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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## May 2007

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** Several editorials signed by Fidel Castro are published in the official daily “Granma”. New regulations are set for Cubans traveling abroad. Two army recruits attempt to hijack an airplane to fly to the United States. On Mother’s Day, nearly 40 members of the Ladies in White march through the streets of Havana. Dissident organizations denounce the continuation of detentions and harassments against their members, while expressing scepticism regarding talks on human rights between Spain and Cuba.

**Economy:** Cuban agricultural authorities report a decrease in this year’s potato harvest. The official daily “Granma” reports signs of corruption in the financial sector. Cuba says it will spend about US\$185 million to upgrade tourism facilities in an attempt to reverse this sector’s decline. Cuba’s population decreased in 2006 for the first time in 25 years. Cuba announces the end of a disastrous sugar harvest. Cuba and China sign new cooperation agreements in medicine and biotechnology.

**Exile Community:** The Cuban-American National Foundation is willing to establish "a bridge" with the Cuban military and civilian leadership to guarantee a smooth transition in the island. Organizations of Cuban residents in Spain are sceptical about the results of talks on human rights between the governments of Spain and Cuba.

**Foreign Affairs:** The Cuban Foreign Affairs minister visits Bolivia for the opening of one of the 23 hospitals the island donated to this country in 2007. The Organization of American States Secretary General favours the opening of a dialogue with Cuba. Raul Castro meets with Ecuadorian Vice President Lenin Moreno. Canadian First Deputy Foreign Minister Leonard J. Edwards and his Cuban counterpart Bruno Rodriguez meet in Havana. The governments of Cuba and Spain hold their first round of talks on human rights.

**Security:** Cuba’s Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro meets in Havana with his Chinese counterpart Cao Gangchuan. A delegation of 93 students from the Venezuelan Air Force Academy makes a one-week instructional visit to Cuba.

**US-Cuba Relations:** Cuba calls a failed attempt to hijack an airplane involving two army recruits an "act of terror promoted by the United States." The Cuban government issues an official statement after a federal judge drops charges against Luis Posada Carriles. Five US lawmakers and dozens of American businessmen visit Cuba during an agricultural trade fair. Fidel Castro says in an op-ed that President George Bush ordered his death. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice criticizes Spain for its dealings with Cuba. Cuba signs a deal to buy about US\$ 118m in American food products.



## Domestic Affairs

**May 1:** Cuban First Vice President Raul Castro presided over the main event on International Workers Day at Havana's Revolution Square. In a speech just before the huge annual parade began, Salvador Valdes, secretary general of Cuba's central workers union, hinted it was highly unlikely that Fidel Castro would make his first public appearance since stepping down from power. "I know I express the unanimous feeling of our people when I send the most fervent wishes for recovery to he who has not only been with us on days like this but has guided us with his proverbial wisdom for more than 50 years," Valdes told hundreds of thousands of people swarming around Revolution Square. "A speedy recovery and lots of health, dear Fidel," Valdes said, adding "Viva Fidel!" as the crowd shouted back "Viva!" The acting president and defense minister, five years younger than his sibling, stood stiffly and smiled, occasionally waving as marchers streamed past, waving plastic Cuban flags, portraits of Fidel Castro and banners denouncing US "imperialism." Many marchers wore red or white T-shirts that appeared to have been distributed by the Cuban government with a May 1 slogan reading, "More solidarity, unity and strength than ever." (*Prensa Latina, AP, Reuters, 1/5/07*)

**May 1:** Fidel Castro failed to appear at Havana's annual May Day parade, fuelling speculation about the state of his health. It was only the third time in 48 years that Castro missed the parade called each year to celebrate International Worker's Day. Castro also was absent in 1959 and 1963 when he was traveling in the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. Instead of appearing, Castro put his name to an editorial in Granma, Cuba's main communist daily paper, criticizing Brazil for embracing ethanol, which Castro argues will rip food away from the poor. The piece also called on participants in the march to protest against the release on bail of the Cuban exiled militant Luis Posada Carriles in the US. [[Reflexions by the Commander in Chief](#)](*BBC, The Miami Herald, 1/5/07*)

**May 2:** The Central Workers' Union of Cuba (CTC) awarded as Outstanding Hero Havana historian Eusebio Leal, along with another three prominent workers. The CTC, fulfilling a mandate of the Cuban Council of State, also awarded Alvaro Serrano, a Sugar Industry operator, Juan Jose Maiquez Fernandez, a Chemical, Mining, Energy Industry mechanic, and Jorge Gomez Jomarron, a Food Industry driver. (*Prensa Latina, 2/5/07*)

**May 2:** A new Cuban government regulation will make it more difficult for some Cubans abroad to invite relatives and friends on the island to visit them. Resolution 87/2007, issued by the Foreign Ministry, requires such invitations to be submitted through Cuban consulates abroad, notarized and in accordance with the laws of the country where they are requested. But the consulates will "have the authority to reject the invitation when there are elements that recommend that," added the resolution, published in the official gazette. Many Cubans have long used such invitations as a way of obtaining Cuban government permission to leave the island and remain abroad. Before the new regulation, the invitations could be certified in Cuba at the International Legal Consultancy, a quasi-government agency with branches in Havana and other parts of Cuba. [[Gaceta Oficial de Cuba, no. 20](#)] (*The Miami Herald, 3/5/07*)

**May 3:** A pair of fugitive army recruits killed a Cuban military officer, one of several hostages in a failed attempt to hijack a plane to the United States, authorities said. Interior Ministry officials identified the slain officer as Army Lt. Col. Victor Ibo Acuna Velazquez, in an official statement. "Despite being unarmed, [Acuna] heroically tried to prevent the commission of the terrorist act," the statement said, adding that the other hostages were unhurt. The predawn drama began when the renegades commandeered a bus with at least seven passengers, witnesses said, and ended in a wild shootout on the tarmac of José Martí International Airport. The recruits were arrested at the scene. They and a third recruit, captured before the shootout, had been the focus of an intensive manhunt. On April 28 they had escaped with AK-47 automatic rifles from the Managua military base, about 15 miles from the airport, after killing a fellow soldier

identified as Yoendris Gutierrez Hernandez and wounding another who was not identified, the government statement said. The Defense Ministry had distributed circulars with their names and photos around Havana and described them as armed and dangerous. The recruits, all from the eastern province of Camaguey, were identified as Leandro Cerezo Sirut and Alain Forbus Lameru, both 19, and Yoan Torres Martinez, 21. In March 2003, two domestic passenger planes were hijacked to Key West, Florida. A month later, three men who hijacked a Havana Bay ferry in a bid to cross the Florida Straits were executed by firing squad. [[Acto de terror promovido por Estados Unidos](#)] (*Sun Sentinel, The Australian*, 4/5/07)

**May 4:** A Cuban army officer killed during a failed airplane hijacking was buried with military honors, decorated posthumously with one of the communist regime's top medals. Lt. Colonel Victor Ibo Acuna Velazquez, a 41-year-old communications engineer, was among eight people being held aboard a plane sitting at Havana's international airport when he quarreled with one of the captors and was shot by the other, officials said. The deserters reportedly were captured later by soldiers, but the government gave few details. Hundreds of civilians lined streets in Pinar del Rio, Acuna's home town, to pay respects as an olive green army truck carrying his black casket wrapped in a red, white and blue Cuban flag made its way to the cemetery. Soldiers at the cemetery marched alongside the truck to the grave as a military band played a solemn march. Riflemen fired a salute. Family members told the press that Cuba's governing Council of State, still officially headed by convalescing leader Fidel Castro, decided to posthumously award Acuna the country's Antonio Maceo Medal of Valor. (*AP, Granma*, 4,5/5/07)

**May 4:** A group of women resisting the oppression of the Cuban government through non-violent means, continues to agitate for the release of those imprisoned by Fidel Castro's government. They are called the "Women in White" because they wear white clothing for their protests. According to statements by Berta de Moya, wife of Cuban prisoner of conscience, Angel Moya, the silent protest of the Women in White, who meet each week at the Church of St. Rita of Acacia to publicly pray for their imprisoned family members, is encouraging more people to publicly speak out in Cuba. "By pressuring the government we can get what we want," Berta explained in a recent interview published online. "These men," she explained in reference to the family members of the Women in White, "are not killers, they are not violent, they are peaceful men. We have the truth in our hands." She also expressed her confidence that change would soon come to Cuba. "The situation is bad for the people and for the government. This silence (...) there is a lot of uncertainty, we don't know anything (...) We have Raul Castro who is worse than Fidel Castro. There is no change, no improvement and increased repression. And on top of it all there is not enough money; many elderly sell peanut shells or coffee because they can't make ends meet, and to make matters worse the police make them leave and go home." Repression in Cuba, Berta said, "is not only levied against the opposition but against the entire nation. The nation is tired; we want change. When they see that breach open, 60% of Cubans will come with us and the government will not have it easy." (*CNA*, 4/5/07)

**May 5:** The renowned Cuban film "*Strawberry and Chocolate*" was shown for the first time on Cuban television, 14 years after its theatrical release. "Whatever the reasons or circumstances behind it, I never understood nor will I ever be able to understand that, to protect the Cuban Revolution, it was deemed necessary to resort to media censorship of movies, documentaries or national newscasts portraying opinions and perspectives other than the official party line," remarked Cuban filmmaker Enrique Colina. (*La Jornada*, 7/5/07)

**May 6:** A makeshift motorboat with 14 individuals onboard, including several women, children, and a dead person, ran aground close to Surgidero de Batabanó. All were severely sunburned and dehydrated. According to paramedics at the scene, they had set off from somewhere in the central area of the island's southern coast, possibly trying to reach Florida, and had been set adrift when the boat's engine broke down. (*Cubanet*, 6/5/07)

