of Cuba ballet director Alicia Alonso. The company will premiere the piece in October as part of the 20th International Ballet Festival of Havana. (*Calgary Herald*, 5/5/06)

May 8: Fresh from advocating an "anti-imperialist" bloc in the Andean region, the Socialist president of Bolivia met with the left-leaning nationalist candidate in Peru's upcoming presidential runoff election. The meeting between President Evo Morales and Peruvian hopeful Ollanta Humala took place at the inauguration of a Cuban-funded eye clinic in Copacabana, a town that overlooks Bolivia's portion of Lake Titicaca. The site of the meeting, amid the brilliant colors of Andean Indian celebrations, was Copacabana's Municipal Hospital, where an eye clinic had been established with Cuban support. It is the fourth such facility opened in Bolivia with the help of the Castro government since Morales became president in January. Two additional such centers remain to be set up. In the few months that doctors have been working at the centers, including Cubans and Bolivians who attended medical school on the Caribbean island, the medical personnel have performed successful operations on 7,306 patients, according to the new Cuban ambassador to La Paz, Rafael Dausa, who was on hand for the occasion. The diplomat had been Havana's deputy foreign minister before being appointed to La Paz, a sign of the interest Castro has in converting Bolivia into a bastion of his foreign policy. (*EFE*, 8/5/06)

May 8: Since the beginning of 2006, a number of 138 Cuban rafters have been rescued from Mexican waters, in the Caribbean, and other 28 Cubans have been intercepted in land. This number is more than a third of the 364 immigrants intercepted last year (276 were rafters), according to data provided by Edgar Orozco, representative of the Migration National Institute in Cancun. (*AFP*, 9/5/06)

May 9: Cuba secured a seat on the new UN Human Rights Council, which replaced an agency where abusers were often members, obtaining the seventh spot out of eight reserved for Latin American and Caribbean nations. Venezuela failed to obtain a spot on the 47-member body, which will start its sessions June 19 amidst expectations that it will mark a departure from its discredited and defunct predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights. The other Latin American nations that secured seats, in the order of votes obtained, are Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Uruguay and Ecuador. Brazil, the top vote-getter in the group, garnered 165 votes. Cuba obtained 135 votes. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/5/06)

May 9: The executive secretary of the UN Convention against Desertification and Drought, Hama Arba Diallo, expressed his support for the setting up of a Regional Training Center in Cuba for sustainable management of land. "We are enthusiastic about the Cuban project to set up an institution in the province of Las Tunas to train specialists from the different Caribbean islands", the UN expert told the local press. Arba Diallo said that they are planning to inaugurate the center next July, following the launching of a campaign for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification in the Caribbean, at a ceremony at Havana's Melia Cohiba Hotel. The campaign is a UN initiative in the face of the serious phenomena currently affecting the world and small island nations in particular. (*ACN*, 9/5/06)

May 9: A Pan-European Solidarity with Cuba Conference began in Vienna, prior to the fourth Europe-Latin America-Caribbean Summit of Chiefs of State and Government to start on May 11. The conference, attended by delegates from several European countries, aims to draw up, discuss, and approve resolutions for increased support with the Cuban Revolution. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/5/06)

May 10: Vice President Carlos Lage Davila heads the Cuban delegation to the 4th EU-Latin America/Caribbean Summit to take place May 11-12 in Vienna, Austria. Also representing the island is Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, vice ministers Abelardo Moreno, Eumelio Caballero and other officials of the Foreign Ministry. The main theme of the forum is "Strengthening the bi-regional strategic association." Parallel to the EU-Latin America/Caribbean Summit, the "Linking Alternatives" people's summit is also taking place in Vienna from May 10-13. Cuba will be represented by personalities of the sciences, culture, sports and social and mass organizations. (*Granma*, 10/5/06)

May 10: Cuba demonstrates to all peoples of the world how to rule with dignity and sovereignty, Bolivia's President Evo Morales said during a news conference in Vienna, Austria. The Bolivian statesman is attending the fourth Europe-Latin America and Caribbean (EU-LAC) Ministerial Summit. Responding to a question by a Miami based journalist, Morales categorically stated his government does not think of Cuba as these gentlemen do and, on the contrary, he and the Bolivian people admire the island and its leader Fidel Castro. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/5/06)

May 10: An "alternative" summit to the one being held by the European Union and the Latin American and Caribbean countries kicked off in Vienna by clearly rejecting any free trade links between the two blocs and hailing Bolivia's nationalization of its energy sector. Among the representatives who spoke at the anti-summit proceedings were Joao Pedro Stedile of Brazil's Landless Movement, who rejected what he called the neoliberal policy that will be discussed at the official summit, adding that it is designed "to control our biodiversity, our water, our seeds." The opposition to the trade pacts is based on the "sufferings of the people of Mexico" after the signing of the NAFTA free trade accord with the United States and Canada, which some say has proven that "you can't compete on an equal basis," said Cuba's Aleida Guevara, the daughter of iconic guerrilla Ernesto "Che" Guevara. (*EFE*, 10/5/06)

May 11: The European Union's commissioner for development called on the Cuban government in Vienna to grant greater civil and political rights to its citizens. The exhortation from Commissioner Louis Michel to Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage came hours before the inauguration of the EU-Latin America summit meeting. In what EU and diplomatic spokespersons described as a "cordial" meeting, Michel told Lage and Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque that the bloc was unsatisfied with the development of the human rights situation on the island since European diplomatic sanctions against Fidel Castro's government were lifted in January 2005. Despite the lack of advances, however, Michel still backs continued "political dialogue between the EU and Cuba," the commissioner told the press. For their part, Lage and Perez Roque criticized what they termed Europe's "acquiescence" to U.S. wishes concerning relations with the Communist-ruled island. (*EFE*, 11/5/06)

May 11: Cuban Vice President, Carlos Lage, said in Vienna that the European Union "doesn't have any reason or moral to sanction Cuba". In statements broadcast by Cuban TV, Lage was referring to an announcement made by the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ursula Plassnik, about the June review of the EU policy toward the island regarding the situation of human rights. (*EFE*, 11/5/06)

