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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

### June 2006

#### Highlights:

**Domestic Affairs:** Cuba's provincial and local government leaders hold discussions about various aspects of people's quality of life. Raul Castro says the Communist Party will remain in control of Cuba if there is a leadership change. A leading member of the Cuban Communist Party is sentenced to 12 years in prison for corruption. Moderate dissidents in Cuba urge the government of Fidel Castro to declare a legal moratorium on executions.

**Economy:** Cuba declares an end to the daily blackouts. Cuba's sugar industry doesn't make its harvest goals this year. Thousands of professors and students from the University of Havana will be participating in the control and distribution of fuel in the island's capital.

**Exile Community:** A former board member of the Cuban American National Foundation says he and other CANF leaders created a paramilitary group to do away with Fidel Castro, a claim denied by CANF's spokesman. The Spanish Socialist Party invites CANF and other Latin American parties to a seminar on the future of the region.

**Foreign Affairs:** Members of the Bolivian medical association stage a strike to protest the use of Cuban doctors in government programs. OAS Secretary General says the members of the OAS should create a channel for dialogue with Cuba. European Union member-states maintain their current position of "critical dialogue" with Cuba. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque reiterates that Cuba is committed to the revitalization of the Non Aligned Movement.

**Security:** Bolivia's and Venezuela's presidents say that if anyone invades Cuba they are ready to take arms in defence of the island.

**US-Cuba Relations:** The Cuban government cuts off electricity to the US diplomatic mission in Havana. A controversial children's book about Cuba is removed from all Miami-Dade school libraries. Cuba and the US exchange accusations during the sessions of the new UN Human Rights Council. A report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba is leaked to the press.



## Domestic Affairs

**June 1:** Raul Castro, Fidel Castro's younger brother and designated successor, is no spring chicken. The world's longest-serving defense minister will be 75 on June 3rd, and many wonder whether he is too old to fill his brother's over-sized shoes if he outlives the president. The elder Castro himself recently suggested a younger generation will have to take up the baton if Cuba's socialist society is to survive. Cuba watchers say he is no obsequious subaltern in the communist state the two brothers built after their rag-tag guerrilla force ousted U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista in a 1959 revolution. Brian Latell, a former CIA analyst who has watched Cuba for decades, believes Raul, once an orthodox Communist and now a pragmatist, will emerge as Cuba's next leader with the backing of the army, keep the lid on dissent and push through economic reforms following China's model. "A praetorian regime dominated by Raul and the generals seems all but certain, though for how long is impossible to know," he wrote in his book "After Fidel." Yet most analysts believe Raul is bound to play a crucial role, at least initially, in any political transition once his brother has left the scene, while ensuring military stability. "In a post-Fidel Cuba, Raul would provide an important leadership role, stepping into the void left by his brother," said Canadian historian John Kirk of Dalhousie University in Halifax. "This would probably be a transitional contribution." (AP, 1/6/06)

**June 1:** Many women in Cuba resort to abortion, 40 years after it was decriminalised, as though it were just another contraceptive method. Some even prefer it to condoms, the pill or intrauterine devices (IUDs), without giving a thought to the risks involved or the ethical aspects. More than 4,000 women all over the country were interviewed by biostatistics expert Miriam Gran for her research study entitled "Voluntary termination of pregnancy and contraception: two methods of fertility control," published with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Although the abortion rate is falling, the trend is not so marked "as to be able to speak of major changes" in the last two years, Gran told the press. The study, which was published this year and is being circulated among government officials and specialists, included 1,806 women who decided to terminate their pregnancies, and 2,442 who did not. Experts believe that more than 70 percent of Cuban women who consult for infertility problems have a history of one or more abortions in adolescence or young adulthood. (IPS, 1/6/06)

**June 1:** Ditching the cigars but not the army fatigues, Fidel Castro leads a life that guarantees he'll live more than a century, according to his doctor. "He is going to live 140 years," said Dr. Eugenio Selman, who heads the 120 Years Club that promotes healthy habits for the elderly. Despite recurring rumors of his demise, Castro, who turns 80 in August, is not only a stellar club member but has also shown great resiliency as a leader, said Selman. "El Comandante" rose to power as Cuba's supreme leader in 1959, outlasting eight — and potentially nine — American presidents (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Bush Sr., Clinton and perhaps G.W. Bush). "It's in the genes". Selman credits Castro's "good genes" and outstanding diet and lifestyle. "He eats moderately," he said. "His health is strong as iron — he has demonstrated that his whole life." The doctor shed no light on Castro's actual diet or if the leader drank specially brewed teas but emphasized that his famous patient follows all the club's six main guidelines. (Reason, 1/6/06)

**June 2:** The Eighth Seminar of Italian Language, Literature and Art wound up in Havana with a strengthening of ties between both countries. The third and last meeting was held at the recently restored Ruben Martinez Villena Library in Old Havana. Mayerin Bello, a professor from the Arts and Literature Faculty of the University of Havana, presented the "12th Notebook of Cuban and Italian Culture", a valuable compilation reflecting the wealth of cultural ties enjoyed between the two countries. (AIN, 2/6/06)

**June 2:** Fidel Castro participated in one of the regular working meetings the country's municipal and provincial mayors hold with the government's leadership to evaluate national priority topics, Granma newspaper reported. Attending debates on the plan to construct houses, the island's leader was interested on the course of those programs and requested information on the government's main leaders and from several organizations involved. Castro analyzed, among other issues, the functioning and modernization of construction material industries from a technical and cost point of view, as well as results of roofing imports and other elements used to build houses. (Escambray, 3/6/06)

**June 2:** Cuba's provincial and local government leaders, who have gathered at the Havana Convention Center, agreed to send a letter to General Raul Castro, second secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee, congratulating him on his 75th birthday. The letter, signed by all the leaders participating in working sessions, highlights Raul Castro's achievements as head of the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, his valuable contribution to the work of the government since 1974, and his intense work in fulfilling his commitment to the party and responsibilities to the state and government. (*Granma*, 3/6/06)

**June 3:** Vice President Carlos Lage led discussions about various aspects of people's quality of life during a meeting with provincial and local government leaders gathered at Havana's Convention Center. Public Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer, who is also a member of the Political Bureau, pointed out that the most important transformations underway in the primary health care sector are the expansion of services in polyclinics, improvements in the quality and organization of patient services, and the acquisition of high technology resources. "Ninety percent of the population's health problems," said the minister, "are solved at the local level; therefore local assistance is and it will continue to be the fundamental base for supporting the revolution underway in this field." According to Deputy Public Health Minister Marcia Cobas, members of the healthcare sector are well aware of the deficiencies in those areas, noting that these are like "barometers for action." Among the flaws she mentioned were inadequate treatment, marginal hygienic conditions in some clinics, poor communication with the public, the misappropriation of resources and the poor organization of services in certain facilities. Ernesto Suarez, the secretary of the parliament, reported that in the delegate's reports, one of the most frequent complaints was the lack of information on the reorganization of family doctor services. "It is necessary," he pointed out, "to be able to explain to people what the changes are and to use this information as a tool for local leaders to better manage and verify work." (*Granma*, 3/6/06)

**June 3:** The Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) replaced Salvador Valdés Mesa with Julio César García Rodríguez, as first secretary in the province of Camagüey according to the official daily newspaper Granma. The paper did not provide an explanation for the reshuffle. In the last few weeks, four first secretaries have been replaced in the provinces of Matanzas, Villa Clara, Pinar del Río and Cienfuegos, "at the request of the Political Bureau"—the highest authority of the PCC. (*EFE*, 4/6/06)

**June 4:** Raúl Castro, younger brother of Fidel and Cuba's defence minister, turned 75, still marching in step with his famous sibling whose back he has watched and whose decisions he has shared since they took power in the 1959 revolution. As head of the military and security apparatus, Raúl is the second most powerful man in Cuba. He runs much of the day-to-day affairs of the ruling Communist party. More important, as first vice-president and second secretary of the Communist party, he is in line to take over from Castro, who will be 80 in August, if he can no longer govern. "He needs to be taken very, very seriously," says Hal Klepak of the Royal Military College of Canada. "He built and has presided over Cuba's revolutionary armed forces for nearly half a century and has proved both his management and leadership skills in places like Angola, in defending the country and perhaps most dramatically deterring anyone from attacking." An increasing number of security experts believe Raúl might be the best option, even if a brief one, for stability if not gradual change, on Fidel Castro's death, Mr Klepak said. This view is opposed by the Bush administration, the Cuban-American establishment and dissidents, who say they are all working to make sure that it does not happen. (*Financial Times*, 4/6/06)