**May 7:** Primary care and aging are on the table of the 15th International Seminar on Assisting Senior Citizens, which started in Havana. The event, taking place at the Habana Libre Hotel, brings together 100 experts on geriatrics, gerontology and family medicine, among other branches related to the care of these people. The agenda also includes

issues like geriatric evaluation, community rehabilitation, dementias, chronic diseases in the community, nutrition, physical activity and health. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/07)

**May 7:** Two Cuban soldiers who attempted to hijack an airplane to fly to the United States are both wounded and awaiting trial, Fidel Castro announced, while accusing the United States of fomenting illegal emigration. "A great deal of serenity and sangfroid are needed to face these issues," said the convalescent Castro, 80, in an article published on the front page of *Granma*, the newspaper of Cuba's governing Communist Party, on May 8. It is the fifth he has written in the last two months. Castro gave details, hitherto unknown, about the case, which he links with the April 19 release of Cuban anti-Castro terrorist Luis Posada Carriles from US custody on bond. The two soldiers involved in the hijacking attempt have not yet been tried because both were wounded during the incident, one of them by shots fired by the other inside the plane, Castro said. The wording of the disclosure seems to imply that the deserters may face a different kind of trial from that of the Cubans who hijacked a ferry, kidnapping the passengers, in April 2003. Three of them received the death penalty. [[The Tragedy Threatening Our Species](#)] (*VOA, IPS*, 8/5/07)

**May 7:** A leading Cuban human rights group urged governments around the world to petition Havana to spare the lives of army deserters who could face a firing squad for allegedly killing soldiers as they fled military bases. The statement by the non-governmental Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation referred to a deadly attempted hijacking at Havana's main airport, as well as a previously unreported December shootout and escape in eastern Cuba. Signed by veteran human rights activist Elizardo Sanchez, the statement noted that Cuban military law calls for capital punishment for deserters older than 20. The two cases of escaped soldiers involved six men, only two of whom were old enough to face a death penalty. The statement called on organizations and governments around the world to protest capital punishment in Cuba, where several dozen prisoners are on death row. In the most recent case of desertion, three conscripts shot their way out of the Managua base southeast of the Cuban capital in late April, killing at least one soldier. The earlier desertion came on December 20, when three soldiers killed two Interior Ministry officials and made off with machine guns in fleeing El Manguito garrison near Santiago de Cuba, 525 miles east of Havana, according to the committee. The suspects were captured a short distance away following an "intense military operation," it added, saying only one of them was 21. Cuba's government has not reported the incident. (*AP*, 7/5/07)

**May 8:** Cubans think their country's communist authorities will execute two military deserters who shot dead an officer and a soldier in an attempt to hijack a plane to the United States. Human rights groups are calling on Cuba not to apply the death penalty, which is carried out by firing squad. On the streets of Havana, Cubans take for granted that the would-be hijackers will be shot. "When innocent people lose their lives in Cuba, people are enraged and demand that heads roll," said taxi driver Arturo, who declined to give his surname. "A violent kidnapping like this is considered an act of terrorism in Cuba and you pay heavily for that," said house painter Jose. "I think they will be executed." (*Reuters*, 8/5/07)

**May 8:** The emeritus bishop of Holguín, Msgr. Héctor Peña Gómez, 78, admitted to "*Cresol*" magazine that "there are many things that the Cuban Church has kept silent about, but also many others it has not kept back (...) with time they will find their place in history." Rock added that the Church in Cuba "supports a dialogue and collaboration with the government based on a healthy autonomy;" however, it affirmed that the issue requires patience, "because on more than one occasion the dialogue has become a monologue." (*EER*, 8/5/07)

**May 9:** Cuba released a dissident reporter who spent nearly two years in prison for joining an anti-government protest, an opposition group said. Roberto de Jesus Guerra, who reported for US-based Web sites, was freed on May 8, the group Assembly to Promote Civil Society said in a statement. The 28-year-old dissident was arrested on July 13, 2005, during protests marking the anniversary of the 1994 drowning of 37 people who tried to leave for the United States in a tugboat that was rammed and sunk by the Cuban coast guard. He was held without trial until February this year, when he was sentenced to 22 months in prison for disorderly conduct in public. Twenty dissidents have been released from prison since ailing Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother, Raul, nine months ago, according to the Cuban

Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. The commission, which is illegal but tolerated by the communist state, estimates that 280 Cubans are in prison for political reasons. (*Reuters*, 9/5/07)

**May 10:** The Cuban Liberal Movement (MLC) informed that it has adopted the name of National Liberal Party of Cuba (PLNC). The MLC had requested its inclusion in the Liberal International. (*Cubanet*, 10/5/07)

**May 10:** Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Paya, the head of the Christian Liberation Movement, or MCL, says that the Varela Project he presented in 2002 before the communist island's National Assembly calling for a national referendum on legislative changes continues to be in effect because the demand for such changes persists. Paya said in a communique released in Havana that the Varela Project, which he presented to the legislature on May 10, 2002, continues to be "alive and in force because the citizens' legal demand that the laws change and guarantee certain fundamental rights continues." "We didn't come to commemorate the past but to announce the road to liberation," said the statement, in which he emphasized that 11,000 people who signed the Varela Project petition five years ago and "those who are signing now (...) can be proud of their liberating and solid efforts that are opening the road to hope." Paya added that the denial of rights in Cuba "has no justification but it certainly does have a solution," which must be "peaceful (...) among Cubans (...) without foreign intervention or interference (...) [and based on] reconciliation without hate or violence." Pushed by Paya starting in 1996, the project proposes modifying certain Cuban laws and opening areas for free and responsible participation of the citizenry in government and society, and it requests the support of the public for a referendum on changing those laws. [[Declaración Movimiento Cristiano Liberación](#)] (*EFE*, 10/5/07)

**May 11:** The book **"Paraninfo, un magnicidio frustrado"** ("Paraninfo, A Failed Assassination"), by TV journalist Ivon Deulofeu, was launched on May 11 during an activity held in Havana and presided over by Julio Martinez Ramirez, first secretary of the Young Communist League (UJC). The book covers the investigation into the failed Fidel Castro assassination attempt, planned for November 16, 2000. The murder was to take place during a Solidarity with Cuba event planned within the framework of the Tenth Ibero-American Summit in Panama. Juan Carlos Rodriguez, director of the Ministry of Interior's Capitan San Luis Publishing House, explained that on that day, the main lecture hall of the University of Panama, with a seating capacity of more than a thousand, was overfilled with people to welcome Cuban President Fidel Castro. Carlos Zamora, who at that time was the Cuban ambassador in Panama, said that the judicial process carried out in Panama against Luis Posada Carriles and his accomplices was a perfect example of manipulation and partiality. Attending the activity were Carlos Lage Codorniu and Patricia Flechilla, presidents of the University Students Federation and High School Students Federation respectively, and members of the UJC National Committee. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 12/5/07)

**May 11:** Cuban cardinal Jaime Ortega declared that the exhortation to Cuba to open up to the world and the world to Cuba, made by Pope John Paul II during his 1998 visit to the island, has been partially fulfilled. "There remain some rather large and long standing obstacles — as it is to be expected, relations with the United States are still difficult," said the cardinal. "Yes, it may have taken place (this opening on both sides)," he said in Aparecida, Brazil. Ortega, who is the archbishop of Havana, is attending the 5th Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishopric. (*AP*, 12/5/07)

**May 12:** Cuba awarded a posthumous medal to a soldier killed by conscripts who fled their base and later tried to hijack a plane to leave the island. The soldier, Yoendris Gutierrez Hernandez, was on guard duty at a military base on April 29. Three deserters bayoneted him to death with stolen rifles after he refused to surrender his weapon, the Communist Party newspaper Granma reported. In a somber ceremony in the eastern province of Granma, a medal for heroism was given to Gutierrez's parents. Acting President Raul Castro, also the island's defense minister, saluted the soldier's "bravery and rejection and opposition to the demands of three assailants who threatened him, demanding that he give them the weapon he used for military service." (*AP*, 12/5/07)

**May 12:** The Cuban authorities have stepped up their actions against illegal possession of satellite dishes and distribution of access to satellite TV broadcasts, which are severely restricted on the island. They warned that the penalties can range from fines and impounding of the electronic equipment and appliances in question to sentences of three to five years of jail time. The official newspaper "*Granma*" reported that 12 Cuban citizens who ran a racket selling and providing paid support for pirated satellite TV "smart cards" will face charges in court. "*Granma*" underlined that "they were engaging in an illegal activity for which the Ministry of Labor and Social Security does not issue self-employed worker's licenses." (*EFE*, 13/5/07)

**May 12:** Nearly 40 members of the Ladies in White, a group made up of the wives and other relatives of the 75 Cuban dissidents arrested and sentenced in 2003 to lengthy prison terms for allegedly subversive activities, marched peacefully to Havana's La India fountain to mark Mother's Day and demand the release of political prisoners. Laura Pollan, the group's leader, told the press that the demonstration was intended to "convey our greetings to all the mothers of the world on Mother's Day, even though we have no joy." The demonstrators handed out flowers and greeted all the women they passed on the march, while marching for several kilometers through the streets of Havana to the fountain and then back to Pollan's house in the Centro Habana neighborhood. After placing a wreath at the fountain, the women chanted "freedom, freedom for the political prisoners," several times in front of curious onlookers. Pollan, the wife of dissident Hector Maseda, said after the march that the group selected the fountain because "when the Spanish arrived in Cuba, there were already mothers here and those are our roots." "Here the Ladies in White also want to say 'we are present' for the struggle for the liberation of the prisoners," Pollan said. (*EFE*, 12/5/07)