May 15: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque has welcomed the Vienna declaration issued by the EU-Latin America Caribbean summit as "an important political victory" for rejecting the US blockade of Cuba. He said there were still "grave differences of opinion" with the EU because, as he said, the EU failed to pursue its own policy and followed the US policy on Cuba. He said the EU "lacked credibility" because it demanded respecting human rights from Cuba, while it failed to criticize the USA over Guantanamo. "There are still grave differences of opinion, because the EU does not pursue its own policy towards Cuba. It prefers to follow the United States. EU sanctions against Cuba were suspended in 2005. They had prohibited establishing political and cultural contacts. And they opened the doors of EU embassies to the mercenaries of the United States. If the sanctions are not lifted completely, our relations will not improve by a millimeter", Perez Roque said. He quoted Fidel Castro as saying that he was the proudest man in the world because there were people like Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales. Roque added: "The Cuban revolution rejuvenates in cooperating with these countries." (*Der Standard*, 15/5/06)

May 16: Reporters Without Borders condemned the brutal and unfair arrests of Odelín Alfonso, a regular contributor to Cubanet and Milisa Valle Ricardo of the Jóvenes sin Censura news agency on 13 May 2006 and the continued detention of Alfonso without any specific charges being put to him. "These arrests reveal once again an unfairness and denial of justice. No real reason exists to explain these repressive acts. It is pure and simple intimidation directed against peaceful opposition figures whose fate varies, apparently, according to the mood of their jailers," said Reporters Without Borders, adding, "We hope that Odelín Alfonso will be quickly released". (*RWB*, 16/5/06)

May 17: During a telephone conversation with Fidel Castro, Iran's President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad expressed gratitude for the stances adopted by Cuba to support the Iranian nation's rights. The president said that, "Those [major powers], which intended to deny the Iranian nation its absolute right, have failed in legal and rational terms". "I hope that during the next summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Cuba, big steps will be taken to realize the aspirations of this movement", Mr Ahmadinezhad added. Fidel Castro, for his part, said that, "We consider it our duty to defend Iran's rights at various international forums; and we believe that the world's public opinion is becoming closer to Iran's stances daily". (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 17/5/06)

May 17: Cuban doctors deployed to Pakistan after last year's devastating earthquake concluded their aid mission to the country after treating 1.7 million patients, official media outlets reported. The work of the Cuban medical personnel is now being continued by 670 Pakistani specialists who are working in the locations where the Cuban field hospitals were set up, according to statements by Cuba's assistant foreign affairs minister, Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla. Rodriguez Parrilla, who was on hand in Pakistan to see off the last Cuban medical brigade on its homeward flight to the Communist island, said that Havana's doctors had trained more than 700 Pakistani medical students and 32 nurses. (*EFE*, 17/5/06)

May 17: Three Spanish associations organized a virtual conference between Spanish and Ibero-American journalists and Cuban dissidents Miriam Leyva, Óscar Espinosa Chepe and Jorge Olivera Castillo. One of the topics discussed was Guillermo Fariñas's hunger strike to protest for the lack of free internet access on the island. The three Cubans connected to internet at the US Interests Section in Havana, following refusals by several European foreign offices, including the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to facilitate the meeting. (*Libertad Digital*, 17/5/06)

May 18: Nicaraguan authorities detained eight illegal immigrants, including three children, in the border with Honduras. The Cubans were sent to migration authorities, after having filed an application for refugee status, Migration vice-director, Nubia Barbosa, said to the press. (*AFP*, 19/5/06)

May 18: Bolivia's House of Representatives ratified the designation of Amazonian indian Saúl Chávez Orozco as the new ambassador to Cuba. Chávez Orozco is a leader of the Yucararé minority ethnic group in the Amazon, one of Bolivia's 37 original indigenous nations. Senator Gastón Cornejo, from the ruling party Movimiento Al Socialismo, said that Chávez Orozco's main mission is to know about "the methodology" that Fidel Castro's government has applied to rule in Cuba for over 40 years "with dignity, in spite of the US embargo". (*AFP*, 18/5/06)

May 18: Local Mexican specialists claimed that the cataract surgical procedures performed in Cuba are conducted with older technology. Héctor Noé Medina López, Coahuila representative before the Mexican Ophthalmology Council, said he did not know why patients are being sent to Cuba when in the island cataract surgery is still conducted using the mininucleous technique, which stopped being performed a long time ago in Saltillo. (*Palabra*, 18/5/06)

May 19: Palestine's ambassador to Cuba, Ibrahim Al Zeben, expressed his recognition to the Cuban people, their Socialist Revolution and Fidel Castro for the support offered to the Palestinian cause. In an interview with *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper in Havana, Al Zeben, denounced that the United States, European Union and Israel are using economic pressure against the Palestinian people over their democratic election of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas in that country's most recent legislative elections. (*CAN*, 19/5/06)

May 21: The Evangelical Czech Brethren Church sent a letter to Fidel Castro with a request to release immediately Cuban human rights activists. The letter demands that Cuban authorities respect the citizens who are seeking dignified life in freedom to the benefit of their own country. The synod of the church, which ended in Prague, also informed the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other international church organizations about the step. It has called on them to pay attention thoroughly and persistently to the discriminated Christians and persecuted activists in Cuba and not to limit their ecumenical contacts to official representatives, recognized by the regime. A few days ago, the Czech Brethren organized a seminar on Cuba as an appeal for the European and global ecumenical movement. (*CTK*, 21/5/06)

May 22: The Cuban government has promised to finance 1,000 Pakistani medical students for September. The offer was made by Bruno Rodrigues Parrilla, Cuba's First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, in a meeting in Islamabad with Federal Minister for Education Javed Ashraf. The scholarships would be for 6 years, and the selected students will have to learn Spanish language in the first year, and during the next five years they would study medicine to get the graduation degree. The scholarships would be distributed among the provinces and the regions, whereas special quota would be reserved for students from earthquake-affected areas and for low-income families. (*Business Recorder*, 23/5/06)