**June 4:** All things considered, Cuba is probably not the easiest place in the world to be Jewish. For one thing, there is not a single rabbi in the entire country. There is no local supplier of matzo or gefilte fish, either. What's more, the government of Fidel Castro broke off diplomatic relations with Israel more than 30 years ago and now officially denies the existence of the Jewish state, while earnestly backing the Palestinian side in the bloody and seemingly intractable Mideast conflict. "The Jewish community exists because we are very stubborn," says Adela Dworin, president of the Hebrew Community of Cuba. "The Jewish community exists because we have a wonderful organization called the Canadian Jewish Congress. They have done wonderful things for the saving of Judaism in Cuba." For more than 40 years, Canadian Jews have been supporting their few remaining Cuban brethren in a variety of ways, thereby helping to

ensure that a Jewish presence survives in what is one of the world's few remaining Communist countries. That presence is now sadly reduced from former times. The Jewish population in Cuba peaked in the 1950s at around 15,000 people, but most of them fled the island in the wake of the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power. Despite this persistent drain on its numbers, Cuba's Jewish community somehow manages to hold out against the ravages of communism and time. (*Toronto Star*, 4/6/06)

**June 5:** Cuban First Vice President Raul Castro chaired the main ceremony marking the 45th anniversary of the Ministry of Interior (MININT). After receiving a commemorative diploma from the hands of Minister of Interior Division Major General Abelardo Colome Ibarra, the vice president congratulated MININT members for their presence in every crucial battle of the homeland. In turn, the members of MININT vowed to continue to defend state security and domestic order in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/6/06)

**June 6:** With the aim of fostering scientific and health research, the 2nd Conference on Education for Health in the sub region of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean is kicking off in Havana. With the theme "Effectiveness in Fostering Health," the event, sponsored by the International Union for Health Promotion and Education, the Pan-American Health Organization and the UN Population Fund, gathers about one hundred experts of several countries. The meeting's agenda includes issues like primary health care, food and nutrition, development of public health policies, social communication, research, planning, development and education. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/6/06)

**June 6:** Opposition journalist Guillermo Fariñas, who has been on a hunger strike since January 31 of this year, is "in very delicate health" and doctors are considering performing surgery on him again, a source from the Cuban dissidence reported. The Marta Abreu Women's Movement, an illegal movement based in the central Cuban city of Santa Clara, said that a CAT scan was done on Farinas on June 5 and doctors found blood clots in his lungs. "They are giving him transfusions of plasma and albumin," said Noelia Pedraza Jimenez, president of the Marta Abreu Women's Movement. She spoke to members of the foreign press from Santa Clara, located about 300 km from Havana. She added that on June 4 she began a hunger strike in support of Fariñas, and that Idania Llanes Contreras, Lisel Zamora Carrandi, Luis Aragon Garcia and Yunieski Garcia Lopez, all of whom are members of the Marta Abreu opposition organization, are only taking liquids. Other dissident organizations are calling for a vigil on behalf of Fariñas. (*Notimex*, 6/6/06)

**June 7:** The ten permanent commissions of the People's Power National Assembly (Parliament) will look into a Military Court Bill, according to official sources in Havana. Deputies of the National Defense and Constitutional and Juridical Affairs Commission will help parliamentarians discuss the bill. Jorge Lezcano Perez, advisor of the president of the National Assembly, asserted discussions before ordinary sessions address other issues related to those commissions. The Attention to Services, Economic Affairs, Local Organizations, Production Activity, Education, Culture, Science and Technology and Environment commissions will be discussing the situation of most domestic sectors. (*Granma*, 7/6/06)

**June 7:** During the celebrations for the 45th anniversary of the (Cuban) Ministry of the Interior, Fidel Castro said that smuggling operations of Cuban emigrants doubled in the last year, adding that they are organized by networks that operate "with impunity" and the indulgence of authorities in the southern United States and Mexico. In 2000, a total of 3,469 emigrants were involved in 470 operations; while in 2005 the number increased to 7,644 illegal emigrants and 713 operations, with "outside support", added Castro. "In the first quarter of this year 331 operations involving 3,854 participants have been reported", said Castro. (*AFP*, 12/6/06)

**June 7:** Participants in the International Literacy Congress being held in Havana urged UNESCO to adopt a Cuban literacy method known as the "Yo Si Puedo" (Yes I Can) program. Argentinean Claudia Camba --who spoke on behalf of the International Support Front in favour of the Cuban initiative which has already been successfully applied in over 15 countries-- gave a UNESCO representative a petition with over 2,000 signatures endorsing the request. Camba

spoke during the first day of sessions in the International Seminar on Literacy Policies and Programs which will run until June 9 at Havana's Convention Center with some 600 delegates from over 30 nations. (*ACN*, 7/6/06)

**June 8:** Fidel Castro proclaimed Cuba the world's safest nation during an event marking the 45th anniversary of the Interior Ministry, which oversees law enforcement on the Communist-ruled island. "Cuba is the safest country in the world and our (law-enforcement personnel) at the Interior Ministry can also consider themselves the most honest and honorable," Castro said at the ceremony, which was off-limits to the foreign press. The Cuban leader added that, "capitalism will never resolve the problem of crime," the official daily *Juventud Rebelde* reported. "Crime problems get worse all the time in many countries, because there are more of all types of drugs going around and the governments don't have the political will or necessary preparation to guarantee their citizens the tranquility they deserve," Castro said. He added that Cuban police officers are the "most decent and humane, combating crime without there being injustices, murders, death squads, torture or other types of (state terrorism)." Dissidents and human rights monitors, however, say the 47-year-old one-party state does inflict inhumane treatment on the roughly 300 political prisoners now being held in Cuba's jails. (*EFE, Prensa Latina*, 8/6/06)

**June 8:** After a preliminary assessment, heavy rains in eastern Cuba left one person dead, seven houses destroyed and many others damaged, while causing flooding on highways and crops. Approximately 1,500 peoples have been evacuated, reported the Civil Defence. A 41-year-old farmer drowned while trying to cross a high river, according to the provincial CD. The official daily *Granma* added that the rise and overflowing of rivers in Guantánamo caused the destruction of seven houses, damaged others, and affected crops while blocking highways. (*AFP*, 8/6/06)

**June 8:** Cuba's state broadcasters will broadcast all the matches in soccer's World Cup, Cuban state newspaper *Granma* said. A state television channel will show 25 weekend matches live, and broadcast the remaining 39 after the matches have been played, while radio will broadcast 55 of the 64 matches live. (*Xinhua*, 9/6/06)

**June 9:** A growing dissatisfaction among many faithful in the last months is due to a perceived passivity on the part of the Cuban Catholic Church hierarchy vis à vis the regime of Fidel Castro. Some argue that several cardinals and high Vatican dignitaries who have travelled to the Island—with some official media coverage—have refrained from criticizing the increased deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba, including the impossibility of the Church to carry out its essential functions normally and be granted access to the media. Others contend that some bishops have chosen to remain silent about the possibility of using state-controlled media to transmit religious messages, especially sanctioned during Christmas and Easter. (*EER*, 9/6/06)

**June 9:** Juan Antonio Picasso has never been to Paris and his paintings - now on exhibit here - sell for well under a thousand dollars, but that's just fine with this Afro-Cuban artist who says he wants nothing more than to remain on his native island. Juan Antonio, 32, said he is related to Pablo Picasso thanks to the famous artist's grandfather, who married a black woman who bore him four children, something for which there is "complete proof" in his family. He says he feels more inclined toward Antoni Tapies - another Spaniard - than to Picasso, but further details his influences citing Cuban artists Nelson Dominguez, Roberto Diago and Eduardo "Choco" Roca. He has currently mounted in Havana his third one-man show, after his March 2005 exhibition in the northeastern Spanish town of Figueras, where, he said, "it all went very well." (*EFE*, 9/6/06)

**June 9:** Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon said that the constant effort of the National People Power Assembly is directed toward perfecting democracy. Alarcon delivered the closing speech of a special session of the legislative plenary, which discussed a report of the Attention to Services Committee regarding the work of delegates at the grassroots level and in the Popular Councils. He pleaded for constant education and consciousness raising at all levels to develop a system of government in which the people have a main role. The essence of socialism is people's power, the government for the people, so that the population understands the possibility to collectively solve all the problems, he added. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/6/06)

**June 10:** Five Cuban university students were suspended for up to five years for violations that their information technology school deemed "very grave": running chat rooms and using school servers to sell Internet access to others. Cuba's Internet police, the Office of Information Security, caught the students at the University of Information Sciences (UCI) using school property to charge \$30 a month for stolen Internet passwords, according to a video of a campus meeting, smuggled out of the island. Critics of Fidel Castro's government say the video illustrates the lengths to which young Cubans are willing to go to access information in a place where the government tightly controls all information. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/6/06)