**May 14:** In the current global environment, accounting is called to play an increasingly important role in decision-making, a Cuban expert said at the opening of several international congresses in Havana. The role of this discipline in Cuba and the world was highlighted by Cuban expert Lidia Esther Rodriguez, president of the Cuban Association of Accountants, before more than 500 specialists from 20 countries. The fifth International Accounting Meeting, the eighth Cuban-Dominican Accounting Congress and the third International Consultants Congress -CONSULT 2007 - are now in session. Lidia Esther Rodriguez noted that Cuba emphasizes development of accounting to play a more relevant role in domestic control, integrating that with administration. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/5/07)

**May 14:** Cuban dissidents announced the creation of the Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs in Cuba to "monitor" cases of human rights violations on the communist-ruled island. About 40 opponents of the Cuban regime participated in the creation of the council that, according to its bylaws, is an "independent organization" that will finance itself with the contributions of its members. The council will be comprised of dissidents of different stripes and former political prisoners. Three of the councilors, Roberto de Miranda, Edel Jose Garcia and Margarito Broche, formed part of the "Group of 75" - peaceful opponents of the Castro regime rounded up in spring 2003 and sentenced to long jail terms - who were later released on medical grounds. Jorge Luis Garcia Perez, known as "Antunez," got out of prison last month after serving a 17-year sentence. "There are members of different organizations, because we're not going to exclude anyone. We're not exclusionist," said Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva. "The situation of human rights has worsened in all respects," Gonzalez Leyva said. Among the proposals the council will analyze will be asking the United States to reduce the quota of legal Cuban immigrants for each political prisoner in the island's jails with the aim, the initiative says, of "sensitizing" the Cuban government to the idea of implementing an amnesty. Also, the council will study the possibility of establishing mechanisms of dialogue to promote the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Cuba. (*EFE*, 14/5/07)

**May 16:** Dissident Héctor Palacios was in a Cuban military hospital when Fidel Castro ceded power in July, and when the ailing leader was a no-show at his birthday celebration December 2. After the first announcement "the military doctors looked nervous and impatient," said Palacios, 63. "But the most important thing happened later on." "When those people got over the psychological fixation they had about Fidel Castro's immortality and saw that it was possible to live without him, I saw nurses, doctors and hospital personnel sighing with relief when the man didn't show up on December 2," he added. Palacios, one of the 75 dissidents sentenced to long prison terms during the so-called Black

Spring of 2003, was in a security wing of a military hospital. He was freed December 6 because of his health problems. He defines Cuba today as a nation halted in time: ``Neither Fidel has gone nor [brother] Raúl has arrived, and this has created a black hole that has absorbed the dreams of the new generations." But he believes that change will come soon, ``not within the next 24 hours, but faster than most people imagine. The day Fidel Castro dies, 80 percent of the regime's potential will die (...) and the transformations will come." (*The Miami Herald*, 16/5/07)

**May 16:** A recently discovered notebook and two stories written by Cuban national hero Jose Marti were the main news at the first session of the "Common Front of Ideas" conference hosted by the Union of Cuban Journalists. "The notebook, apparently written by Marti in mid-1894 or early 1895, brings to light Marti's assessments about the dark side of the human heart, its weaknesses, and confirms that Marti explored deeply into human feelings," said Pedro Pablo Rodriguez, who is in charge of the annotated edition of the *Complete Works of Jose Marti* at the Center of Marti Studies. The two new stories (*US Scenes*) are entitled: "Del Viejo al Nuevo Mundo" (From the Old to the New World) and "Proa al Mar" (Bow to the Sea). The latter is about the voyage of a ship that sails out of the New York harbor. The conference "Common Front of Ideas", being held on Cuba's Isla de la Juventud (Island of Youth), is an event organized and promoted by the Union of Cuban Journalists about the life and work of Marti. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/5/07)

**May 17:** Hundreds of people accompanied statues of St. Isidro and the Virgin of the Remedies down several streets in Managua, Havana City province, during a procession organized as part of the town's patron saints festivities. The Apostolic Nuncio to Cuba, Msgr. Luigi Bonazzi, delivered the homily at the Church of San Isidro. "In the last century we had ideologies, like Marxism and some savage forms of capitalism, making the mistake of removing God from the households and from the people themselves," said Msgr. Bonazzi. (*Cubanet*, 18/5/07)

**May 18:** A group of peaceful opposition activists founded the "Gustavo Arcos Bergnes" Human Rights Movement in the city of Holguín. According to dissident José Santos Escobar, leader of the new organization, twelve activists assembled at his home gave life to the project. (*Holguín Press*, 27/5/07)

**May 18:** Cuban authorities announced the foiling of an international drug-dealing operation on the eastern coast of the island, and stressed the political will of the government to prevent the use of narcotics in the country. According to an article published in the official daily Granma, nearly a ton of marijuana was confiscated from dealers who landed on the eastern coast by speedboat and attempted to hide their cargo there. Despite the successful seizure of the banned substance, the dealers managed to escape, the information in Granma said. The paper gave no details about where or when the operation took place. (*ACN, Reuters*, 18/5/07)

**May 18:** The opposition organization National Liberal Party of Cuba (PLNC) denounced that its spokesman, Leonel Alberto Pérez Belette, was detained in Havana, barely seven days after the creation of his organization. A number of personal belongings he was carrying at the time of his arrest were impounded by the authorities. (*Cubanet*, 18/5/07)

**May 19:** These days churches in Cuba regularly draw packed sanctuaries on Sundays, with membership growing in the country's dominant Roman Catholic denomination, along with Protestant and Evangelical sects. Even Santería, Cuba's Afro-Caribbean religion that slaves created by mixing African beliefs with those of their Catholic Spanish masters, has seen a revival in Cuba. Religious leaders in Cuba say dramatic changes in the past decade have firmly re-established the church as an important part of the lives of many Cubans. It seems that religion will play an increasing role in Cuban society in the future as longtime leader Fidel Castro, 80 and ailing, eventually gives way to a new generation. "Our role in Cuba is growing daily, and relations with the government are improving daily, too," said the Reverend Juan Ramon, pastor of Havana's Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. ``But it's like a turtle, not a rabbit. We must be patient." "Religious devotion and spirituality never left the people," he said. ``It was winter and everything looked dead, but it wasn't dead. The flowers come back and the birds sing when spring comes. And that has happened in Cuba. It is a good time for the church here." But while most Cubans no longer fear that going to church might get them in trouble, Cuba is still ruled

by the Communist Party. Dissent is stifled, and most church leaders are careful not to cross the line from a social gospel focussing on the needs of the people into the arena of politics. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/5/07)

**May 19:** A Cuban dissident released just weeks ago after spending 21 months in prison was arrested again on charges of resisting authority, according to the banned Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. Lazaro Alonso was released from prison, along with five other opposition members, on April 24 upon completing his sentence for public disorder, rebellion and reckless endangerment after taking part in a protest to mark the anniversary of the sinking by authorities of a boat packed with dozens of would-be emigrants. The leader of the rights commission, Elizardo Sanchez, told the press that the dissident was arrested and will face a summary process on May 23 for "resistance" to authority. The arrest came after Alonso asked to know why police were constantly stopping him on the street to demand identification, the dissident organization Assembly to Promote Civil Society said. "It's something very worrying because he was released the other day as a political prisoner," said Sanchez, adding that, in his judgment, this is "a case of harassment against an opposition" figure. He said this situation reveals "the absolute lack of legal security for citizens before the police," since "any police officer can stop anyone and there's no defense against arbitrary police" actions. (*AFP*, 21/5/07)

**May 19:** The International CUBADISCO music Fair began in Havana, a cultural event that is organized by the Cuban Music Institute in its 11th edition. Karl Marx Theater, with capacity for 5,000 people, will be the scene for the CUBADISCO award-ceremony, at which special and honor laureates awarded by the jury will be presented. The 11th edition of International CUBADISCO Music Fair will continue to be celebrated all around the country in June, from the central Province of Villa Clara to Bayamo, in Granma province. (*Cubarte*, 19/5/07)

**May 19:** Cuban author Reynaldo González, one of the promoters of an intellectuals and artists' debate on the 1970s' cultural policy in Cuba, affirmed that "the discussion is not over" and that there is "a 'before' and an 'after'" following the so called "email war." During the presentation of the last issue of *Casa* magazine, González once again brought up the topic that sparked an intense debate among a group of Cuban intellectuals last January. (*EER*, 21/5/07)

**May 20:** The daughter of acting Cuban President Raul Castro spoke out in favor of tolerance and against gay-bashing on the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia. "The communications media have a big responsibility in the education of the public, in developing a culture of respect for people due to their sexual identity and sexual orientation," said Mariela Castro, the head of the National Sex Education Center, in remarks broadcast by state television. Castro attended an unusual film-debate held in the "23 y 12" hall in Havana, where organizers showed the US film "Boys Don't Cry," which tells a story based on real events of the difficulties, discrimination and violence to which a young transsexual woman was subjected. "Starting with the advances we have had on these matters in our country, it's that we (are) trying to better visualize the goal of this international - and in this case national - day," said the sexologist. Castro said that "homophobia and transphobia still exist in the world in a very strong, very cruel, very discriminatory way against homosexual, transsexual and transgender people in a general sense and, above all, as a result of ignorance." (*EFE*, 21/5/07)

**May 21:** The parents of the students at the José Martí Trades School, in Boyeros, Havana, expressed their discontent with the lack of teachers in this secondary education center. The principal informed that the school would not have sufficient teaching staff, and that the current course would be the last one for that major. (*Cuba Verdad*, 21/5/07)