May 22: Shortly after his arrival in Havana, St. Lucia's Prime Minister, Kenny D. Anthony, said he was in Cuba to embrace his "Cuban family". Anthony is visiting the island at the invitation of Fidel Castro. The Santa Lucia PM, who is accompanied by a large delegation, was welcomed at the "Jose Marti" International Airport by the Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas. He has a full agenda which includes visits to places of scientific, economic, cultural and social interest. In an exchange with the Cuban press, Anthony said that the people of St. Lucia are very moved by the

tremendous support they have received from Cuba, especially by "Operacion Milagro", an eye surgery and treatment program known in the English-speaking Caribbean as "Vision Now." (*Granma*, 23/5/06)

May 22: Fidel Castro stressed the need to boost relations between the communist parties of North Korea and Cuba. Castro met with an official delegation of the Korean Workers' Party [KWP] led by Kim Ki-nam, secretary of its Central Committee, at the Palace of the Revolution. Also present were members of the KWP delegation, Pak Tong-joon, and the North Korean ambassador to Cuba. The Cuban part included, Carlos Lage Davila, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba and vice-president of the Council of State of Cuba, Fernando Ramirez, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, and other party officials. (*KCNA*, 22/5/06)

May 23: Human rights abuses were widespread in Latin America last year with slave labor in Bolivia, government critics reportedly harassed in Venezuela and dissidents intimidated in Cuba, Amnesty International said in a report. "There were continued concerns that critics of the government were being harassed" in Cuba, "including through the criminal justice system," it said. Fidel Castro's regime maintained "tight control" over its critics and nearly 70 "prisoners of conscience" remained jailed. "There was increasing international concern about Cuba's failure to improve civil and political rights," the report said. [[AI Report 2006: Cuba](#)] (*AFP*, 23/5/06)

May 23: Fidel Castro and St. Lucian Prime Minister, Kenny Anthony, held official talks at Havana's Palace of the Revolution. In a cordial atmosphere, both leaders and their respective delegations exchanged about subjects of national interest and bilateral cooperation, as well as on international issues. The Cuban leader was accompanied by Vice President Carlos Lage; Yadira Garcia, Basic Industry Minister; Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, as well as the Minister of Foreign Investment and Cooperation Martha Lomas; and Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, among other officials. The St. Lucian Prime Minister was joined by his Foreign Minister, Petrus Compton, the Minister of Health, Human Services, Family Affairs and Gender Relations, John Odum and other members of his delegation. (*Granma*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Fidel Castro came out in support of a free program that treats poor Latin American patients with eye diseases, and discredited a complaint presented to local authorities by Uruguayan physicians against Cuban doctors. "Who are the enemies of this project? Rich ophthalmologists!", Castro said during a TV appearance. (*AP*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Cuba is trying to focus on its international musical work by collaborating with alternative record companies, according to reports in Havana. Ciro Benemelis, President of the International Cubadisco Fair, said "Despite our limitations we have notable experience that allows us to lead projects and dreams." Those initiatives could be directed by the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a project of emancipation and solidarity headed by Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia, according to the high-ranking official, who is also a musician. "It is necessary to create an Internet side of Latin and Caribbean music," Benemelis said. (*Prensa Latina*, 24/5/06)

May 24: A group of 17 Cuban immigrants arrived in Honduras on their way to the United States, local authorities said. The group of thirteen men and four women arrived at Cocalito, Colon province, in the Nicaraguan border. This community is 400 km north of Tegucigalpa. (*AP*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Cuba said the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), created 40 years ago as an alternative to a bipolar world under the East-West conflict, should become a forum where the rights of the Third World countries are safeguarded. "NAM is more necessary than ever before", Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Perez Roque said. "The fact that there is only one superpower in this world demands actions from the Movement". The Cuban minister said that the Havana Summit in September will gather from 50 to 60 heads of state. Latin American countries like, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and Venezuela are members of NAM. According to Perez Roque, Cuba's participation in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) –an alternative to the Free Trade Agreement

sponsored by the United States and comprised of also by Venezuela and Bolivia—has its focus on Latin America, “while the focus of NAM is global”, he added. (*AFP, Reuters*,

May 24: UK Leicestershire Cares has developed a scheme designed to prepare students for interviews by enabling them to practise answering the questions they can expect to be asked. Following a visit to Leicestershire Cares by the Cuban Minister of Education, the programme is set to be adopted in Cuba. Members of the Cuban delegation were attending a conference at the University of Leicester when they learned of the scheme. They were so impressed with the idea of students being given help to prepare for interviews before they leave school that they have decided to consider it for their own education system. (*Leicester Mercury*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Controversial British MP George Galloway made a surprise appearance on live Cuban television. He defended Fidel Castro against allegations made by a US magazine that he has amassed a personal fortune of \$900m (£477m). Mr Galloway said the article was part of a "Yankee imperialist" conspiracy. Castro has said the claim in Forbes magazine is "rubbish" and that he would resign if anyone proved he had a single dollar in a foreign bank account. (*BBC*, 25/5/06)

May 24: Fifty-seven Cuban immigrants who arrived in Mexico in homemade boats were sent back to the island in a flight. The immigrants, who came from almost all Cuban provinces, arrived to Mexican territory in small groups and were detained at the new federal prison for undocumented immigrants in the state of Chiapas. (*Cubanet*, 24/5/06)

May 26: Carlos Lage was welcomed by Bolivian President Evo Morales in La Paz. Vice-president Lage arrived in the South American country on a working visit, and he will participate in the signing of cooperation accords between Bolivia and Venezuela, as well as in a public gathering that will take place in the locality of Shinahota, in the Chapare region with the attendance of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Upon his arrival, Lage told the press that, “we came to take new steps toward solidarity integration”. “This is prove of our commitment toward achieving this goal”, he added. Lage and Morales held talks at the Government Palace and later were greeted by a crowd, gathered across from the building, with shouts of Long-live Cuba and Long-live Fidel. Lage arrived in La Paz in a Venezuelan plane. (*AP, ACN*, 26/5/06)

May 27: The Medical Association of Bolivia (CMB) has called a strike of its 14,000 members for June 1 to protest the contracting of Cuban doctors and medical technicians by the administration of Socialist President Evo Morales, the association announced.