**June 10:** The Cuban Meteorological Institute (Insmet) gave its first warning of a tropical depression for the 2006 hurricane season with the appearance of an "extensive low-pressure area" in the Caribbean Sea. "Taking into account the rains that fell in the past few days and that rain is the chief danger of these tropical systems, local organizations in these areas should get activated," Civil Defense said in a communique published in the local media. (*EFE*, 10/6/06)

**June 12:** Tropical Storm Alberto, the first named storm of the 2006 Atlantic Ocean Hurricane Season, headed toward Florida after dumping rain over western Cuba. Cuba's weather system forced the evacuation of at least 27,000 people in western Cuba because of the threat of flooding, Cuba's National Information Agency said. Parts of the country received as much as 445 millimeters (18 inches) of rain in a 24-hour period, the official Granma newspaper reported. "Rains are the most important factor in this meteorological situation, and they will continue this morning in the most western extreme of Pinar del Rio province, the provinces around Havana, and the Isle of Youth," Cuba's Institute of Meteorology said. Thousands of residents of western Cuba were in shelters waiting for Alberto's floodwaters to recede as the season's first tropical storm pulled away. State-run media reported that efforts were underway to restore power in Pinar del Rio province after a weekend plagued with more than 200 outages. The rain, exceeding a foot in some locations, quickly filled the reservoirs and caused rivers to burst their banks, washing out roads in several parts of the province. (*Bloomberg, Reuters*, 12,13/6/06)

**June 12:** Cuban leaders have named University of Havana Rector Juan Vela Valdes to be the new minister of higher education, replacing a man who was in the job for three decades, the island's state-run media reported. Vela Valdes is a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee and has been rector at several universities and medical institutes, the party's daily newspaper Granma said. He replaces Fernando Vecino Alegret, who served "with maximum dedication and devotion during 30 years," Granma said. The newspaper added that Cuba's governing body, the Council of State, made the decision to "liberate" Vecino Alegret from his post after his long career. (*AP*, 12/6/06)

**June 14:** About 60 residents of the Havana town of Casablanca protested in Havana outside the principal seat of the Communist government in an effort to prevent eviction from their homes. Public questioning of authority in this one-party state is very rare, and participants in demonstrations not sanctioned or organized by the government are generally either detained or harassed by supporters of the regime. The protesters told the press that they do not want to leave their homes in the little sector of San Nicolas although local government authorities ordered them several years ago to do so because they are considered to be living there illegally. Several members of the group, which is made up mainly of women, said that if they are driven from their homes they have no other place to live and do not want to impose upon or drag their children into the matter.

One member of the group said that it was the fourth time they had gone to the Council of State, the seat of the Cuban government, "so that they listen to us." "The only thing we want is for them to leave us where we are," added one of the ladies, who said she had lived in San Nicolas for 15 years. (*EFE*, 14/6/06)

**June 14:** Fidel Castro's brother said the Communist Party will remain in control of Cuba if there is a leadership change, according to a speech published in Granma. Raul Castro, the island's defense minister and designated successor of his 79-year-old brother, dismissed claims that Cuba's political system would change dramatically after his brother is no longer president, saying the party would quickly fill any political vacuum. "Only the Communist Party -- as the institution that brings together the revolutionary vanguard and will always guarantee the unity of Cubans -- can be the

worthy heir of the trust deposited by the people in their leader," he said in a speech marking a military anniversary. [\[Discurso de Raúl Castro\]](#) (AFP, *La Jornada, Granma*, 14,15/6/06)

**June 16:** Over the past 20 years, the prestigious San Antonio de Baños Film School has promoted among its hundreds of students a socially-oriented and fiercely independent kind of cinema. In the flatlands south of Havana sits San Antonio de los Baños - a decrepit urban sprawl of 40,000 inhabitants, stunted buildings and scant tourist appeal, which according to local legend is "the world's most frequently filmed town. Over the past 20 years, the Cuban International Cinema and Television School (ICTV) has hosted hundreds of budding directors, scriptwriters and producers from around the world, and in particular from other Latin American countries. "Viewers today are still condemned to see one type of filmmaking. What [Latin American] countries want is to come up with movies that have an impact on reality. We lack visibility. Christopher Columbus didn't really finish discovering us," explained the school's director Julio García Espinosa, who visited Spain earlier this month to celebrate the school's 20th anniversary. (*El Pais*, 16/6/06)

**June 18:** Marriage as a lifelong union is becoming more and more of an "anachronism" in Cuba, where the average length of time that couples stay hitched is 10-14 years, according to official statistics. An article in the daily *Juventud Rebelde* dealing with the subject of divorce and separation in current Cuban society says that the existence of couples who have celebrated their "golden wedding anniversary" - that is, 50 years of marriage - has almost acquired a social "heritage value." Thirty-five percent of the Cuban population is married, but there is also a high incidence of consensual and informal unions, according to National Statistics Office figures cited by the paper. In addition, the average age marriage for Cubans is 20-24 and the average age at which the members of couples separate is 30-35. The head of the Population and Development Studies Center within the National Statistics Office, Enrique Gonzalez, said that since 2000, the divorce rate on the communist island has been trendless, fluctuating between 3 and 3.4 per 1,000 residents. He said that the divorce rate "is high, but stable." (*EFE*, 18/6/06)

**June 18:** The sons and daughters of Cuba's ruling class live in Spain but keep a low profile so that Fidel Castro's government will let them return home for visits. They are known as *quedaditos*, which means "those who stayed" but implies the under-the-radar lives they lead to avoid the whiff of dissidence that might stick to their decision to live outside the communist system. Some are critical of Fidel Castro. Others just want to get away from the island's intense politics. Others want to do business, without Cuba's draconian controls. But for all, unlike Miami, living in Spain does not immediately point to dissidence and the end of their possibility of frequently visiting the island. There's Agustín Valdés, the son of the former Cuban interior minister and notorious hard-liner Ramiro Valdés, who has lived in Madrid for the past eight years. Javier Leal, the son of Eusebio Leal Spengler, who heads the Historian's Office of the City of Havana, runs a travel agency and an art gallery in Barcelona. Emma Alvarez-Tabío, the daughter of Pedro Alvarez-Tabío, who heads Cuba's Office of Historic Affairs, is married to a Spanish diplomat and works as a consultant on investments in Cuba. Enrique Alvarez Cambra, the son of Rodrigo Alvarez Cambra, a physician who is a trusted member of Castro's inner circle and performed surgery on former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Enrique runs a medical clinic in the northern city of Santander. And Antonio Enrique Luzón, son of the former Cuban minister of transport of the same name, is based in Madrid and runs an import-export business. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/6/06)

**June 18:** Thirty-one Ladies in White--wives and relatives of (Cuban) prisoners of conscience--attended mass at the Santa Rita Church on Fathers' Day. Later, the 30 women, many of whom had travelled from different parts of Cuba, marched three kilometers along 5th Avenue in Miramar. This marks the third year since the group of 75 was sent to prison in the spring of 2003. (*Cubanet*, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** The Cuban Tobacco Research Institute has obtained a high quality protein from this plant, which will be used to treat patients with renal problems, reported the Institute's deputy director, Norma del Castillo. The protein meets the standards of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and it is ideal for patients with renal problems, said del Castillo to local media. (AFP, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** A moderate opposition coalition asked the government of Fidel Castro for a general amnesty of political prisoners and a moratorium on the death penalty, consistent with Cuba's entry in the newly created UN Human Rights Council, based in Geneva. Arco Progresista and Coalición Diálogo Pro Derechos Humanos also urged the Cuban government to "put a halt to the harassment and the so-called acts of repudiation against pro-democracy and human rights activists in Cuba". (AFP, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** According to an official local television station, a fire of medium proportions in a central building in Havana, which houses the Ministry of Trade and two television channels, caused some material damages, but there were no victims. The fire caused partial interruption to the transmissions of the two educational channels. (AFP, 20/6/06)

**June 21:** Cuba has sentenced a leading member of the Communist Party to 12 years in prison for corruption in what the country's only legal political organization said was proof no one stands above the law. The conviction of the highest-ranking party member in over a decade came amid a nationwide anti-corruption drive that has used young people, retired party members and others to fight rampant theft that has hobbled Cuba's state-run economy. A Political Bureau communique said party leader Juan Carlos Robinson was tried and found guilty of "continuous influence peddling". Robinson was expelled from the Political Bureau, the party's highest body, in April. His trial was not publicized. (Reuters, Globe & Mail, BBC, AP, 21/6/06)

**June 22:** The Cuban Foreign Ministry rejected criticism of the prison conditions of a group of dissidents accused of cooperating with foreign governments by saying they are in perfect health. "The human dignity and physical and mental well-being of the mercenaries sentenced to prison have been carefully respected", said the Foreign Ministry in a lengthy report. Cuba thus stated its position on the criticism made by the wives of some of the 60 imprisoned dissidents. "The allegations of supposed human rights violations against any of them are absolutely false", said the ministry. (AFP, 22/6/06)

**June 23:** Fidel Castro was presented with a painting allusive to the recent graduation of the millionth person from the Youth Computer Clubs set up around the island, handed to him by the first secretary of the Young Communist League (UJC) Julio Martinez, during the radio and TV program "The Round Table." "This is a birthday's gift," said Castro, who added, "but it is just the beginning!!" Panellists on the TV and radio program evaluated the 18 years of uninterrupted work of the Youth Computer Clubs. (Granma, 24/6/06)

**June 23:** During the celebration for the 12th anniversary of "Vital" magazine, Dagoberto Valdés, its editor and director of the Centre for Civic and Religious Education, said that Cuba "needs renewal and rebuilding on the foundations of Varela and Martí and if either apathy or power prevents it, the nation languishes". Valdés insisted that "dialogue is the way, in spite of any stubbornness and violence, and in spite of frustrations and doors being closed". (EER, 23/6/06)

**June 23:** In what scientists billed as a breakthrough, Cuba has developed the first monoclonal antibody from transgenic plants -- dubbed a "plantibody" -- used in making a human vaccine. The antibody, CB-Hep.1, is from an "ancestor" of the tobacco plant.