**May 21:** Although Fidel Castro has not appeared in public for 10 months, his 16,000 words published in Granma Communist Party newspaper and repeatedly read out on state media in recent weeks have raised speculation that Castro could lead the country again. His partial return has many wondering whether he or his brother Raul Castro -- who was named interim president when Castro fell sick -- is in charge. "Fidel is writing articles to show that he is still alive. But Raul is silent and nobody is speaking to the Cuban people," said a caretaker watering plants at an apartment building in Havana. "I love Fidel but it is time he showed up, told Cuba 'Mission Accomplished' and handed power to his aides,"

he said, asking not to be named. Eight articles signed by Castro have appeared since March. But not a word on his illness, which is a closely guarded state secret, on whether he plans to resume leadership of Cuba, or retire. "He has not appeared physically, so we don't know how he is," said Miriam Leiva, a dissident and former diplomat. "The articles maintain his apparent presence, but they do not deal with the real issues Cubans are facing." "Cuba needs change and economic revival. The country is in political limbo," she said. (*Reuters*, 21/5/07)

**May 22:** Dissident **Antonio Moné Borrego**, leader of the "Miguel Valdés Tamayo" Human Rights Movement, was arrested in the city of Baracoa on May 20. The charges being brought up against him are still unknown. (*Payo Libre*, 22/5/07)

**May 23:** Fidel Castro said he was eating enough solid food to recover from several intestinal operations that had not been successful at first. In his most detailed account of his health crisis since handing over power and dropping out of sight 10 months ago, Castro said he spent months being fed intravenously, but has recovered his weight to a stable 176 pounds (80 kilos). "It wasn't just one operation, but various. Initially there was no success and this led to a prolonged recuperation," he said in an editorial column distributed by the Cuban government by e-mail and published in official daily Granma on May 24. The Cuban leader gave no indication of when he might show up again in public or resume leadership of the government. [[For the Deaf Who Won't Listen](#)] (*Reuters*, *AP*, *La Jornada*, 24/5/07)

**May 23:** Margarito Broche Espinosa, president of the illegal Council of Human Rights Rapporteurs in Cuba, conveyed great concern for the life of the Cuban prisoner of conscience Alfredo Pulido Lopez, who, like him, belongs to the group of dissidents who were sentenced to jail in 2003. Though it was recently detected that Pulido Lopez is infected with tuberculosis, he remains medically untreated at the Kilo 7 Prison in the province of Camaguey. Broche Espinosa demanded from the Cuban regime to show its consideration for the imprisoned dissident's state of health and made the government responsible for any consequences thereof. He also pointed out the case of political prisoner Normando Hernandez, who also suffers from tuberculosis while confined at the Kilo 5 ½ Prison in the province of Pinar del Rio and who is presently imprisoned in Camaguey with Pulido Lopez. (*Bitácora Cubana*, 24/5/07)

**May 24:** Members of Cuba's internal opposition said that the most recent article by Fidel Castro, in which he provides details about his convalescence but does not refer to the country's domestic situation, offers no indication that he will be returning to power. According to Elizardo Sanchez, who heads the outlawed Cuban Human Rights Commission, the elements that Castro refers to in the message "are nothing new (and) have been present over the last 10 months of strange paralysis that Cuba has endured." He said that Cuba is experiencing an "anomalous situation" in which "Castro doesn't cede (the reins of government), nor does anyone dare take them from him; it's a strange situation of paralysis, of lack of mobility and a country can't go on like that." Miriam Leiva, co-founder of the Ladies in White, a group comprising relatives of political prisoners, said that, despite the signs the president is recovering, "it seems that he's not in condition to resume his work as normal and that suggests the possibility he'll no longer carry out the functions of government." According to Oscar Espinosa, a former political prisoner, the most significant thing is that "Castro has made no mention of Cuba's reality in the series of commentaries he has been writing since March." Vladimiro Roca, of the Todos Unidos (All United) movement, said the article fulfills two objectives: "gradually making it clear to Cubans that they're not going to see him anymore" and sending the message that "he remains in charge." "That's how they're justifying the paralysis that the government has maintained all this time," according to Roca, who said he is convinced "it is necessary for someone to take the decisions (needed) to lift up the country," although he added he doesn't believe anyone will fill that role. The article, according to Marta Beatriz Roque, head of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society, "tries to (subtly suggest) that he is leading the country," but "in reality we don't know who is governing" and "this is a situation that could continue for some time." (*EFE*, 24/5/07)

**May 24:** Cuba's minister of culture, Abel Prieto, suggested that some owners of the independent press should receive long prison sentences. "I wish that we could imprison the owner of a media outlet. With much pleasure we would give him a life sentence for lying, for confusing the people," Mr. Prieto said. The Cuban official said it was "imperative" to

establish a tribunal that would "permit the evaluation and work of the media. Not only local and national but of all the great disinformation machinery in decisive media outlets with enormous world influence." Mr. Prieto was responding to journalists covering the Fifth World Conference of Artists and Intellectuals in Defense of Humanity, a Venezuelan-backed group supporting "the process of change in Latin America", that gathered in Cochabamba, Bolivia. (*The Washington Times, El Nuevo Herald, 24/5/07*)

**May 26:** An article published by the official newspaper "Granma" lambasted the foreign press corps in Havana for reporting about the domestic political opposition, regarded by the authorities as "mercenaries" in the service of the United States. The article did not single out any media outlet. "The propaganda apparatuses of the United States are not alone (...)," said the editorial entitled "Masters of manipulation," adding that "(...) Some of the correspondents accredited in Havana earn their keep every day by fabricating news on the alleged leaders of the domestic dissidence." (*Reuters, La Jornada, 26/5/07*)

**May 28:** Authorities at the prison "Alambradas de Manacas", in Villa Clara province, denied family visits to political prisoner Alexander García Lima. Prison authorities told Alexander's mother that he was punished for possessing articles denouncing the government that were to be published in the independent press. Ms Lima was told by a prison officer that Alexander would remain in a high security cell for 10 days and could be sent to Guantanamo, in the eastern part of the island. (*Cubamet, 1/6/07*)

**May 30:** As a new project to encourage the use of information technologies by senior citizens in Cuba, hundreds of computer clubs for the elderly are expected to be opened throughout the island. The initiative is organized by the Computer and Electronics Youth Clubs. It will be supported by intranet services especially designed to meet the interests of senior citizens, the official Juventud Rebelde newspaper reported. Eduardo Alfredo Triana, director of the Geriatric Center of Matanzas, said the use of information technologies would boost the quality of life of that age group by helping them to recover certain mental and physical abilities. He said the project could even help some cases to become involved in a working life again. (*ACN, 30/5/07*)

**May 30:** Fidel Castro is recovering and is pursuing a physical rehabilitation programme after emerging from the very dangerous phase of his illness, the president of the National Assembly of Cuba, Ricardo Alarcon, said. "I can tell you (that) he has already recovered a great deal, and that his progress is going very well," said Alarcon after acknowledging that Castro had been through "delicate surgery, a very dangerous period, and a phase of recuperation that was also quite risky at the beginning." Commenting on Castro's possible return to power, which he delegated temporarily to his brother Raul, Alarcon said that he "would not advise him to go back to days in which he delivers three or four speeches and travels hundreds of kilometres." "Perhaps he might behave a little more deliberately," he added, referring to the possibility that the historic leader of the Cuban communist revolution might take up the reins of government again. In his remarks on RCN Television, which interviewed him in Havana, Alarcon added that Castro "is following a programme of physical rehabilitation and treatment that he is pursuing with a great deal of discipline. He pointed out that "this is an 80-year-old man who has led a very active life (...) Despite his age and this circumstance, fortunately things have turned out very well, and his recuperation is going very well," insisted the president of the Cuban legislative body. (*BBC, 31/5/07*)

**May 31:** A vaccine against influenza for older people currently benefits 18.7 per cent of the population of the central province of Villa Clara where the life expectancy rate is 78 years old, the highest throughout Cuba. Over 150,000 senior citizens over 60 years old are given the vaccine in healthcare districts and homes for the elderly, Doctor Mario Sanchez, provincial head of the healthcare department in charge of the senior citizen care, told the press. (*ACN, 31/5/07*)

**May 30:** The directors of the Cuban Center of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB), announced that the new drug HEBERPROT-P has an international patent and is available for people who suffer from complex diabetic

foot ulcers, including neuropathic or neuroischemic patients. HEBERPROT-P, previously known as CITOPROT-P, speeds the healing of diabetic foot ulcers and reduces the risk of amputation. Ernesto Lopez Mola, head of the CIGB Business Development Department, said that the drug has been distributed to all the most important Angeology services of the main municipalities of each province in Cuba. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 31/5/07)

**May 31:** The presidents of the municipal assemblies of the People's Power met in Havana to analyze several tasks by local governments linked to the daily life of the population. The meeting includes reviewing the progress of the energy revolution. Participants will also discuss preparations for the next elections, fulfillment of the housing construction plan, measures to improve transportation services, highway administration and agricultural production. Organization and preparation to confront eventual natural disasters will also be part of the agenda, as will the work of social workers and implementation of the resolution to combat illegality, corruption and lack of discipline. Vice President of the State Council, Carlos Lage, the president of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, and the Minister of Finances, Jose Luis Rodriguez, chaired the meeting. (*Prensa Latina*, 1/6/07)

## **Economy**

**May 2:** Diversified Canadian miner Sherritt International Corp. posted a 150-percent jump in its first-quarter earnings, bolstered largely by higher nickel prices. Sherritt, which has power, oil, and nickel investments in Canada and Cuba, earned C\$89.1 million (\$80.3 million), or 52 Canadian cents a share, up from a profit of C\$35.7 million, or 20 Canadian cents, in the year-prior period. (*Reuters*, 2/5/07)