Medical Association President Fernando Arandia told the press that the measure was approved by the National Medical Council, made up of presidents of professional associations in the sector, which has been meeting for a week. Arandia said that the strike is "the only way to protest against the government's health-care policy which does not make use of Bolivia's own doctors." The CMB says that the Bolivian government pays for the Cubans' stay in the form of food and lodging, a system not applied to Bolivian doctors who are willing to work under the same conditions in order to have employment. (*EFE*, 27/5/06)

May 29: Cuba confirmed its support to Iran in its efforts to master atomic technology with peaceful objectives, in an interview between Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki and a high official from the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). Fernando Ramirez, head of the PCC International Relations Department, spoke with Mottaki about the Non-Aligned Movement, bilateral ties and nuclear energy. Iranian news agency IRNA said Mottaki spoke about the common ideas of all Non-Aligned countries, which defend freedom and justice. He said that in the case of Tehran and Havana, there is continuity and increasingly greater links, a reflection of the solidarity between two countries that love freedom. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/5/06)

May 29: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque declared the support of his government and nation for Iran's legal right to access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and expressed their solidarity with the Iranian nation.

Speaking at a meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki, on the sidelines of the foreign ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kuala Lumpur, Perez Roque said that Iran's stance to safeguard its right to access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes is legitimate. A two-day meeting of NAM foreign ministers kicked off in Putrajaya, political capital of Malaysia. The foreign ministers will discuss the agenda fixed by NAM's senior officials and decide on the agenda of the 14th summit of the movement slated to be held in Havana, Cuba, on September 11-16. (*IRNA*, 30/5/06)

May 30: Bolivian President Evo Morales is due to open in Escoma, on the border with Peru, the first of 20 top-technology hospitals donated by Cuba to Bolivia, the governmental headquarters reported. Armando Garrido, coordinator of the Cuban medical brigade in Bolivia, stated that the Aymara Hospital is provided with a medicinal gas system, labs with gasometry and fixed and portable ray-x equipment. The center, like the other 19, will have one intensive therapy room with four beds, as well as services of obstetrics, neonatology, digestive endoscopy and a fully-equipped operation room. Qualified Cuban staff and paramedics will work in the hospital and the donation also includes maintenance of medical equipment, medicine and materials, said Garrido. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/5/06)

May 30: The European Union is not pushing hard enough for democratic change in Cuba, a former Czech president said, and called on the newest EU member states to grab a leading role in defending human rights on the communist island. Vaclav Havel and former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis -- both dissidents in their countries under the Communist regime that fell in 1989 -- spoke at a conference organized by the Prague-based International Committee for Democracy in Cuba. The committee was formed in 2003 and its members include former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. (*AP*, 30/5/06)

May 30: The EU could do more in support of human rights in Cuba and other dictatorial regimes in the world, Czech ex-president Vaclav Havel said at a Brussels conference devoted to the EU policy towards Cuba. Havel said the Czech Republic should not present itself as "a poor relative" in the EU, but it should act as a full-fledged member who has something to offer. Apart from elementary human solidarity and civil aid to people in totalitarian countries, international and institutional solidarity is needed as well," Havel said. "In this respect, the EU could do more not only in relation to Cuba but also other dictatorships in the world," he said. (*CTK*, 31/5/06)

May 30: Bolivian President Evo Morales said that he will take a cake made with coca leaves to his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro, when he visits Havana on August 13, the latter's 80th birthday. "Since we've been invited, why don't a few of us go to the birthday (celebration) and spend a day with comrade Fidel," Morales said in a speech in the town of Escoma to inaugurate the first of 20 rural hospitals financed by Cuba in the Andean country. "But what can we take him as a present? We could take him a poncho, we could take him a 'chicote,'" a whip with which to herd cattle, Morales said. "The coca growers say, 'Why don't we take a coca cake to Fidel?' So, the coca growers will (...) go with a coca cake," he continued to the laughter of the crowd. Evo called Castro "our wise grandfather," and he asked the crowd - most of whom were Aymara Indian peasants - for a round applause for the Cuban leader. (*EFE*, 30/5/06)

May 30: Peru's jailed former spy chief Vladimiro Montesinos has returned to the political stage, alleging in a 37-page booklet apparently written in prison that presidential candidate Ollanta Humala is a pawn of Cuban and Venezuelan intelligence. The timing of the book's publication, five days before the election runoff, raised suspicions that it's part of the dirty campaigning by Humala and his opponent, former President Alan Garcia, who have traded stinging insults in recent days. But several intelligence experts say Montesinos, who was captured in Venezuela in 2001 and is being tried on dozens of criminal charges, may simply want to become a political player again in Peru. The book, entitled "Chess Pawn," alleges that Cuba's Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez want to use Humala, a left-leaning nationalist, as part of a strategy to reduce U.S. influence in Latin America. (*AP*, 30/5/06)

May 30: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the detention of independent Cuban journalist Armando Betancourt who was arrested while covering the evictions of dozens of families from their homes in the

central city of Camaguey, sources told CPJ. On 23 May, authorities forcefully evicted families allegedly occupying homes illegally, according to local sources. Betancourt, a reporter for the news agency Nueva Prensa Cubana in Camaguey, was arrested along with several people who were protesting the evictions, a relative told CPJ. The journalist did not participate in the protests, according to several sources. (*BBC*, 31/5/06)

May 31: Local Mexican specialists claimed that the cataract surgical procedures performed in Cuba are conducted with older technology. Héctor Noé Medina López, Coahuila representative before the Mexican Ophthalmology Council, said he did not know why patients are being sent to Cuba when in the island cataract surgery is still conducted using the mininucleous technique, which stopped being performed a long time ago in Saltillo. (*Palabra*, 31/5/06)

May 31: Reporters Without Borders blasted Cuba for jailing a reporter for his coverage of the eviction by police of homeless individuals who had taken up residence in a drainage pipe. "We firmly condemn the arbitrary arrest and solitary confinement" of Armando Betancourt, who reports for the Miami-based Nueva Prensa Cubana news Web site, RSF, as the Paris-based organization is known, said in a statement. The press watchdog group said that, by arresting Betancourt, Cuban authorities "are highlighting their determination to censor news and information. Betancourt must be freed at once." (*EFE*, 31/5/06)

May 31: Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi reiterated his full confidence that Cuba will successfully assume the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and will continue the task of revitalizing it. The prime minister made these statements during his meeting with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque shortly after the official inauguration here of the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Coordination Bureau. Badawi had words of affection and praise for Fidel Castro and expressed his satisfaction at his being able to once again lead the Movement during a complex international situation. (*Granma Internacional*, 31/5/06)