It replaces an antibody obtained from mice in Cuba's manufacturing of the hepatitis B vaccine, researchers told reporters in Havana. Carlos Borroto, deputy director at Cuba's Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Center (CIGB), said the plantibody had won approval from Cuba's medication quality control agency, part of the public health ministry. CB-Hep.1 is the first plantibody authorized anywhere in the world for manufacturing a vaccine. Borroto said since the breakthrough was achieved, "145 million doses have been exploited and not a single problem in their use has been reported." (AFP, 24/6/06)

**June 24:** A truck crashed in the mountains of Eastern Santiago de Cuba province, killing nine people and injuring 45, the official media said. A field hospital was set up at the scene after the crash and a military helicopter was ferried the

most seriously injured from the remote area to hospitals. Five young people were among the dead, including a 4-year-old girl. Some of the seriously injured were also children. Cubans often pack trucks in the area because there is a lack of public transportation. The official report said the truck apparently went out of control and tumbled repeatedly when a front tire blew out as it was passing another vehicle. (*Reuters*, 24/6/06)

**June 26:** Cuba has 332,000 teachers, one for every 36 inhabitants, the best such indicator in the world, said Cuban Education Minister Luis Gomez speaking at the closing ceremony of the 2005-2006 school year in eastern Las Tunas province. In statements to the press, Gomez announced that by this September, some 3 million students will be enrolled at all of the various education levels on the island, an unprecedented figure. He stressed that the country is able to guarantee high quality teaching. (*ACN*, 26/6/06)

**June 27:** A group of opponents asked the Apostolic Nunciature and the Cuban Catholic Church to intercede with the government of Fidel Castro on behalf of independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas, who's been on a hunger strike for almost five months and whose health is in critical condition. Internal human rights activists sent a letter dated June 14th to the Apostolic Nuncio, Monsignor Luigi Bonazzi, asking for help. (*EER*, 27/6/06)

**June 28:** Moderate dissidents in Cuba urged the government of Fidel Castro to declare a legal moratorium on executions and announced that a campaign would be launched this year to raise public awareness on the issue. Capital punishment has not been applied in this Caribbean island nation since the April 2003 execution by firing squad of three Cubans who hijacked a ferry carrying dozens of passengers, including several foreign tourists, in an attempt to reach the United States. "The time is right to move from a 'de facto' moratorium to a legal one," Manuel Cuesta Morúa told the press, clarifying that he was speaking on behalf of the Pro Human Rights Dialogue Coalition and not as the spokesman for the Arco Progresista, which links groups with social democratic tendencies. Both coalitions signed a statement, at the start of the very first session of the new United Nations Human Rights Council, demanding general amnesty for political prisoners and the creation of national mechanisms aimed at guaranteeing respect for human rights. Cuesta Morúa said "it is in this context that we are calling, among other things, for a moratorium on the death penalty." (*IPS*, 28/6/06)

**June 28:** One of 15 Cuban migrants sent home after reaching an abandoned bridge in the Florida Keys said the group is growing desperate after three months awaiting final Cuban government approval to leave for good. The migrants were returned to Cuba in January. But a deal allowing 14 of them to emigrate permanently was reached in March between US District Judge Frederic Moreno in Miami and the US government. Now all they lack is the so-called "white card," an exit permit Cubans must receive from the communist government to leave the island. Fourteen of the original 15 have humanitarian visas from the American government to emigrate to the United States. The migrants have quit their jobs as instructed by Cuban authorities in preparation to leave for the United States. (*The New York Times*, 28/6/06)

**June 29:** Mariela Castro is leading a Cuban revolution less well known than her Uncle Fidel's: one in favour of sexual tolerance within the island's macho society. Castro, 43, is leading the charge from her government-funded National Center for Sex Education, based in an old Havana mansion. As director of the group, she promoted a soap opera that scandalized many Cubans in March by sympathetically depicting bisexuality. Now Castro's niece is pushing for passage of a law that would give transsexuals free sex change operations and hormonal therapy in addition to granting them new identification documents with their changed gender. A draft bill was presented to parliament last year and was well received, she said. It is expected to come up for a vote in December.

If approved, it would make Cuba the most liberal nation in Latin America on gender issues. Castro says her goal is to bring the revolution her uncle and father, Defense Minister Raul Castro, fought 47 years ago to the terrain of sexuality. Her group has also campaigned for better AIDS prevention as well as acceptance of homosexuality, bisexuality and transvestites. "I want to bring the revolution's humanity to those aspects of life that it hasn't reached because of old prejudices," she told the press. (*Reuters*, 29/6/06)

**June 29:** Over 30 Cuban rafters detained in Kilo 5 ½ prison, in Pinar del Rio province, were released after being accused of cooperating with smuggling activities. Last April, police authorities captured some one hundred citizens from La Habana and Pinar del Rio provinces when they were trying to leave the island by illegal means. Women with children were sent to Manto Negro prison, accused of putting the lives of their children in danger. After over forty days in jail, a group of thirty prisoners were released on a \$5,000 pesos bail until trial, some of the detainees said. (*Cubamet*, 29/6/06)

**June 29:** A dissident group monitoring human rights in Cuba said there are at least 347 prisoners of conscience on the island and warned that the jailing of opposition activists was rising. "There is a worsening of the situation," said Aida Valdés Santana, of the National Coordinating Group of Prisoners and Ex-Political Prisoners. Valdés told a news conference that her group would begin offering periodic updates on the number of political prisoners. According to another group, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, there are 333 political prisoners. (*AP*, 30/6/06)

**June 30:** The traditional activities that Havana authorities organize every summer will be dedicated this year to Fidel Castro's 80th birthday and the 50th anniversary of the landing of the motor launch Granma, on which the rebel leader and his comrades arrived from Mexico. Under the slogan "Summer for my People," the summer campaign in Havana has scheduled activities "for relaxation and fun, with events that promote human values," the front page of the official daily *Juventud Rebelde* reported. The campaign will begin on July 8 and will include cultural and sports events, parades and musical groups, special movie passes, get-togethers with old sports heroes and screenings of the 2006 World Cup matches from Germany in coffee shops around town. The celebrations are particularly dedicated to Castro's 80th birthday on August 13, and to the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the motor launch Granma on the Cuban coast and the start of the revolution that brought down the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship on January 1, 1959. (*EFE*, 30/6/06)

**June 30:** A new apartment building that will benefit some official journalists was finished in time record, to the surprise of all neighbours. The building was constructed in only one year in Vedado, a central neighbourhood in Havana. The materials used in the construction were of the highest quality compared with low cost materials used for regular apartment buildings in Cuba. The beneficiaries were journalists from *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper who also received domestic appliances and furniture. Months before, *Juventud Rebelde*'s director, Rogelio Polanco, and Hassan Perez Casabona, a government's official, had received new apartments in another building belonging to the State Council. (*EFE*, 30/6/06)

## **Economy**

**June 1:** In 2005, Cuba exported 120 tons of organic coffee to Japan and the European Union, in spite of the intense drought that affects the east of the island, said Pascual Caro, head of the ecological project of the Ministry of Agriculture. Caro, an agriculturist at the Central Station for Research on Coffee and Cocoa of the Ministry, added that Cuba started selling organic coffee in 2002, which is at present grown by around 1,500 farmers on about 4,500 hectares. (*AFP*, 1/6/06)

**June 4:** Angola's Oil Minister Desiderio Costa, expressed in Havana the possibility of the Southern African country to cooperate with Cuba in the field of oil. The Angolan official, who expressed this intent in the ambit of a working visit he carried to the Latin American country, stressed that Angola has conditions to cooperate with Cuba in this area. "We are willing to share our experience in the field of oil acquired during the past 30 years. Angola is Sub-Saharan Africa's second biggest oil producer after Nigeria. (*Angola Press*, 4/6/06)