**May 3:** Venezuela and Cuba will create Aceros del ALBA, a joint venture with majority stakes owned by Caracas that will manufacture stainless steel for the domestic markets of both countries as well as for the Latin American region. Caracas will own 51 per cent of the shares in Aceros del ALBA, with the remaining 49 per cent going to Havana. (*Reuters*, 3/5/07)

**May 3:** The Cuban agricultural authorities have reported a decrease in this year's potato harvest. Losses are estimated at nearly 30 per cent as compared to the previous year's crop, and have been mainly ascribed to high overnight temperatures in December and January. (*Cubanet*, 3/5/07)

**May 4:** Cuban and Venezuelan Labor and Social Security ministers signed a memorandum of understanding in Havana that includes jobs, training, security and health. Cuban Minister Alfredo Morales noted that this is an important step in the framework of the agreements of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), boosted by both countries, and for the close relations between both peoples and governments. These programs, projects, and actions that we will carry out will help extend our work in favor of both peoples, Morales said, after saying the meeting was one of "brotherhood and collaboration." We are going to learn from each other, with great modesty and interest in supporting each other, he said. Venezuelan minister of People's Power for Work and Social Security, Jose Ramon Rivero, said the agreement will facilitate progress in training and assisting inspections of corporations industrial security system, giving special attention to sugar mills. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/5/07)

**May 5:** Orlando Lugo Fonte, president of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), told a press conference that "the Ministries of Agriculture and Sugar owe no arrears to private farmers." However, he said that they are still behind in their payments to cooperative farmers that supply education and health centers. (*Granma*, 5/5/07)

**May 7:** Cuban experts started assembling equipment to measure wind force in Las Tunas Province, an area considered among the most favourable for the use of this alternative energy source. In view of the shortage, high prices and

harmful effects of oil and its derivatives, and in contrast with the genocidal policy promoted by US President Bush to turn food into fuel, Cuba promotes the use of renewable, economic, clean energy sources. The works, which are expected to be completed in a year, will determine the kind of generators to be used and their contribution to the National Electro-energy System (SEN), among other aspects. (*Prensa Latina*, 7/5/07)

**May 8:** In order to increase the arrival of tourists in Cuba, authorities announced a series of measures that will make it easier for travelers to fly to the Caribbean island. Heriberto Prieto, first vice president of the Civil Aeronautic Institute, said that the new measures are aimed at boosting Cuba's tourist industry. They are aimed at stimulating traditional markets and others that are emerging, above all by strengthening organizational measures and investment to speed up arrivals in such airports as Havana and Varadero. With that goal in mind, new air routes are operating: Buenos Aires-Cayo Largo, Córdoba (Argentina)-Havana, and Santiago (Chile)-Havana. In addition, authorities are working to increase frequencies in the Moscow-Havana route. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/5/07)

**May 8:** The Center for the Promotion of Bolivia (CEPROBOL) and Cuba's Chamber of Commerce (CCC) signed a cooperation agreement in La Paz, diplomatic sources said. The signing of the accord, attended by Cuban ambassador to La Paz Rafael Dausa, establishes the coordination of missions and exchange of information on trade. It also strengthens benefits of the People's Trade Agreement and the Economic Complementation Agreement, in force between both nations. CCC judicial director Ivan Marichal and CEPROBOL executive director Martin Lopez signed the document. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 8/5/07)

**May 8:** Canada, the island's main tourist source for many years, has the leading role at the 27th International Tourism Fair of Cuba (FITCUBA 2007). The Cuban vice-president, Carlos Lage, attended the opening ceremony, during which Manuel Marrero Cruz, the Cuban minister of Tourism, welcomed the participants in the fair, "on this occasion dedicated to Canada, this vast country (...), a pioneer in the development of the Cuban tourism industry, and from which today we receive more than 600 thousand travelers every year." The already historical Cuban relationship with the Canadians "resembles an amalgamation of two countries, because millions of Canadians have mingled with us (...), forming indestructible bonds of friendship and familiarity," he added. (*World Data Service*, 8/5/07)

**May 9:** Cuba released an advance copy of an article by convalescing Fidel Castro on the evils of biofuels. It is the sixth article attributed to Castro, 80, in the nine months he has been recovering from intestinal surgery. In the article, to appear on May 10 newspapers, Castro chastises biofuel proponents for being ignorant or indifferent to the fact that people will go hungry in order for fuel to be produced -- or the proponents are doing it for their own material interest. Support for biofuels is "ethically and politically unacceptable," and what is needed is "an energy revolution, but one at the service of the people and not of the monopolies and imperialism (US dominance)." It is Castro's second written comment of the week. Four of the six articles attributed to the Cuban leader have been on the "dangers" of biofuel production. [[The Debate Heats Up](#)] (*AFP*, 9/5/07)

**May 9:** In 2006, poor controls in the Cuban milk industry translated in the loss of millions of litres of milk to bad quality, pickup delays and delivery detours. The official daily "Granma" denounced that, in 2006, just in terms of milk going sour, 14 million litres were lost while a similar quantity was used to make what is locally known as "farmer's cheese" (cheese curd blocks) due to "milk collection difficulties," even though the country produced 44 million litres more than the previous year. "All you need to do is drive along" the country's highways "to understand where part of the milk goes," referring to curd cheese vendors on road shoulders. The State does not allow the sale of this cheese. Despite the increase in milk production, "the country could not decrease its powder milk import volumes," Food Industry vice Minister Fray Álvarez told "Granma". (*EFEAGRO*, 9/5/07)

**May 9:** The financial sector fell prey to corruption in Cuba, Granma reported. For the first time, the official newspaper "Granma" made a brief mention of banking troubles on the island. The head of Auditing of the Republic's General

Prosecutor's Office, Sabó Herrera, revealed to the newspaper the existence of "loopholes in the banking system that facilitate the unsupervised creation and use of bank accounts." (*EFECOM*, 11/5/07)

**May 10:** A forest fire has destroyed 2,140 hectares of trees in a UNESCO-protected biosphere reserve in western Cuba. The fire, which began on March 30, expands a total of 2,500 hectares in the Ciénaga de Zapata bioserve, approximately 100 km from Havana, reported the official daily "Granma". (*Reuters*, 10/5/07)

**May 11:** The Cuban government will ease customs restrictions to allow non-profit imports of electrical equipment and motor vehicle parts, which had been prohibited for years. The list of products and accessories ranges from whole vehicle bodyworks and engines to power generators. The new regulations issued by the General Customs Office of the Republic of Cuba will go into effect on June 1. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/5/07)

**May 14:** Cuba has renovated its aircraft fleet with three Russia-made Il-96-300 passenger planes. Cuban officials said Russia's liners have already begun regular international flights. "Russia's state-of-the-art planes meet high security standards and will fly different routes," Cubana de Aviacion President Arturo Bada said. He pointed out that Russia's aircraft will be used for humanitarian programmes within the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, an international cooperation organization based upon the ideas of social, political and economic integration between Latin America and the Caribbean. (*Itar-Tass*, 14/5/07)

**May 14:** Companies interested in developing Cuba's oil and gas sector appear confident that the industry is set for significant growth. According to officials, total Cuban oil and gas production is expected to rise from its current level of around 85,000 barrels/day (b/d) of oil equivalent to 100,000 b/d by 2009, with investment spending of US\$300m-400m. Increased extraction from existing fields will initially account for the expansion, but in the longer term, hopes are pinned on potential finds in Cuba's exclusive economic zone in the Gulf of Mexico. So far, the bulk of foreign participation in the sector has been Canadian, led by Sherritt International and Pebercan, but new potential participants from Spain, India, China and Norway are said to be interested. According to Cuba's minister of basic industry, Yadira García, negotiations in progress with companies are likely to result in a sharp rise in the number of new wells being drilled, both on land and in coastal zones as well as in offshore deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Vietnam's state oil company, PetroVietnam, is due to ink a new oil exploration partnership agreement in the coming months, following a co-operation agreement signed with Cuba's state oil company, Cupet, in October 2006. While Sherritt has indicated that it might be exporting part of its production of crude oil by the end of 2007, new processing capacity is expected to lead to the eventual export of refined hydrocarbons. A Cuban-Venezuelan project for the rehabilitation of Cuba's largest oil refinery in the central port city of Cienfuegos is being readied for operation by the end of 2007 or in early 2008. Initial production from the plant of 65,000 b/d of refined fuel is planned. (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, 14/5/07)

**May 14:** A modernized oil refinery is set to go on line in December 2007, official media reported, in a shift due to turn import-dependent Cuba into an oil exporter. Overhauled with capital from a joint Venezuelan-Cuban company, the Cienfuegos refinery in south-central Cuba will meet the Caribbean country's own demands, and earmark 9,000 barrels of gasoline a day for export, Venezuela's communications and information ministry said in a release circulated in Havana. Vice President Carlos Lage confirmed the facility was set to start operations in December, the "Juventud Rebelde" newspaper reported. Vice President Lage said the refinery would process 65,000 barrels per day of petroleum by late this year or early 2008, the paper said. (*Caribbean Net News*, 14/5/07)

**May 15:** Cuba says it will spend about \$185 million to upgrade more than 200 resorts, golf courses, marinas and other amenities to try to reverse a dip in tourism to the island. The government has said the number of visitors to the island dropped by about 100,000 last year to 2.2 million, a situation that has hurt the communist nation's leading source of income. Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero announced the development plan at a tourism fair that was closed to the international press. The plan detailed in "Opciones", a state-run newspaper for foreign investors, will run through 2010 and seeks to make Cuba more competitive.