Terrorism

May 20: An important United Nations panel roundly criticized the United States on Friday for its treatment of terrorism suspects, and called for shutting down the detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The panel's criticism came as military officials at Guantánamo disclosed the most serious disturbances by prisoners there since the camp opened four years ago, and reported new suicide attempts that had left two detainees hospitalized and unconscious. Military officials said the prisoners' actions were apparently aimed at raising political pressure on the Bush administration over its detention policy. Pressure was also ratcheted up by the report issued in Geneva by the United Nations Committee Against Torture. (*The New York Times*, 20/5/06)

May 29: Seventy-five prisoners at the US naval base in Guantanamo were on a hunger strike, joining a few who have refused food and been force-fed since August, a military official said. Cmdr. Robert Durand, a spokesman for the Guantanamo detention operation, called the hunger strike an attempt by the prisoners to gain media attention and pressure the United States to release about 460 men held there as enemy combatants. Hunger strikes have flared periodically since the first suspected al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners were taken to the US base in southeast Cuba in 2002. (*Reuters*, 29/5/06)

May 31: At a UN Security Council meeting, Cuba denounced the high cost of innumerable terrorist actions undertaken against the island over the last 47 years, mostly organized from the United States. Speaking at a meeting on threats caused by terrorism, Cuban alternate Ambassador to the UN, Ileana Nuñez recalled the 3,478 deaths and 2,099 wounded and/or permanently physically impaired caused by these actions, as well as enormous economic losses, Prensa Latina news agency reported. (*Granma Internacional*, 30/5/06)

Security

May 1: Fidel Castro told hundreds of thousands of workers gathered in Havana for the island's annual May Day celebration that US military exercises under way in the Caribbean are aimed at threatening his country and its ally Venezuela. Castro's close friend, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, has repeatedly accused Washington of using the Caribbean exercises to threaten his nation and announced military maneuvers of his own. Washington has denied Venezuela's charges. "This little maneuver is trying to intimidate Cuba and Venezuela," Castro said. "They haven't done this garbage in some time." The US naval exercises, beginning in April and continuing into May, are dubbed "Partnership of the Americas." They include about 6,500 military personal, dozens of planes and helicopters, and numerous ships, including a destroyer. (AP, 1/5/06)

May 1: During his May Day celebration speech, Fidel Castro pointed out that a Cuban-born California man accused of selling guns illegally from his home told the press in a jailhouse interview that the weapons were supposed to be used in an attempt to oust the Cuban leader in concert with the US naval exercises. A Pentagon spokesman and other military officials have denied the claims by 61-year-old Robert Ferro, who had stashed 1,571 firearms and some hand grenades in hidden rooms and compartments at his home in Upland, in California's San Bernardino County. "(Ferro) had as many arms as the mercenaries brought with them to Giron," Castro said, referring to the disastrous invasion of Cuba 45 years ago by a US-trained exile army at the Bay of Pigs, which includes a beach called Giron. Castro said the US, currently involved in an international campaign against terrorism, has no business these days with people who have a history of violence toward Cuba. (AP, 1/5/06)

May 3: Russia and Cuba have signed a number of documents concerning military technological cooperation during the visit of Rosoboronexport to Cuba. "Important agreements in the sphere of military technology, which will strengthen cooperation between our countries, were signed by the two sides", stated Rosoboronexport associate director Nikolay Shvets at a press conference. According to his words, the members of the Russian delegation, among which there was the outstanding Russian small-arms weapon constructor Mikhail Kalashnikov, conducted in a number of negotiations with representatives of various ministries and departments of the country, including Cuba's Ministry of Defense Heads. The Rosoboronexport delegation was in Cuba from April 17 to April 26. (Novosti, 3/5/06)

May 5: Cuban authorities are using factories of sugar cane cutting equipment and other agricultural tools to restore tanks, artillery and armored vehicles, reported the Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), Raúl Castro. Castro acknowledged the contribution of several metallurgical complexes in Holguín to the restoration and modernization process of the Cuban armament. (AFP, 8/5/06)

US-Cuba Relations

May 1: Fidel Castro charged that the US characterization of his country as a terrorist nation was cynical and shameless as Washington had harbored violence-prone Cuban exiles for decades. The US State Department, in its annual terrorism report, once more included Cuba as one of six terrorist nations, along with North Korea, Iran, Libya, Syria and Sudan. "The Department of State has in a cynical and shameless fashion accused Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez of friendliness toward terrorism and Cuba of being a terrorist country," Castro said during a more than four-hour May Day speech. Washington accused Cuba of harboring and aiding terrorists from Spain and Colombia, as well as fugitive Black Panthers and Puerto Rican independence militants from the United States. Venezuela, Cuba's closest ally, was fingered for allowing Colombian guerrillas in its territory, being too friendly with Iran and Cuba, and not supporting the US led war on terrorism. Castro charged the United States had organized terrorist attacks on Cuba, from

the 1976 bombing of Cuban commercial airliner to dozens of bombings and shootings over the years. "Will this report conclude the endless chain of gross lies by the president of the United States about terrorism? No!" Castro told hundreds of thousands gathered in Havana's Revolution Square. Castro accused the Bush administration of being behind Panama's 2004 pardon of former CIA agent Luis Posada Carriles and three others found guilty of planning to assassinate him during a 2000 Latin American Summit. (*Reuters*, 1/5/06)

May 2: The US Coast Guard announced the repatriation of 74 Cuban migrants by one of its cutters. Thirty five of the 74 migrants were intercepted on a grossly overloaded 32-foot go-fast vessel that was trying to enter the US illegally. The vessel was disabled by the Coast Guard, 20 miles southeast of Islamorada. Two suspected smugglers were taken into custody and turned over to Customs and Border Protection agents. (*Sun Sentinel*, 2/5/06)