**June 4:** Fidel Castro said that socialism means rationality, as well as the opportunity to do things efficiently and he called for the application of that concept in all production and service activities. Castro presided over a third session of a meeting of provincial and municipal government officials, which took place at Havana's Convention Hall. Fidel

referred to ongoing efforts in the country aimed at saving energy and improving the people's quality of life. Castro said that by making use of efficient work the country can save much of the electricity it is currently consuming, which would translate into noticeable saving, bearing in mind the high price of oil at the world market. Fidel stressed the positive results of the meeting, in which local government officials exchanged views on the advancement of the national energy program or Cuban Energy Revolution, the fight against dengue, the progress of urban agriculture and the commercialization of agricultural products at local marketplaces, as well as the advancement of national social programs undertaken by the Cuban revolution under the so called Battle of Ideas. (ACN, 5/6/06)

**June 6:** Cuba seeks to increase commercial relations with Brazil, particularly transference of technology in the alternative fuels sector, said a business source. Brazilian sugar-cane producer, Aecio Marcondes, indicated that "last May Cuban officials visited (their) plants". (Notimex, 6/6/06)

**June 7:** Venezuela has agreed to share technology with Cuba for oil exploration, production and refining, Venezuela's state oil company said. Intevep, the research arm of state-run Petroleos de Venezuela SA, signed the agreement, which includes projects to increase Cuban oil production, improve the quality of its fuels and optimize its refineries, a company statement said. Intevep will work with Cuba's Ceinpet petroleum research center. (AP, 7/6/06)

**June 9:** An increased tax on remittances sent to Cuba in dollars will bolster the flow of foreign exchange into state coffers, but will create further difficulties for the hundreds of thousands of families who are divided between Cuba and the United States. "Supposedly, the increase is for the agency carrying out the money transfer. But it's the customer who ends up paying," a 45-year-old Cuban woman who lives abroad, and who spoke on condition of anonymity, told IPS. The Cuban authorities "know that they can continue to squeeze because we will continue sending money back." The measure means in practice that a money transfer for 123 dollars will be converted in Cuba into 100 "convertible pesos" or CUCs, which were created in 1994 as a substitute for the US dollar in internal transactions. Up to May 31, the ratio was 120 dollars:100 CUCs. Two currencies are presently used as legal tender in Cuba: the regular peso and the CUC. The CUC was pegged to the dollar until October 2004, when the U.S. currency was removed from circulation on the island. (IPS, 9/6/06)

**June 10:** The Cuban Food Industry is making an over-150-million-dollar investment in an effort to increase the supply and quality of food for the population. The investment, considered the largest ever made by the food industry, was announced in the report submitted to the Cuban parliament's ordinary session, attended by Fidel Castro. Cuban Food Industry Minister Alejandro Roca said his sector has grown by a 10-percent average annual rate over the past five years, and has seen a 7-percent growth during the first four months of this year, even when all scheduled investment projects are not yet being implemented. (ACN, 10/6/06)

**June 10:** Details about the ongoing expansion program of the Cuban nickel industry in the eastern part of the island were presented by the Minister of Basic Industry, Yadira Garcia, as part of a series of parliamentary committees taking place in preparation for the opening of Parliament. The minister explained how the government has been able to sustainably develop this industry by means of mixed capital enterprises where foreign capital provides management experience and technology, while Cuba maintains total control over production. The expansion project is being undertaken with a primary focus on new energy-efficient technologies that will allow Cuba to produce 80,000 tons of nickel in a first phase, using three industrial plants, which will later be expanded to 100,000 tons when a fourth plant begins operations. These new fuel-efficient technologies will enable the industry to eliminate the use of electricity, providing a boost to the national power grid, said the minister. Garcia also mapped out additional perspectives such as the production of Cobalt, a byproduct of the nickel industry. Cobalt is currently trading at \$US 33,000 per ton, and Cuba holds 20 percent of the world's cobalt reserves. (Granma, 11/6/06)

**June 12:** Canadian businesspeople in Cuba are steaming mad about what they say are unfair US trade practices, as American exporters steadily increase their market share in a country Washington officially regards as an enemy state.

"This is a serious, serious problem," said Sam Raina, president of the 52-member Canadian Business Club, an association of Canadian companies operating in the Caribbean country. "The Americans are playing very unfair games." Raina says pressure from the US Treasury Department recently caused his Canadian banker - HSBC Bank Canada - to close his corporate and personal accounts and to cancel his credit cards, because he lives and does business in Cuba. "There's no bank in the world that would defy the US Treasury," he said during a recent interview at his office in western Havana. "This has all of a sudden become an issue because U.S. trade with Cuba is getting higher and higher and stronger and stronger. (*Toronto Star*, 13/6/06)

**June 13:** Cuba has declared an end to the daily blackouts that have wreaked havoc on peoples' lives and the economy since the collapse of former-benefactor the Soviet Union in 1991. In the latest sign Cuba is recovering from a long economic crisis, Basic Industry Minister Yadira Garcia told parliament a \$US1-billion program to link hundreds of large generators to the energy grid meant there was 1000 megawatts more power available for the summer when demand peaks. "In less than eight months conditions have been created that guarantee that there will be no blackouts in our country due to a lack of generating capacity," the minister said in her report published by the official media. (*Reuters*, 13/6/06)

**June 18:** EXPOCARIBE 2006 trade fair opened its doors at the Heredia Convention Center in Santiago de Cuba, the island's second largest city. Raul de la Nuez, Minister of Foreign Commerce, said the commercial event, in its 14th year, will boost business in eastern Cuban and increase this region's negotiation capacity. The fair runs until June 23. Referring to Cuba's increased foreign trade during the first quarter of 2006, the minister named Venezuela, China and Spain as countries with which trade is on the rise. After the opening ceremony, de la Nuez, local Communist Party officials Misael Enamorado Dager and Rolando Yero Garcia and Bertha Delgado Guanche, president of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, toured the exhibition area where some 200 firms, more than half Cuban, are exhibiting their products. (*Granma*, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** The Guinea Bissau Tourism Minister, Francisco Conduto de Pina, began an official visit to Cuba, invited by his Cuban counterpart, Manuel Marrero. Conduto de Pina told the press Cuba's experiences in tourism can contribute to related plans in his country, and highlighted Cuban collaboration in the development of education and health in his country. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/6/06)

**June 21:** Colombian businesspeople have been in contact with Cuba's pharmaceutical institutions proposing production in that South American nation, the Colombian Minister of Social Protection Diego Palacio Betancourt affirmed in Havana during a visit accompanied by a delegation from his country. The Colombian government is ready to resume purchasing vaccines manufactured in Cuba, as it did from 1992 to 2002, and has decided that it is willing to look for alternative ways to attain "any product necessary for public health which is of high quality and has a good price." During their stay on the island, Palacio and his delegation met with Dr. José Ramón Balaguer Cabrera, member of the Political Bureau and the Cuban health minister and toured several scientific institutions including the Immunoassay Centre. (*Granma International*, 21/6/06)

**June 21:** Cuba, with an unemployment rate close to 1.9 percent, is moving towards a system of labour policies to achieve greater quality products and security, an expert said. Santos Prieto, an official of the Cuban Ministry for Labour and Social Security (MTSS) said that Cuba works for consolidation of regulations to guarantee public health and working security. The Cuban system for sanitary surveillance for workers was recognized by specialists from the International Labour Organization, during the International Meeting of Trade Unionists and Specialists in Labour Security and Public Health taking place in Havana. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/6/06)

**June 21:** Cuba is investing in its ethanol refineries with hopes of increasing its production of renewable fuel fivefold as it bets on growing ethanol demand in the face of rising petroleum prices, a leading sugar expert said. Luis Galvez of the Cuban Research Institute for Sugar Cane Derivatives said by 2010 Cuba hoped to be producing 500 million liters

(about 130 million gallons) of ethanol annually, which he said would be a fivefold increase of what it produces now. Galvez spoke to about 200 representatives from a dozen countries at an international congress on sugar and its derivatives. He did not give a current production figure for Cuban ethanol, but did say the island had 17 distilleries capable of producing up to 180 million liters (about 48 million gallons) annually. To increase production, Galvez said, Cuba must modernize 11 of those existing plants and build seven additional new ones. He did not say how much the improvements would cost. (AP, 21/6/06)