About \$162 million will be used to upgrade non-hotel amenities, such as golf courses, yacht clubs and theme parks. Other funds will be used to build 50 boutique inns around the country in addition to 10 already under construction and to improve the country's outdated highways, Marrero said. "Opciones" did not say how many tourists have visited Cuba so far this year, but quoted Marrero as saying that "in 2007, for the fourth consecutive year, the number will be greater than 2 million visitors." Many international visitors complain that Cuba is excessively expensive, especially because of a tax on required currency exchanges. (*Sun Sentinel, EFE, ACN, 15,18/5/07*)

**May 16:** Cuba's population declined in 2006 for the first time in 25 years due to fewer births, the Communist Party newspaper Granma said. The Cuban population dropped last year by about 4,300 to 11,239,536 inhabitants, according to official statistics. The number of births dropped to 111,084 in 2006 from 120,716 a year earlier, an 8 percent decline, the country's top demographic expert, Juan Carlos Alfonso, told Granma. Cuba's populace is aging fast and there is a marked rise in the number of people aged 60 and over compared to other age groups, Alfonso said. Women are deciding to have fewer children, said Alfonso, director of population studies at the National Statistics Office. On average, Cuban families tend to have only one child. The country has faced economic hardships and overcrowded housing since it lost the support of the Soviet Union 15 years ago. Today, 16.2 percent of the Cuban population is 60 or over, according to the National Statistics Office. The agency estimated that about one-quarter of the Cuban populace will fall into that category by 2025. That is a worrying statistic for any society because it means a smaller working population and escalating costs for the state in health care and social security. Wealthier countries solve the problem with immigration. In Cuba's case, emigration has been a constant since Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959 steered the country to Communism. (*Reuters, AP, Granma, Prensa Latina, 16/5/07*)

**May 16:** The joint-venture oil refinery project at Cienfuegos central province, is not expected to be completed on time as planned for the end of this year due to slow work progress, industry sources said. Cuba, with help from Venezuela, is building an oil refinery in Cienfuegos and refurbishing its existing Havana refinery. The refinery projects could reduce the country's reliance on oil products imports from neighboring Venezuela or boost Cuba's oil exports, but it will not stop its oil imports from Venezuela. Cuba has an operating 120,000 barrels per day refinery at Havana, but the refinery is grossly under-producing due to operational issues, sources said. The Cienfuegos refinery is expected to have an initial output of about 65,000 bpd when completed. "The progress of the refinery projects is not as expected," said a source who is involved in upstream projects in Cuba. "Cuba and PDVSA are hoping to complete the abandoned refinery project left behind by the Russians, but it is a major project because there is a lot of work to be done," he said. Besides the Cienfuegos project, the Cuba state oil company is also working to refurbish and upgrade its underperforming Havana refinery, the source said. The Havana project has a better chance of completion this year than the Cienfuegos refinery, he said. (*Reuters, 16/5/07*)

**May 16:** Cuban scientists who are advocating the exploitation of biomass to satisfy local energy demands gathered in the Cuban province of Matanzas to discuss a project which embraces ten years of experience on the topic. The workshop was attended by researchers and investors from the Ministries of Sugar, Agriculture and of Higher Education, from the Cuban Academy of Science and from other specialized institutions in the field of agriculture and livestock. The project emerges as an alternative to deal with the present challenges posed by the growing energy demands. The scientists propose the use of animal feces, the mass of oleaginous plants rich in oil and gas from agricultural waste as eco-friendly sources of energy to attain some regional independence from the national network. The initiative is supported by specialists from the Swiss Agency of Cooperation for Development, who delivered lectures on their experience in this area. (*ACN, 16/5/07*)

**May 16:** Cuba has increased the production of aluminium sections for its use in the construction of new buildings as part of the social programs currently being undertaken throughout the island. According to Alberto Garcia Oliva, vice president of the ALCUBA corporation, this increase is the result of the modernization of a manufacturing plant in Havana which is capable of processing 1.5 tons of aluminium sections an hour. ALCUBA is made up of 11 companies, which allocate over 90% of their production to the social programs underway throughout the island. (*ACN, 16/5/07*)

**May 16:** The harvest in Cuba's main tobacco-growing region is expected to be down 12 percent from last year's levels, the official press reported. The harvest of the solanaceae, which finishes at the end of May, "should provide a volume of the leaf equivalent to 88 percent of what we brought in last year" in the western province of Pinar del Rio, Cuban Communist Party daily Granma said. Nonetheless, the paper said the leaf this year is of a "higher quality" in order to "guarantee the product standards to which the industry and its export plans are committed." Pinar del Rio is thought to produce the world's finest tobacco. "The weather has been favorable for drying, which judging by samples and the first leaves of the harvest that have benefited from it should mean a more abundant supply of wrapper leaf (the cigar's outer covering) and of high-grade leaf for manufacture and export," Granma said. Corporacion Habanos SA, a joint venture of the Cuban government and the Spanish-French company Altadis, commands 83 percent of the global market - excluding the United States - for premium, hand-made cigars. (*EFE*, 16/5/07)

**May 16:** The Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA) recently issued a new national environmental strategy. The new plan seeks to improve protection and make rational use of natural resources. The 2007-2010 plan was announced by Orlando Rey Santos, CITMA's environmental director, official daily Granma reported. It includes the main environmental problems facing the nation today and proposes ways and tools to resolve or minimize them. The drafting of the new strategy took some two years and substitutes the plan in force since 1997, Rey Santos said. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/5/07)

**May 17:** According to the Ministry of Labor, Alfredo Morales, the existing salary policy is currently under review, in a move to boost industrial productivity. At the same time, new workplace discipline regulations are being implemented and efforts to eradicate corruption are under way. "At present, we are conducting a review of the productivity-based payment system and are implementing the design of a salary policy that ensures that the salary constitutes the worker's main incentive so that payment matches productivity," Morales told the official weekly paper "*Opciones*". (*EER*, 17/5/07)

**May 17:** Cuba said that a Soviet-era refinery in the port city of Cienfuegos will be rebuilt by the end of November, in a joint venture with Venezuela. The Cienfuegos refinery, on Cuba's south coast east of Havana, will begin refining 65,000 barrels a day of Venezuelan oil in January 2008, state television said. "We expect to finish renovating the refinery between the 23 and 30 of November," the refinery's maintenance chief Roberto Lopez said. "We plan to start production on January 1." Cuban television said Cienfuegos refinery will produce gasoline, fuel oil, jet fuel and liquid gas. Experts estimate the refinery renovation, which includes a new catalytic cracker, will cost at least \$500 million. Oil industry sources in New York told Reuters the refinery was not expected to come on stream as scheduled by year-end due to slow work progress by the joint venture between the state oil companies CUPET of Cuba and PDVSA of Venezuela. (*Reuters*, 18/5/07)

**May 18:** Prensa Latina reported on the creation of a collaborative biotechnology venture between Cuba's Neuronic SA and a Chinese state-held firm, Beida Wankun Science Development Co. The new organisation, which brings together two technology-transfer arms of Beijing University and Cuba's Neurosciences Centre, will be known as Beijing Neurotechnology Limited. The new alliance reflects the deepening involvement of Chinese institutions in Cuban medical technologies, and builds on previous collaborations in the production of monoclonal antibodies (under the name Biotech Pharmaceutical) and interferons (under the name ChangHeber Pharmaceutical). In a new departure, the latest bilateral scheme will focus on neurology, although it has not been clarified whether the applications involved will be in the area of small-molecule central nervous system (CNS) treatments or in biotech areas such as stem-cell technology. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 18/5/07)

**May 18:** At least 25 countries around the world block websites for political, social or other reasons as governments seek to assert authority over a network meant to be borderless, said a US-British-Canadian study. The The OpenNet Initiative said the regions chosen for review should not be considered comprehensive. It didn't include any countries in North America or Western Europe on grounds that filtering practices there have been better known than elsewhere. It

also excluded North Korea and Cuba for fear of risks to collaborators it would need in those countries. The OpenNet Initiative, a collaboration project between researchers at Cambridge, the University of Oxford, Harvard University and the University of Toronto, has previously published reports detailing censorship in specific countries. The latest study was its attempt to compare filtering worldwide. (*AP*, 18/5/07)

**May 18:** Cuba has substituted 50 percent of chemical fertilizers for pest management mechanisms in more than 247,1000 acres of fruit, greens, pasture and root vegetable crops. Maximo Martinez, Vice Director of the National Center for Plant Health, said that some 200 centers reproduce over 10 entomopathogens and a great deal of entomophagous. Entomopathogens feed on crop predators and entomophagous feed on insects causing plagues. Martinez told Granma daily that those have been used to control white flies, sweet potato weevils, coffee bean miners (*Hypothenemus hampei*), plus live barriers at plantations like the Neem tree. Cuba consumed over 1.3 million tons of chemicals and fertilizers for pest management in the 80's before the economic crisis of the early 90's (*Prensa Latina*, 18/5/07)

**May 18:** A hearing of the Economic Affairs Permanent Committee of the People's Power National Assembly (Cuban Parliament) met to analyze the efforts being made to improve labor discipline and productivity. Labor and Social Security Minister Alfredo Morales and Cuban Workers' Confederation Secretary General Salvador Valdes gave keynote speeches in the morning session. In his opening speech, Committee Chairman Osvaldo Martinez noted that labor discipline paves the way to increased productivity, a great goal to be achieved as part of a gradual political process. For his part, Minister Morales described that effort, based on the effective and responsible participation of workers and administrative leaders, as strategic for the construction of socialism. Morales pointed out that discipline involves compliance with labor and consumption standards, rational use of material and human resources, good quality and excellent services. CTC Secretary General Salvador Valdes noted that the trade union movement is working on the political and ideological education of workers as collective owners of production, and on boosting economic recovery. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/5/07)