May 3: Legislation aimed at banning public and private universities and community colleges from sponsoring trips to Cuba and other US-designated terrorist nations is on its way to the governor. The Florida House passed a bill, filed by state Representative David Rivera, a Miami Republican. It already cleared the Senate. "To me, this bill is so uncomplicated," Rivera said to his colleagues in the House, who voted unanimously in support of the measure. "Taxpayer money should not be used to support or subsidize terrorist regimes -- period." Rivera sponsored the legislation after the January arrests of Florida International University professor Carlos M. Alvarez and his wife, Elsa, an FIU counselor. The couple is accused of being unregistered agents for Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/5/06)

May 3: Vigilantes from the Puerto Rican Department of Natural Resources put six Cuban immigrants under arrest. The immigrants arrived by illegal means to Isla de Mona, local Police reported. The group, comprised of three men and three women arrived in the island from the Dominican Republic. (*EFE*, 3/5/06)

May 3: In the United States, power is in the hands of a terrorist regime which makes use of hypocritically anti-terrorist discourse and policy as tools to achieve world domination, said Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon. During an international solidarity-with-Cuba conference, attended by over 1,000 delegates from 60 nations, the top Cuban parliamentarian said that while the United States continues its war on Iraq and Afghanistan and looks for excuses to launch other military actions against the so-called "dark spots of the world", it harbors international terrorists like Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch. But the top hypocritical US attitude is that of holding the Cuban five in jail, the five Cuban youths who infiltrated South Florida-based terrorist groups, in an effort to prevent those organizations from repeating violent actions against the Cuban people, similar to those undertaken by Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch, Alarcon said. (*ACN*, 3/5/06)

May 3: Two French members of an environmental group landed a home-built twin-propeller ultralight plane in Key West after flying across the Florida Straits from Cuba, raising concerns by Homeland Security officials who detained and questioned the two men. After questioning, officials said, the two men were to continue on their way -- with a stop scheduled in Sebring for maintenance of the plane before trekking to Africa. Zachary Mann, a spokesman for US Customs and Border Protection, said the plane drew attention from Homeland Security because it took off from Cuba, which the US State Department has designated a terrorist state. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/5/06)

May 3: In remarks to the 36th annual Washington Conference of the Council of the Americas, the US secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reiterated that Cuba is the only undemocratic country in the Hemisphere. "Next month, when the 34 democratic members of the Organization of American States will gather in Santo Domingo, there will be only one empty seat at the table, a seat that will one day be filled by the free people of a democratic Cuba". (*MartiNoticias*, 3/5/06)

May 4: Fidel Castro was furious when Forbes magazine estimated his fortune at \$550 million last year. This year, the magazine upped its estimate of the communist leader's wealth to a cool \$900 million. Castro, who says his net worth is

nil, is likely the beneficiary of up to \$900 million, based on his control of state-owned companies, the US financial magazine said in its annual tally of "Kings, Queens & Dictators" fortunes. (*Reuters*, 4/5/06)

May 5: With efforts to open Florida's coast to energy exploration gaining momentum, more Florida lawmakers are turning their sights south, filing legislation aimed at blocking Cuba from drilling for oil near the Florida Keys. US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Miami Republican, and 14 other House members -- 11 of them from Florida -- joined in introducing a bill that would deny visas to any employees of a company or entity that "contributes to the development of Cuba's oil-exploration program." Their bill, a companion to Florida Democratic Senator Nelson's Senate bill filed earlier, would also impose sanctions on any individuals -- or companies -- who invest \$1 million or more to help Cuba develop its oil and natural gas resources. "My colleagues and I have been working tirelessly to prevent our own companies from ruining Florida's pristine beaches and delicate ecosystem by exploring and drilling for oil off our coast," Ros-Lehtinen said in a statement. "To now have this murderous and totalitarian regime say it wants to drill just 45 miles from Key West is beyond the pale and totally unacceptable." Her co-sponsors include US Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Mario Díaz-Balart, both Miami Republicans; Clay Shaw, Republican-Fort Lauderdale; Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Democrat-Weston, and Mark Foley, Republican-Palm Beach County; Katherine Harris, a Senate candidate, and Jim Davis, a Democratic candidate for governor. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/5/06)

May 8: The US government condemned the repression suffered by Cuban dissidents and the campaign orchestrated by the Havana authorities to harass and intimidate some of them. "The Cuban government recently directed mobs to intimidate and harass peaceful dissidents including Hilda Molina, Felix Bonne, and members of the Sigler Amaya family," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement. He added that on April 25 former political prisoner and the head of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, Marta Beatriz Roque, "was attacked in her home and prevented from attending a U.S.-sponsored event." "The United States reiterates its support for these brave individuals and all those in Cuba who are being deprived of the freedom they desire and deserve," McCormack said. The official US statement, he said, came several weeks after the third anniversary of the so-called "Black Spring," an allusion to the harshest wave of repression launched in recent years in Cuba between March 18-20, 2003. (*EFE*, 8/5/06)

May 9: The US has attacked the newly-formed United Nations Human Rights Council after countries such as Cuba were elected to its 47-member body. Cuba, China and Pakistan are among many nations considered to have poor rights records which have joined the new body. The US envoy to the UN, John Bolton, said the council looked set to inherit the flaws of its predecessor, the discredited UN Human Rights Commission. (*BBC*, 9/5/06)

May 10: Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles has refused to testify on behalf of his friend Santiago Alvarez and another man who are both charged by federal officials with possessing a cache of weapons. US District Judge James Cohn ordered Posada, 76, to appear as a defense witness at the trial of Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat, set to begin in Fort Lauderdale. Posada, a close friend of Alvarez, was expected to counter testimony from a key government witness that Alvarez helped smuggle Posada into the United States last year. In court documents, Miami attorney Eduardo Soto, who represents Posada, asked Cohn to exempt his client from appearing in court. If not, Soto said Posada would assert his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent when called to the stand to avoid incriminating himself. (*Sun Sentinel*, 10/5/06)

May 11: Attempting to use gas price frustration to crack a Cold War-era ban on US trade with Cuba, Idaho Senator Larry Craig wants to allow American companies to sign deals with the Caribbean island nation to explore and develop oil deposits in its waters. "It's time America began to understand that our (...) prohibition on trade with Cuba has accomplished just about zero and that policy needs to be changed," Craig said in a telephone interview before introducing legislation to permit US oil drilling deals with Cuba. "China, as we speak, has a drilling rig off the coast of Cuba." US companies are prohibited from doing business with Cuba under the 45-year-old embargo imposed after Fidel Castro came into power and the US cut off all diplomatic relations with the country. But since the discovery of oil deposits off its northern coast two years ago, Cuba has signed drilling deals with companies from Canada, China, India

and Norway. In February, Cuban officials told US oil executives at a meeting in Mexico they want to double their drilling capacity and explore for more oil offshore. (AP, 11/5/06)