**June 22:** Cuba plans to nearly triple raw sugar output in the future from this year's 1.1 million to 1.2 million tonnes, official news agency AIN said. "The Sugar Ministry is working to increase cane planting by 30 percent with the goal of sugar production reaching 3 million tonnes," AIN reported. Cuba also plans to increase ethanol production for domestic use and export. Output was expected to increase to around 1.5 million tonnes in 2007, with a big jump in 2008 as new cane comes on line. Planting got off to a slow start this year as drought persisted across much of the country, but has picked up in recent weeks due to above-average rainfall. Production Director Eglis Greck Rodriguez said in May he expected a 15 percent increase in sugar cane for the 2007 January to May harvest due to increased sowing (100,000 hectares) and increased use of fertilizer and pesticides, improved irrigation and other measures. Mills will double what they pay for cane starting in 2007, according to ministry sources. (Reuters, 22/6/06)

**June 22:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage visited a number of important construction projects under way in Havana Province along with Ivan Ordaz Curbelo, first secretary of the Communist Party in this territory, and other leaders. Lage showed special interest in seeing first hand the progress of several home building projects as well as the creation of offices to make it easier for the population to do the required paperwork involved in housing. The tour began in Artemisa and ended at La Cooperativa, Guira de Melena, where 190 new homes are being built, the majority of which should be finished this year with the committed cooperation of the residents of Playa Cajio, also affected by hurricanes. (Granma, 22/6/06)

**June 24:** Cuba and Venezuela have set up a joint railroad company under the name Empresa para la Infraestructura Ferroviaria Latinoamericana S.A. (Ferrolasa), the Government of Venezuela said on June 24, 2006. The new company is headquartered in Caracas and will use Cuban experience in the railroad sector. Ferrolasa is expected to officially start operations in August 2006. The main activity of the joint company will be to evaluate new investments in the Venezuelan railroad sector as well as modernisation and maintenance of the railroad infrastructure and installations. Ferrolasa will also provide technical assistance for modernisation and maintenance. Venezuela will hold a 51 percent stake in the joint company, while Cuba will have the remaining 49 percent. The authorisation for the creation of the joint railroad company was published in Venezuela's Official Gazette on June 13, 2006. (Latin America News Digest, 24/6/06)

**June 25:** A shipment of 8,000 tons of cement arrived in the Jamaican capital from Cuba-- some two months after officials expected it would arrive. The cement, which will help ease a shortage that has slowed construction on the island, will be issued for local distribution, said Commerce Minister Phillip Paulwell. It was not clear why the shipment was delayed. Paulwell said it is the first of several shipments expected from Cuba to ease the cement shortage. Jamaica began negotiating with Cuba to supply cement after the main local producer, Caribbean Cement Company Limited, temporarily suspended production in March following claims of substandard product. (AP, 26/6/06)

**June 26:** Belarus is to supply refined sugar produced from sugarbeet to Cuba, the Belarussian agriculture ministry announced. The agreement was reached during an ongoing visit by a Cuban delegation to Minsk, the Belarussian capital city. Cuban officials will visit Belarussian sugar refineries before July 4 to assess production conditions there, after which contracts would be signed, the agriculture ministry said. (Dow Jones, 26/6/06)

**June 26:** Cuba will sign a multilateral economic complementary agreement with Mercosur at the end of July during the group's presidential summit scheduled to be held in Cordoba, Argentina. However the participation of Fidel Castro has

not been confirmed.

The Cuban embassy in Buenos Aires confirmed the coming of the delegation from Havana July 20/21, when Argentina officially hands the rotating six months Mercosur chair to Brazil. "Cuba is participating with a delegation but it must not be interpreted as a step towards the integration of Cuba to Mercosur, but rather for the specific purpose of signing this very significant multilateral agreement", indicated the Cuban embassy in a release. Argentina's Deputy Secretary for American Economic Integration and Mercosur Affairs Eduardo Sigal said that the "agreement with Cuba will basically unify all bilateral treaties with each Mercosur country member". (*Mercopress*, 26/6/06)

**June 27:** Cuba's struggling sugar industry won't make its harvest goals this year, the government acknowledged, saying that inefficient mills and a late start proved to be obstacles difficult to overcome. "The recently finished harvest demonstrated that hard work and final results don't always correspond," the Communist Party daily Granma reported. In February, when sugar prices rose to 17 US cents a pound, Fidel Castro announced his country - after having closed sugar mills and furloughed workers in 2002 - would try to increase its production. The government announced it would shoot for a 3 million ton harvest. But experts say it is now producing about 1.3 million tons a year - less than a fifth of what was grown in the 1950s. The nation that four years ago had 156 operating mills now has just 42, and says 28 of them began the season late. Of 22 low-production mills, eight couldn't grind the amount of sugar cane that had been projected and two were shut down due to "reiterated inefficiency and high per-ton cost," Granma reported. Had all the mills operated at capacity, Cuba could have produced another 43,800 tons, the paper said. But Granma did not offer any actual production figures for this year's harvest. "The late start couldn't be beaten," the paper said. (*AFP, McClatchy Newspapers*, 28,30/6/06)

**June 27:** A blackout of about two hours affected areas in the municipalities of Diez de Octubre and San Miguel del Padrón, in Havana. The reasons for it are not currently known. Similar power cuts were reported in the municipality of Arroyo Naranjo, which indicates that the new energy plan promoted by Fidel Castro from generators does not seem to be a definitive solution. (*Cubanet*, 27/6/06)

**June 29:** Thousands of professors and students from the University of Havana will be participating in the control and distribution of fuel in the island's capital. "We were called to participate in a task for the Revolution on a voluntary basis", a professor said. According to a student who talked with the press, professors and students will be working on trucks distributing fuel, controlling sales and the route of vehicles. All educational activities have been suspended until next September. (*AFP*, 29/6/06)

## **Exile Community**

**June 1:** The famous Cuban painter Agustin Fernandez, 78, died in New York from pneumonia. Fernandez was one of the most significant of the exiled Cuban artists in the development of international modernism. Although he has been classified as a surrealist throughout his career, his work draws from a wide realm of visions, inventions and contortions. While not abstract in approach, his work does not represent objective reality, instead depicting unconscious yearnings, obsessions, and fantasies. In 1959 Fernandez moved to Paris, where he would remain for more than 10 years, producing a series of erotic work. In 1968, after moving to Puerto Rico, and destroying much of his earlier work, he began to work in collage, and continued to explore the armor-like metal facades. In 1972 he moved to New York where he lived the rest of his life. "My paintings were more Cuban, more romantic before 1960; in exile they hove and become more metaphysical. I don't know if exile influences my work, but it has influenced me. It is not that I left Cuba, it's not being able to return", he said. (*El Nuevo Herald, Art in Context*, 4/6/06)

**June 5:** In a special session of the Organization of American States in Santo Domingo, the president of MAR por Cuba, Sylvia Iriundo, described the situation on the island where for more than 47 years the people have not had the option of electing their leaders. The activist called on the OAS member states to support the democratic aspirations of the Cuban people, and denounced the situation of more than 330 political prisoners on the island who suffer in subhuman conditions. (*MartiNoticias*, 5/6/06)

**June 7:** Six years after the government raid to seize Elian Gonzalez and return him to his father, supporters of the Cuban boy continue to press their claims that federal agents used excessive force in seizing him. Oral arguments were heard before the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in an amended lawsuit against the government. The suit was filed by more than 90 people who say they were injured by a type of tear gas used by immigration agents who removed then-6-year-old Elian from his relatives' Miami home on April 22, 2000. An earlier lawsuit against former Attorney General Janet Reno was rejected by the federal appeals court in Atlanta on the grounds that she had immunity from damages. This suit, based on similar facts, only names the United States and has nearly twice as many plaintiffs as the previous one. The plaintiffs include supporters of Elian who were outside the home and neighbors who were sleeping at the time of the raid. Among them is Donato Dalrymple, who was on a fishing trip with his cousin on Thanksgiving 1999 when they found and rescued Elian, who had survived a shipwreck that killed his mother and others fleeing Cuba. (*AP*, 7/6/06)

**June 9:** The group Cuba Democracia Ya! condemned the "inaction" of European institutions with regards to the situation in Cuba, by continually "delaying" their actions while the acts of repudiation and violence against peaceful opposition increase on the island. (*Europa Press*, 9/6/06)

**June 14:** A small group of Cuban-Americans dressed in black gathered outside the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, holding posters picturing independent journalists held in Cuban jails, some serving sentences of more than 20 years. The group was demonstrating during an interview with Ricardo Alarcon, president of Cuba's National Assembly, by the organizers of the annual convention of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists in Fort Lauderdale. One large poster featured Guillermo Fariñas, a Cuban journalist who has been on a hunger strike for the right to Internet access. The Cuban-Americans holding posters outside the center said they were not protesting, but wanted to educate visiting journalists about limited access to information in Cuba, and persecution of those who express dissenting views. Most Cubans don't have computers, and only a few government jobs carry full Internet privileges. (*Sun Sentinel*, 14/6/06)