**May 19:** The massive expansion of information and communication technology programs are being planned in Cuba, with implementation to take place over three to next five years for the benefit of the general public, government agencies and institutions, and student and youth organizations. Cuba's Ministry of Computer Science and Communication is undertaking an ambitious program to facilitate the wider use of the Information and Communications Technologies (ITC) by the general public, government agencies and institutions, and student and youth organizations over the next three to five years. The plan was discussed by ITC chief Ramiro Valdes Menendez, who spoke to the press on May 17, in Havana, after signing an agreement between the computer ministry and Che Guevara Youth Center. Center Director Nurys Concepción Perdomo pointed out that Cuba is "developing the 'informationalization' of the country". And added, "not only in the field of the telephony, but also in the area of 'social connectivity' and the Cuban intranet. It's a very ambitious plan, and not just for children and youth, but for all sectors of the society and the public as a whole." (*Juventud Rebelde*, 19/5/07)

**May 19:** Division General Ramon Pardo Guerra, Head of the General Staff Cuba's National Civil Defense System, said recently in a press conference that the country has been preparing to face the approaching hurricane season, paying special attention to extreme situations that could arise and in accordance with the evaluation of possible risks. «Meteor 2007» natural disaster exercises will be carried out across the entire length of the island. Participation will include the National Defense Council, state agencies, economic entities and social institutions, municipal and provincial defense councils, defense zones and the general public, as well as command forces, units and entities of armed forces and the Ministry of the Interior. This exercise will analyze the capabilities, the degree of preparedness and execution of measures to reduce the impact of disasters. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 19/5/07)

**May 20:** Tourism, for 15 years the locomotive of the otherwise weak communist economy, faces erosion from within Cuba and without, the official Cuban magazine "Bohemia" reported. In 2006 tourist arrivals fell 3.6 percent, "falling

short of plans to grow by almost eight percent and reach 2.5 million foreign tourists on our streets and beaches." Only 2.2 million showed up, the weekly Cuban magazine said in an article dated May 8. The number of European visitors slid during the 2007 December-April peak season. Canadians, the most numerous visitors to the Caribbean island, grew a meager 1.6 percent compared with 2006. The magazine blamed the slowdown in part on US restrictions on travel to Cuba, including Washington 's tightening of visits by Cuban-Americans to their families. "Foreign tour operators and Cuban hoteliers noted a drop in the quality of services in the sector," the report added. (*AFP*, 20/5/07)

**May 21:** The Colombian Minister of Mines and Energy, Hernán Martínez, began an official visit to Cuba to sign energy collaboration and conservation agreements and to encourage Latin-American integration in this sector. Martínez came to Havana invited by the Cuban Basic Industry Minister, Yadira García. (*AFP*, 21/5/07)

**May 22:** Cuba and the Dominican Republic will expand air connections with the increasing of flights between both countries. Sources at Cubana de Aviacion airline said that current flights by IL-62 planes will be joined by modern TU-204-300 jets next September 1, with very competitive tariffs for the region. Meanwhile, Cuba's Aerocaribbean airline will continue to fly between Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, and Santiago de Cuba. The airline company enjoys high demand as celebrations of the Caribbean Festival in eastern Santiago de Cuba approach; this year dedicated to the Dominican Republic. (*ACN*, 22/5/07)

**May 22:** Cuba is engaged in a new program of fuel oil energy generation that will add 1,700 MWe to the current national electricity system, Cuban Basic Industries Minister Yadira Garcia affirmed. The minister highlighted the results of the transformations made to Cuba's electricity system in the last two years, to the 5th International Conference on Renewable Energy, Energy Saving and Energy Education meeting in Havana. The Energy Revolution promotes a conceptual change through decentralization of the national system, use of new energy resources and energy saving, installing 3,000 new generators in key economic points, public health and population services. The program also involves training operators and maintenance personnel to guarantee optimal function and reparation, she said. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/5/07)

**May 22:** The Cuban government is willing to contribute to electricity production in Angola, Cuba's ambassador Pedro Ross Leal said. Speaking to the Angolan official news agency, Ross Leal said his country may bring to Angola the experience in energy saving and supply of this good to the population. Commenting on the Cuban experience, the diplomat pointed out the alteration of 52 per cent of the electricity network in that country. He reminded that Angola is in a phase of reconstruction and its government intends to contribute with its experience in various domains of human development, an intention already manifested to the Angolan authorities. Thus, the Cuban authorities are just waiting for the signing of co-operation accords soon. (*Angolan Press*, 22/5/07)

**May 22:** Cuba is modernizing its ethanol-producing facilities despite Fidel Castro's repeated assertions that making more of the biofuel could starve the world's poor. The island plans to upgrade 11 of its 17 refineries, which produce up to 47 million gallons annually of ethanol from sugar cane, said Conrado Moreno, a member of Cuba's Academy of Sciences. The refineries currently produce alcohol for use in rum and other spirits, as well as medications and cooking on the island. But the improvements will give Havana the capacity to produce fuel for cars, Moreno told reporters at a conference on renewable energy. Ethanol produced in Cuba is not for cars now, but "in four or five years, we'll see," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/5/07)

**May 23:** Cuba is successfully testing new technologies in the field of communications, such as IP Telephony, digital TV, and different phone and electric connections for data transmission. IP Telephone technology is under evaluation at a Havana communication center, said Luis Conde, an expert with Cuba's Telecommunications Enterprise ETECSA, cited by Juventud Rebelde newspaper. We have made some tests with that technology, which will allow clients access through a single network to telephone, data transmission or digital TV services, based on the appropriate equipment. The evaluation process also includes what is known as Power Line Communications (PLC), which allows phone

communication through power cables with no impact on the electric service. The expert spoke during the InfoClub conference underway in Havana. He said Cuba is also considering wireless connectivity at short and long distances. (ACN, 24/5/07)

**May 23:** Cuba announced the end of a disastrous sugar harvest after heavy rainfall in eastern provinces washed out efforts to recoup tonnage. The Communist Party newspaper Granma said the last few sugar mills still in operation had shut down operations, and only two of Cuba's 13 provinces, Matanzas and Cienfuegos, met their targets. No figures were given for the second year in a row. According to Reuters estimates, Cuba produced more than 1 million tonnes of raw sugar, but less than the 1.2 million tonnes milled in 2006, the worst harvest in a century. The government had planned to produce between 1.5 million and 1.6 million tonnes by May 1. (Reuters, 23/5/07)

**May 23:** Cuba's Ecosol Solar division is currently implementing several renewable energy projects in other countries. Ecosol Solar is an entity with the Corporation of Electronic Technology Exports (COPEXTEL), which belongs to the Cuban Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications. Ecosol Solar experts Raul Novo and Rene Diaz told the press that several health care and education facilities received electricity from solar panels in countries such as Bolivia, Mali, South Africa, Honduras and Lesotho. (ACN, 23/5/07)

**May 24:** Toronto's Sherritt International Corp. is bullish on both the skyrocketing nickel price and its wide range of investments in Cuba and isn't terribly worried about being scooped up like most of its former Canadian-owned competitors in the last year, the company's chief executive says. "We are having a really nice time," Sherritt chief executive Jowdat Waheed announced to shareholders at the company's annual meeting at Roy Thomson Hall. "Prices for commodities are substantially higher than last year and are poised for another record year in 2007," he said. The miner will triple annual nickel production in the next five years with expanded output from its Cuban operations and also if its buyout of Dynatec Corp. is completed as planned next month, giving it control of the coveted Ambatovy nickel laterite project in Madagascar. Shareholders were curious about the future of the company's Cuban assets – from nickel and cobalt to coal, oil and real estate – with Fidel Castro's health still in question and any change in government that may come. "It's a terrific place for us to do business. We think we will endure under any circumstance," he said. The miner has committed \$1.2 billion in capital spending on various projects there over the next three years. (The Toronto Star, 25/5/07)

**May 24:** The governments of Cuba and India signed a Protocol of Collaboration on Renewable Energy for 2007-2009. This agreement is the first India signed with a Latin American nation. The agreement was signed in Havana by Vilas Baburao Muttemwar, head of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy of India, and Fernando Gonzalez Bermudez, acting minister of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment of Cuba. The agreement establishes the collaboration in the fields of wind energy, biomass conversion, small hydroelectric power stations, and thermo solar and photovoltaic energy. The two ministries will promote scientific exchange to share experiences, take part in workshops and seminars in the above mentioned fields, and the training of Cuban scientists. (Juventud Rebelde, 25/5/07)

**May 24:** At the close of the fifth International Conference on Energy Renewal, Conservation, and Education (CIER 2007), hydrogen as fuel was the discussion on the table. The conference was held at the Havana Convention Center. Because hydrogen is the lightest and most abundant chemical element on Earth it makes sense that scientists would research its viability as a fuel. Hydrogen combustion results in water. Hydrogen as a fuel is thought to be extremely clean and energy efficient. At the CIER 2007 conference, studies involving the impact of hydrogen as a fuel for motor vehicles and its cost-effectiveness were discussed. Currently in Cuba, research on obtaining hydrogen from electricity generated by bagasse (a residue of sugar cane crushing) and through electrolysis is being conducted. (H2 Daily, 28/5/07)