May 14: A number of 41 Cuban rafters have arrived to the Florida coast in what seemed to be a smuggling operation, the Coast Guard said. The group, 16 men, 14 women and 11 children, three of them under one year old, arrived in Cayo Rodríguez beach, close to Islamorada, in a speed boat, the spokesman for the Coast Guard, Steve MacDonald, said. (EFE, 15/5/06)

May 16: Risking fines and jail for "trading with the enemy," Benjamin Treuhaft, a New York piano tuner, has shipped 237 pianos to Communist-run Cuba since 1995 to replace old Soviet-made pianos damaged by tropical humidity and termites. He returned to Havana with 200 lbs (100 kg) of tools and a dozen music lovers to help tune the second-hand pianos donated by Americans through his non-profit "Send a Piano to Havana" program. The 58-year-old bandana-clad activist opposes US trade sanctions against Cuba on humanitarian grounds and has been to Cuba 16 times defying a travel ban for Americans. (CNN, Reuters, 16/5/06)

May 16: The State Department said the decision to halt weapons sales to Venezuela stems from a formal determination by the administration that the government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is not cooperating with the United States in the fight against terrorism. At a news briefing, State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack declined details but said the arms sales ban stemmed from, among other things, Venezuelan intelligence cooperation with Iran and Cuba and ties with the two main Colombian insurgent groups. "In our judgment, they over the course of the year developed a much closer and stronger intelligence-sharing relationship with the intelligence agencies of Iran and Cuba," he said. (VOA, 16/5/06)

May 17: Columbia University conferred an honorary doctorate on Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya, the highest-profile advocate of democracy and human rights who has remained on the Communist-ruled island despite years of harassment by authorities. Paya was not able to be present at the ceremony. The award was bestowed in recognition of his peaceful struggle for human rights and democracy in Cuba. A vacant chair was set up in the graduation hall to represent and honor the dissident on a day when more than 11,000 Columbia students received their diplomas. University provost Alan Brinkley, who was responsible for presenting awards at the ceremony, told the assembled crowd of students, their family members and other guests that the seat was vacant because the Cuban government has not given Oswaldo Paya the necessary exit visa" to allow him to travel to New York. (EFE, 17/5/06)

May 19: A long-awaited update from the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, a keystone of President Bush's policies on the island, will not be delivered to the White House as scheduled on May 20 th, Cuban independence day, but should be in Bush's hands by month's end, US officials said. US officials have declined to comment on what changes the commission might recommend in its new report, although some Cuba-watchers in Washington have been speculating that the panel will recommend even tighter restrictions on trips by US academic and religious groups. Bush is expected to take some time to review the new recommendations and decide which ones he will implement, US officials said. (The Miami Herald, 19/5/06)

May 19: Ogallala farmer Cindi Allen has until the end of May to finalize a deal to sell part of her 2006 crop of edible beans to Cuba. The end of May is bean-planting time, she said, and the deal with Cuba will determine what she plants. Allen planted seeds for direct-from-the-farm bean sales in April as part of a 31-member Nebraska delegation on the latest agricultural trade mission to Cuba. She hoped to know shortly details about the types and volume of beans representatives of Alimport, the buyer for Cuba's 11 million people, want to buy and how much they're willing to pay. (AP, 19/5/06)

May 19: Gilberto Abascal, a key witness in a major weapons case against one of Fidel Castro's sworn enemies -- Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat-- was stopped by the Coast Guard 40 miles from Key West in 1999 as he

attempted to return to Cuba. With him were a crock pot, a VCR and photographs of a Cuban exile paramilitary training camp in Miami-Dade County. At the time, US officials determined that Abascal and a married couple with him who brought along their 3-year-old, US-born daughter on the "small pleasure craft" were simply homesick, disillusioned expatriates, according to filed federal court records. The FBI decided there was no nefarious reason for the group to have photos of Alpha 66's Miami-Dade operations. Abascal and his friends were returned to Miami after they maintained that the photos were only meant to show dissidents on the island that exiles in Miami were continuing their fight to help free the country from communist rule. But Alpha 66's leader and the widow of the group's former leader disputed that notion. This latest twist in the weapons case against Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat comes as a grand jury convenes in Texas to evaluate how Alvarez's friend, former CIA-trained operative and exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, entered the United States last year. Defense attorneys say Abascal's explanation for the Alpha 66 pictures is "preposterous." They said a declassified FBI document on Abascal's trip on December 7, 1999, is further proof that he was cooperating with the Cuban government to target Alvarez and Mitat, whose federal trial has been delayed until July 17 in Fort Lauderdale. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/5/06)

May 21: The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, supported the embargo against Cuba and reaffirmed that it helps to avoid that Fidel Castro's dictatorship uses trade to finance and to strengthen his control over its people. Rice was answering a question by a journalist who asked if changes in the embargo that could lead to an increase in trade between the two countries, especially in the agricultural sector, could be expected. (*MartiNoticias*, 22/5/06)

May 22: A review committee made no decision about a controversial children's book on Cuba and will continue deliberating June 5. Miami-Dade School Superintendent Rudy Crew has urged some of its members to find a compromise that neither removes the book from library shelves nor leaves it for children to read unsupervised. But if no such compromise can be reached, Crew's spokesman suggested the superintendent would overrule any recommendation to ban the book, "Vamos A Cuba" (subtitled A Visit to Cuba). The book has drawn attention this spring for its rosy depiction of Cuba under Fidel Castro's regime. The father of a student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Elementary in West Miami-Dade filed a formal complaint, but repeated appeals have ended with the book staying in place. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/5/06)