**June 17:** Nearly 100 protesters gathered in Miami to oppose a ban on traveling to Cuba, the Miami Herald reported. The protesters marched outside the office of US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Republican-Florida), carrying signs with slogans like "Breaking Up the Family is Compassionate Conservatism?" Ros-Lehtinen supported the travel ban, which was imposed in 2004. It allows only those with immediate family to visit the island once every three years for a maximum of two weeks. Maria de la Torre, 73, has many family members in Cuba -- numerous orphans she raised, and their children -- who she has not been able to see in years. "These are like my own children and grandchildren," said de la Torre. "I love and miss them. But I can't go visit them." (*Washington Times*, 18/6/06)

**June 22:** A former board member of the Cuban American National Foundation said he and other CANF leaders created a paramilitary group to carry out destabilizing acts in Cuba and do away with Fidel Castro. Jose Antonio Llama, known as Toñín, told the press that the arsenal to carry out these plans included a cargo helicopter, 10 ultralight radio-controlled planes, seven vessels and abundant explosive materials. The plans failed after Llama and four other exiles were arrested in Puerto Rico in 1997 on charges of conspiracy to assassinate Castro during the Ibero-American Summit on Margarita Island, Venezuela. A jury acquitted them after a federal judge threw out one of the defendants' self-incriminating statements. Llama, a close associate of the late CANF leader Jorge Mas Canosa, left the group's board in 1999. CANF spokesman Alfredo Mesa -- speaking for members and leaders -- told the press: "In this case, we consider that it is extremely irresponsible for a press organization to echo what clearly represents an extortion and defamation

attempt." The Cuban government has long claimed CANF planned armed attacks on the island, but up until now, none of its claims have been documented. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 22/6/06)

**June 28:** A new generation of Cuban-American activists are finding their own way to support Cuba's internal opposition. "I think every college kid has to have a cause," said Candice Balmori, 21, president of Harvard's Cuban American Undergraduate Student Association, or CAUSA. "Everyone has to take up a banner of some sort." That banner was handed to them by older exiles. The young Cuban-Americans, many born in the United States, grew up hearing stories from relatives who longed for their homeland. The youngsters learned to love Cuba, even if they had never visited it. "I think most people who had to leave (...) I think they all left being very proud of their country and loving everything about it," said Joanna González, who grew up in Miami and was one of the founders of Raíces de Esperanza, a national network of young Cuban-American activists.

"I heard about it constantly. I heard about absolutely everything, the culture and what happened to the country. You grow up not being able to be a part of that and that's how you become passionate about it," González said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/6/06)

**June 29:** The Spanish Socialist Party invited the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and other Latin American parties to a seminar on the future of the region. The Cuban Communist Party, Venezuela's Movimiento Quinta República, and Ecuador's Movimiento al Socialismo, all in power, were not invited to the seminar. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 29/6/06)

## Foreign Affairs

**June 1:** The 14,000 members of the Bolivian medical association staged a strike to protest the use of Cuban doctors in government programs instead of out-of-work local physicians. Association head Fernando Arandía said that his group does not reject the idea of international aid to this impoverished country, but seeks to highlight what it claims are hidden costs associated with the presence of some 600 Cuban doctors. The Cuban contingent arrived in Bolivia in February, two weeks after socialist Evo Morales was sworn-in as Bolivia's first Indian president, and came in response to La Paz's request for emergency help to cope with the medical needs of flood victims. The local medical association says that, contrary to statements from their country's health ministry and the Cuban Embassy, the Bolivian government is paying the cost of food, lodging and transportation for the doctors sent by Havana. In conjunction with their strike, physicians in the capital offered treatment to the poor free of charge. (*EFE*, 1/6/06)

**June 1:** Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister Gergana Gruncharova and her Cuban counterpart Eumelio Caballero signed in Havana on May 31 an intergovernmental programme for cooperation in education, science and culture in 2006-2008, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry said in a press release. The document was signed during bilateral political consultations in the Cuban capital. Gruncharova also conferred with acting Foreign Minister Manuel Aguilar de la Paz and with Deputy Minister of Investments and International Economic Cooperation Ricardo Guerrero, who is also co-chairman of the intergovernmental commission for economic and trade cooperation. (*BBC*, 2/6/06)

**June 1:** Cuban and Venezuelan ambassadors to Argentina denounced US acts of aggression against their countries, while emphasizing that regional cooperation processes underway between their two nations and Bolivia are being consolidated. As the main topic of a forum held in Buenos Aires, participants discussed the need for Latin American integration to be able to face American domination over the region, read a Prensa Latina news agency report. (*ACN*, 1/6/06)

**June 1:** The former Cuban consul general in Mexico, Pedro Riera Escalante, accused the Spanish government of ambivalence with regards to the protection of human rights for refusing to grant him a visa as a political refugee. Riera,

a retired intelligence officer who served a five-year sentence in a Cuban prison, requested humanitarian refuge for him and his wife, Loyda Castilla, from the Spanish Embassy in Havana last December. However, he has not yet received a positive response to his plea. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 1/6/06)

**June 1:** Health Minister Horace Dalley says the Jamaica/Cuba Eye Care Programme will not be suspended despite concerns raised by local ophthalmologists about the standard of care offered by the Cubans. According to local eye doctors, several persons have returned to the island with serious problems. But the Health Minister says more than 2,000 poor people have benefited from surgical treatment and post-operative care since the programme began nine months ago. However, the Health Minister says he has requested that a full investigation be carried out regarding the complications reported. (*AP*, 1/6/06)

**June 2:** Visiting Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque expressed his country's condolences to the tens of thousands of victims of Indonesia's devastating earthquake. Perez Roque also invited Indonesia's president to attend a summit of the Nonaligned Movement in September in Havana. "Unfortunately my visit here is at the same time as the earthquake," he told a news conference. "President Fidel Castro asked me to convey to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the people of Indonesia our deepest condolences." (*AP*, 2/6/06)

**June 3:** A Cuban medical team arrived at Solo airport, on the Indonesian island of Java, to attend to the thousands of victims of a devastating earthquake. More than six thousand people were killed and tens of thousands have been injured. The team comprises of 135 health care professionals, among them hospital staff and specialist physicians, the majority of whom also took part in the aid to Pakistan after the October 8, 2005, earthquake. (*Granma*, 3/6/06)

**June 3:** More than 100 Nicaraguans with eye problems will travel to Cuba to undergo free surgery, said the special attorney for citizen participation, Reverend Sixto Ulloa. Ulloa said that eye surgeries performed on the Nicaraguans are part of the regional cooperation program promoted by the governments of Cuba and Venezuela. (*AP*, 4/6/06)

**June 3:** The members of the Organization of American States (OAS) should create a channel for dialogue with Cuba, which could help the island in a transition after Fidel Castro, said the OAS secretary general, José Miguel Insulza. "Many people like to talk about the possibility of a future transition in Cuba," said the secretary general before leaving for the Dominican Republic where the next OAS general assembly will take place. "Well, if that's the case, only those who have some type of contact with all Cuban sides will be able to play an important role. And certainly the OAS does not have those relations," he indicated. "Many people say that we should plan the transition, that we should get involved in the human rights issues. But that implies some type of contact with the government," he added. "I can speak with the Cubans in Miami who will likely have a role to play. But I will lack legitimacy if I cannot speak with others also," he added. (*Reuters*, 3/6/06)

**June 4:** Colombian President Alvaro Uribe says that he will maintain excellent relations with his counterparts in Cuba, Fidel Castro and Venezuela, Hugo Chávez. One week after having been reelected with an overwhelming majority, 62%, Uribe told the daily *El Tiempo*: "I am grateful to Castro on behalf of the Colombian people," the AP reported. "He has helped us a lot on all issues regarding South America, and Latin America in general, and on the issue of peace," and that is why relations with Cuba are "transparent, clear and friendly," Uribe said in a statement. (*Granma*, 4/6/06)

**June 4:** Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Shara reviewed together with the Chief of the Foreign Relations Bureau of the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, Fernando Remires de Estenoz, the recent developments in international and regional arenas and the ongoing tension due to the US policy of hegemony. During the meeting, Shara and Eastonz stressed the significance of boosting bilateral relations between Syria and Cuba

in all fields and activating the role of the Non Aligned Movement role on the occasion of the summit next September in Havana. (SANA, 4/6/06)

**June 5:** The official Cuban Communist Party newspaper defended the "Operation Miracle," a health-care initiative being carried out by Cuba and Venezuela, against the "selfish and rich ophthalmologists" who oppose the program. Granma said the health-care program was initially launched by Cuba and later joined by Venezuela, providing free eye surgery, especially for cataracts, to the poor and helping some 250,000 people in Latin America and the Caribbean. "Despite the great emphasis it places on people and solidarity, it paradoxically brings out opponents among those who hate and spurn, especially among the ranks of those selfish and rich ophthalmologists who charge thousands of dollars for just one operation," Granma said. Several days ago, Dr. Albert Lue, head of the Department of Ophthalmology at Jamaica's Kingston Public Hospital, tried to "cast doubt on the high level of qualifications of our specialists, their surgical ability and the technology they use" after conducting a survey of patients treated in Cuba, Granma said. (EFE, 5/6/06)