**May 27:** Many international travelers complain that Cuba has become too expensive, particularly because of a tax required on currency exchanges. For instance, the government automatically takes 20 percent on all dollar exchanges. "We know that Canadian tour operators have complained about costs in Cuba," said Philip Peters, a Cuba expert and vice president of the Lexington Institute think tank in Arlington, Virginia. "Places like the Dominican Republic are much more competitive. Others in the business have complained that refueling costs for planes in Cuba are much, much higher than in other places." Dissident economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe said the subject of tourism had virtually disappeared from the state-controlled media and this reflected the ambivalence of some ranking government officials toward travel to the island. "Tourism has not been given the priority that it had in the past," he said. "There is a sector in the Cuban government that views tourism as a very serious political threat to its absolute power." (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/5/07)

**May 27:** At least two people were drowned and as many as 2,500 others had to be evacuated due to the flooding caused by the rise of two rivers in the eastern province of Camaguey, Cuban state television reported. Emergency services teams are evaluating damage and the potential for further flooding in areas already affected by torrential rains in recent days. Civil Defense authorities provided a preliminary report indicating that 158 homes have sustained damage of some sort, with at least 23 of them being completely destroyed. The two fatalities occurred when a youth and an adult man tried to swim through the strong current of the Hatibonico River. The heavy rains that have hit Camaguey, located some 570 kilometers (354 miles) east of Havana, exceeded 200 millimeters (7.8 inches) within a few hours, causing the Tinima and Hatibonico rivers to overflow their banks. Reservoirs are at 60 percent of capacity and dams are releasing water to address the situation, officials said. An emergency services spokesman in Camaguey said an alert had been declared in response to the heavy rains, which forecasts say could continue for several days. In Manzanillo, eastern province of Granma, several houses collapsed and others were reported damaged by the independent press. (*EFE, Cubanet*, 27/5/07)

**May 29:** Cuba plans to launch a three-year port modernization and expansion program that will cost \$180 million, a high-level official told the weekly *Opciones*. The deputy transportation minister in charge of maritime and port affairs, Gilberto Ponce, said ports would be deepened, Chinese-made cargo handling equipment installed and other facilities improved. The island's busiest ports will also be dredged and terminals for shipping sugar will be repaired, Ponce said. Work has already started at several terminals at the port of Havana. Ponce said the port upgrades would increase productivity and shorten vessels' stays, cutting the fees paid for delays when cargo is unloaded. (*EFE*, 29/5/07)

**May 30:** Cuba and China have signed a sweeping new cooperation agreement in the areas of medicine and biotechnology, government-run media reported. The daily *Granma* newspaper reported that the president of China's Academy of Sciences, Lu Yong Xiang signed the deal after meeting with Cuba's Secretary of the Council of State, Jose Miyar Barrucco. *Granma* reported that the deal would enhance mutual cooperation in the areas of vaccines, monoclonal antibodies, medical and agricultural biotechnology, renewable energy and nanotechnology among other areas. China is Havana's second-largest trading partner after Venezuela, with bilateral trade of some two billion dollars in 2006. (*AFP*, 30/5/07)

**May 30:** Various Cuban communities will benefit from social projects starting soon as a result of cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela, under the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). The announcement was made during the delivery of seven Fiat buses for public transportation in communities of the province of Pinar del Rio (Sandino, Bolivar and Isabel Rubio). The delivery took place in a public act presided over by the highest authorities of this Cuban province and Ali Rodriguez Araque, Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba. Rodriguez Araque noted that these projects —both of a material and social character— show that Cuba and Venezuela are working on a path of mutual benefit and cooperation that will lead to better quality of life for the peoples. When the ceremony concluded, Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation Marta Lomas told the press that the construction of Baracoa's gravity aqueduct will soon start, as well as the revitalization of agriculture in the municipality of Venezuela, in Ciego de Avila, all this as part of the ALBA. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 30/5/07)

**May 31:** Cuban Minister of Basic Industry Yadira Garcia highlighted the progresses achieved by the Energy Revolution and the importance to continue working on that area. Garcia spoke at the meeting of presidents of municipalities of the People's Power held at Havana's Convention Center. She pointed out the setting up of thousands of new water pumps in housing buildings, the improvement of the power grid by 70 percent and a 10 percent saving in oil consumption, compared to 2006. The Minister pointed out that despite the achievements, all transformations made in the energy sector have not yet concluded. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/5/07)

## **Exile Community**

**May 7:** Either by chance or by design, a growing number of Venezuelans - more than 2,000 since 2002 - are marrying Cuban refugees on the fast track for green cards, and drawing scrutiny from US immigration officials. The escalation coincides with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's increasing ties to Cuba's Fidel Castro, which have prompted thousands of Venezuelans to flee and then overstay their visas in the United States. In South Florida, attorneys say marriages between Cuban refugees and Venezuelan immigrants top the list of non-Cubans marrying Cubans, followed by Colombians and Mexicans. For undocumented immigrants, marrying a Cuban with a green card can be their ticket to staying in the United States - and even a better deal than marrying a US citizen. Non-Cubans married to US citizens for less than two years obtain conditional residence, but those who marry Cubans with green cards can get permanent residency after a year. (*McClatchy Newspapers*, 7/5/07)

**May 10:** Friends and sympathizers of former CIA operative Luis Posada Carriles toasted a federal judge's decision to drop immigration charges against him, as pressure mounted on the US government to prosecute the aging activist on terrorism counts. Cuban-American hard-liners celebrated the news that Posada was coming home and described him as a patriot. They tuned in to Spanish-language radio programs and waited to hear if he had arrived home after the ruling in El Paso. Miguel Saavedra, a Posada supporter and head of the Cuban exile group Vigilia Mambisa, said he and others hoisted cups of Cuban coffee as a toast for the aging militant. "We are celebrating Posada Carriles' freedom," he said. "He is a great man, a fighter. We have seen the triumph of justice in the United States." (*Sun Sentinel*, 10/5/07)

**May 11:** Former "Comandante" with Fidel Castro's guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra remembered Cuban interim leader Raúl Castro, a comrade-in-arms during the fight against dictator Fulgencio Batista, as a vengeful and calculating man who helped put him in jail for 20 years. Huber Matos also doesn't think much of Castro's ability to rule Cuba in place of 80-year-old brother Fidel. "Raúl is not really governing. His older brother continues to manipulate him at will and rein in his initiatives," Matos said. Matos, 88, arrived in Miami in 1979 after serving his sentence, imposed when he tried to resign from the Cuban armed forces with a letter accusing the elder Castro of leading the country into a communist system. He now believes that there's a "command crisis" in Cuba, pitting members of the ruling class against each other, and hopes that armed forces and interior ministry officials will step in to lead the island toward democracy. Dissidents "form the democratic (...) leadership inside Cuba [and] are called upon to play a future role next to those military people who, in due course, opt to follow the changeover," he added. "The Castro model is exhausted and I have faith that democracy in Cuba has a future." (*The Miami Herald*, 11/5/07)

**May 18:** The Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF) claimed that it is willing to establish "a bridge" with the Cuban military and civilian leadership to avoid a succession when Fidel Castro permanently leaves the political arena in the island. Jorge Mas Santos, president of CANF's executive board, said that it is necessary to admit that "all Cubans must join efforts to find a solution leading toward freedom and democracy." But in this search, neither Fidel nor Raúl Castro can take part, and least of all those who "have blood on their hands," elaborated Mas Santos. (*EFE*, 21/5/07)

**May 25:** "Havana Today in Images", a Miami Dade College (MDC) photo exhibit that opened at the Tower Theater in Little Havana, raises new though uncertain hopes among Cuban exiles for the reclamation of their property in a post-Castro Cuba. The exhibit, which was organized by a Florida International University-based NASA office in

collaboration with MDC, matches satellite images of specific zones of Havana with building-by-building, street-level photography. A link on the project's website clicks to an affidavit that can be filed, with supporting documentation, claiming ownership of the building photographed. "Whether this is considered proper evidence depends on who would be processing these applications," says Tania Mastrapa, who runs a Miami consulting practice on property reclamation in Cuba. "I have not heard of these claim mechanisms being used in other countries," says Mastrapa, whose doctoral thesis at the University of Miami examined post-Communist property claims in the Czech Republic and Nicaragua and the lessons they could have for Cuba. Still, she says, "owners can see how their building is being used, if there's a sign for a restaurant, for example, or what shape it's in. Then they can decide if they want to try to reclaim it. On the issue of exiles trying to take back property, architect Nicolás Quintana, who owned property in Havana but does not plan to try to reclaim it, thinks a great deal of wisdom must be exercised. "You just can't evict people who've been living in a residence for 35 years," he says. "There has to be some social justice." (*The Miami Herald*, 25/5/07)

**May 29:** Organizations of Cuban residents in Spain expressed skepticism regarding upcoming Havana talks on human rights between the Governments of Spain and Cuba. The Cuban Liberal Union said that the release of political prisoners should be a pre-requisite for establishing a mechanism on rights and freedoms. The platform Cuba Democracia Ya claimed not to be expecting much on account of the lack of a clear agenda or a provision of access to those who see their rights trampled on. The Cuban-Spanish Association declared to have "zero faith" in the outcome of the talks. (*El País*, 29/5/07)

**May 30:** A founder of the Cuban Liberty Council, a conservative exile group, stepped down from the organization's board after it emerged that a subsidiary of the French construction company he represents built hotels on the communist-ruled island. Attorney Ignacio E. Sanchez was asked to resign by his fellow board members after *The Miami Herald* reported on his legal work for Bouygues Travaux Publics, the leading bidder in a \$1 billion tunnel project for the Port of Miami. In his capacity as a lawyer for BTP, Sanchez said that while the company never worked in Cuba, one of its affiliates may have been involved in building hotels on the island. CLC director Ninoska Perez told the press Sanchez was asked to leave "because it was not acceptable that someone who represents a company that does business in Cuba was part of the Council". (*EFE*, 30/5/07)