May 22: A federal appeals court unanimously upheld the convictions of six Cubans accused of hijacking a Cuban passenger jet and diverting it to Key West. But the court overturned the sentences of two of the hijackers and remanded the case for resentencing. In March 2003, six Cubans took control of a plane flying from Nueva Gerona to Havana. They forced the pilots to head toward Miami, but were intercepted by US fighter jets before they arrived. The jet landed in Key West and the passengers were released without incident. At trial in US District Court in Key West in late 2003, the Cubans' defense was that the plane's crew was complicit in the plan to hijack the plane. The defendants claimed the hijacking was staged so that the pilot and co-pilot also could reach the US and gain political asylum under the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy. The six men were convicted of aircraft piracy, conspiracy and interference with a flight crew. Their sentences ranged from 20 years in prison to just more than 24 years. They appealed. A three-judge panel of the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the claim of convicted hijacker Neudis Infantes Hernandez that a 20-year sentence for aircraft piracy is cruel and unusual punishment. (*Broward Daily Business Review*, 23/5/06)

May 24: Governor Jeb Bush indicated he will sign a bill that would forbid professors and students from visiting Cuba and other nations accused of supporting terrorism. Bush's backing of the legislation, sponsored by state Representative David Rivera, a Miami Republican who represents a portion of Broward County, would make Florida one of the most restrictive states for travel by scholars. The bill bans faculty and students at public universities and community colleges from using "state or non-state funds" to travel to any country deemed a sponsor of terrorists. Five countries would be considered off-limits: Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. The bill does not specify penalties for violators. (*Tallahassee Bureau*, 24/5/06)

May 24: The Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister suggested that US president George W. Bush, wouldn't be capable to read the 500 pages of recommendations made by the State Department on transition in Cuba. In the next few days, the US Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba, headed by secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, will present its recommendations to Bush on how to end with Fidel Castro's government, in power since 1959. The US president should study the recommendations and decide how to strengthen the 40 year-old-embargo against Cuba. "It has taken them too long. They said Bush is studying the report, which should be some 500 pages. But, to imagine that Bush is studying the report sounds strange", Felipe Pérez Roque said laughing. Perez Roque was accompanying Fidel Castro at a live TV appearance. (*Reuters*, 24/5/06)

May 24: Fidel Castro branded the US government and Forbes magazine as "liars and slanderers," and demanded an apology for saying he had amassed a personal wealth of 900 million dollars. "They have to ask for an apology of the world public opinion for their lies against the Cuban revolution. They cannot remain silent. They must speak up," Castro told a live radio and television broadcast. Earlier this month, Forbes said Castro after 47 years in power had become the seventh wealthiest ruler in the world, having stashed away 900 million dollars by skimming profits from a Havana convention center, retail conglomerate Cimex and vaccine and pharmaceutical products firm Medicuba. (*AFP*, 25/5/06)

May 24: Cuba reiterated its invitation to US companies interested in participating in oil drillings in the Gulf of Mexico. "Yes, we have authorized those explorations, we are not excluding US companies". "We say it publicly", Fidel Castro said during a TV appearance. (*AFP*, 25/5/06)

May 25: The Cuban government has not allowed the US diplomats based in Havana to have access to two Cuban Americans detained last month after a violent incident in the north coast of the island. "The Cuban government has ignored our repeated requests of providing consular assistance to the detainees", said Drew Blakeney, spokesman for the US Interest Section in Havana. "We haven't been allowed access to the two survivors." (*El Nuevo Herald*, 26/5/06)

May 25: In unusually frank criticism of US policy on Cuba by a top military officer, the outgoing head of the Miami-based Southern Command said he favors a top-to-bottom review of the policies, including a long-standing ban on most contacts between the US and Cuban militaries. The comments by Army General Bantz J. Craddock came just days before President Bush is to receive a major report on US policies toward the island, coordinated by the State Department but with input from other agencies, including the Department of Defense. "One of the things that we as a government probably don't do well is to review our policies and our laws routinely, based upon the conditions in the world changing," Craddock said in response to a question about Cuba during a briefing for a small group of reporters. "My judgment is we need to relook laws, policies more often to ensure that they still make sense, given the changing conditions in the world," he said, adding, "I don't want to make a judgment on whether or not to change [the Cuba policy], but I think it needs to be re-looked." Craddock added that it's time to review the laws "stem to stern" and not just the long-standing ban on military-to-military contacts beyond the regular talks on purely local issues between US and Cuban military officers along the fence surrounding the US Navy base in Guantánamo. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/5/06)

May 30: Cuban-American filmmaker Luis Moro expressed his disdain for the long-standing US trade and travel restrictions against Cuba in a very public way: he made a movie there. Moro's "Love and Suicide" was showing in East New York, New Jersey, after screenings last year in Los Angeles, Miami Beach and the Bahamas. It's linked to a personal crusade against the US embargo and it led US officials to investigate Moro for possible violation of US laws that make it almost impossible for most Americans to legally visit communist Cuba. If officials act against him, Moro says he will refuse to pay any fines, even if it means jail time. (*AP*, 30/5/06)

May 31: The National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service (the churches' global development agency) have joined with other organizations to renew objections to new American government restrictions on travel to

Cuba. "The current US policy toward Cuba restricts religious freedom and is contrary to the principles upon which our nation was founded," said the Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell, the NCC staff executive for justice and advocacy, during a news conference. She continued: "We reiterate our call on the US government to respect religious freedom and restore the less restrictive travel licenses that we have had for decades." Last year, the NCC and CWS, along with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, American Baptist Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ Global Ministries, received notices from the US Office of Foreign Assets that their existing licenses for religious travel to Cuba would not be renewed. (*Ekklesia.Com*, 31/5/06)

May 31: A federal judge raised questions about the role of a Florida International University employee accused along with her professor husband of working as agents of the Cuban government, suggesting that the charges amounted to "character assassination" against her. US District Judge K. Michael Moore said it was unfair to Elsa Alvarez to assume that she was involved in all of the activities of her husband, Carlos Alvarez, particularly since there is substantial evidence indicating she was reluctant from the beginning and later opposed continuing their alleged surveillance on behalf of Cuba. "There's a lot of character assassination as to the wife because of what you have on the husband," Moore said at a hearing. "It strengthens your case if you can just lump her in there." Moore's comments came during a three-hour hearing on a request by Elsa Alvarez's lawyers that she be released on bail before trial scheduled in early 2007. (*AP*, 31/5/06)