**June 5:** Participants in the Alternative Summit of the Peoples presented a resolution of solidarity with the Cuban Revolution to the Cuban Embassy in Santo Domingo. The 50-member delegation included members of more than 50 political, social, cultural and non-governmental organizations, as well as notables from the Dominican Republic and other countries attending the alternative to the ongoing OAS Summit. (Prensa Latina, 5/6/06)

**June 5:** Mali National Assembly President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita described as "fabulous" the Cuban medical cooperation benefiting his people. His official visit to the island responds to an invitation by his Cuban homologue, Ricardo Alarcon. "It is a sin and a sign of ingratitude not to recognize what has been done thanks to the Cuban doctors supporting the Malian people," said the congressman in his interview with Sergio Corrieri, president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, (ICAP). (Prensa Latina, 5/6/06)

**June 5:** At its meeting in Moscow, Russia, the global Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations, issued a series of resolutions condemning the violence against and murder of journalists, including special resolutions calling for the improvement of conditions of the press and of journalists in Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela. (PR Noticias, 6/6/06)

**June 6:** Cuba and Syria rejected their inclusion on a US list of countries that do not do enough to combat human trafficking. "Of course we are against human trafficking. It seems to me the United States has too many lists, publishes all these lists to mask the failure of its policy in the world," Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad told the press. Mekdad, on an official visit to Cuba, said the United States should treat trafficking "with great respect, with the goal of solving it, and not stick a finger in others' sore spots." His Cuban counterpart Marcos Rodriguez said it was a sign of arrogance that Washington "presumes the right to judge other countries" on issues like terrorism and human trafficking. (AFP, 6/6/06)

**June 6:** The Czech Republic has reservations about the text of a EU resolution on Cuba, now being drafted for the meeting of EU foreign ministers, as it is against the current policy of "critical dialogue" with the Cuban regime and for the toughening of the EU stance, diplomatic sources disclosed to CTK. "We are proposing certain changes in the text and we are continuing with the talks," Jan Vytopil, the spokesman for the Czech diplomatic office at the EU, told the press. (CTK, 6/6/06)

**June 6:** Members of the National College of Journalists of Venezuela, Anzoátegui chapter, took a position against the Cuban minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, who during a speech while on a visit in Venezuela, said that the work of the mass media in the South American country is "garbage". "Calling the programs produced or published in the media by Venezuelan social communicators garbage and mediocre, is an expression of the interventionism of pro-Castro imperialism", they said in a statement. (El Nuevo Día, 6/6/06)

**June 7:** Human rights concerns were the focus of talks on the final day of a meeting of the Organization of American States. The president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Evelio Fernandez, noted ongoing violence by leftist rebels in Colombia, lack of security in Haiti and the jailing of political dissidents in Cuba. The United States Ambassador to OAS, John Maisto, took note of conditions in Cuba, such as as continued restrictions on freedom of expression and failures in the justice system. "For 47 years, the people of Cuba have lived under a dictatorship that has shown time and again that beneath its rhetoric there is no respect for the fundamental rights of the individual," said John Maisto. Maisto also drew comparisons between Cuba and the current government in Venezuela. (VOA, 7/6/06)

**June 7:** Immigration authorities detained eleven Cuban rafters after their craft ended up at the Mexican island of Cozumel. Another member of the group managed to flee, said the police. (AFP, 8/6/06)

**June 7:** Cuba will strive to defend the adoption of an action plan at the summit of Non-Aligned Movement countries (NAM) to be held in Havana in September. This plan should translate the movement's far-reaching decisions into concrete deeds, a diplomatic source indicated. According to sources from the Cuban Chancellery, the island's stance is in line with the drafted Final Document presented by Malaysia, the current president, and approved in the ministerial preparatory meeting recently held in Putrajaya. The document is to be submitted to delegations of the 116 NAM country members, 60 of which will be represented by heads of State and Government, at the 14th summit in Havana, September 11-16. As it is customary, Cuba will assume the presidency of the movement for a three-year mandate. (Prensa Latina, 7/6/06)

**June 7:** The ambassadors of the EU member-states reached an "agreement" to maintain their current position of "critical dialogue" with Cuba, although they also agreed on considering what should be their mid and long term "strategy" toward the island, according to community sources. The Political and Security Committee (PSC)-- formed by ambassadors of the 25 member-states, and which deals with relevant foreign and security issues-- agreed on the wording of the text that the ministers of foreign affairs of the EU will ratify when they formally revise their common position towards Fidel Castro's regime. (EFE, 8/6/06)

**June 12:** Cuba denounced to the UN the US attempts to strengthen its economic, political and social control on Puerto Rico by hindering its right to self-determination. Cuban Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca submitted the draft resolution to the UN Decolonization Committee on Puerto Rico's case and highlighted its importance; confirmed by the massive attendance and the number of speakers on the agenda. The diplomat said the UN has made its opposition clear throughout 30 years with 24 resolutions, which so far have been fruitless due to the US determination to ignore them. (Prensa Latina, 12/6/06)

**June 12:** The Czech Republic appealed to its European Union partners to get tough with Cuba, saying Europe's dealings with Havana have failed to generate significant democratic change. Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda brought up the issue of EU-Cuba relations at a monthly EU foreign ministers' meeting. Officials said the Czech Republic also planned to raise the issue at a meeting of the 25 EU leaders in Brussels, Belgium, later in the week. Support within the EU for a tougher stance on Cuba is strongest in the eight eastern European nations that joined the bloc in 2004 and where memories of the legacy of communism are still fresh. The Netherlands and Sweden also favor a tougher stance, but Spain is among countries that oppose it, officials said. (AP, 12/6/06)

**June 12:** EU foreign ministers have slammed the Cuban government for its deteriorating human rights record saying the bloc should agree on a longer term strategy on its relations with the "island of freedom." Meeting in Luxembourg, the ministers urged Havana to "unconditionally release all political prisoners," while lamenting the fact that the prisoner numbers have increased since last year. They also criticised "several dozen acts of violent harassment and intimidation, including acts of repudiation," noting that police and security forces took part in the acts. The statement is part of a regular evaluation of the island's civil liberties performance, following last year's withdrawal of bloc's diplomatic sanctions. The Dutch delegation argued that the EU should re-consider its policy on Cuba as there are no signs of

political improvement after over a year of closer ties with officials - a point supported by several countries, particularly the Czech Republic. But in the declaration itself, the bloc stressed it would "welcome the resumption of a political dialogue with the Cuban authorities," while asking every EU "high-level visitor" to raise human rights concerns with the country's officials. (*EUObserver*, 12/6/06)

**June 12:** Walther Troger, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Commission of Sports for Everyone, is in Cuba to supervise arrangements of the 11th Congress of this organization. The world sports leader, who will stay five days on the island, was welcomed by Jose Ramon Fernandez, president of the Cuban Olympic Committee, Granma newspaper reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/6/06)

**June 14:** The official Cuban newspaper Granma criticized the financing granted by the president of the autonomous Community of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre, of the conservative People's Party (PP), to anti-government organizations. In an article titled "Madrid tiene su Moscoso" [Madrid has its Moscoso], Granma, official organ of the Communist Party of Cuba, compares Aguirre with former Panamanian president Mireya Moscoso, who just before leaving power pardoned anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles accused of multiple terrorist acts by Havana. Granma denounces that Aguirre granted a subsidy of 239,100 euros to the Fundación Hispano Cubana [Spanish Cuban Foundation (FHC)], an organization the Cuban newspaper calls a "creature of the CIA". (*EFE*, 14/6/06)

**June 14:** A group of experts from the Cuban Civil Aeronautic Institute (IACC) is in Venezuela to advise the National Civil Aeronautic Institute (INAC), said the latter in a communiqué. During the meeting, Cuban technicians are to share their expertise in order to help complete an airport certification process under way in Venezuela. This move is intended to meet recommendations the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) made during a recent visit to Venezuela, INAC said, as quoted by the Venezuelan official news agency ABN. (*El Universal*, 14/6/06)

**June 14:** Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque reiterated in Havana that Cuba is committed to the revitalization and strengthening of unity within the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), when it takes on the presidency of the 116-nation body in September.

"We will work for a world where peace, respect, cooperation and the right to development reign," said Perez Roque, who took part in an Internet forum in the Foreign Ministry as the island prepares to host the 16th NAM Summit. Before the forum began, Perez Roque chaired the presentation of the new web site created to give information about the summit in Havana. The foreign minister said the Non-Aligned Movement represents a great diversity of interests, national situations and priorities, but with common aspirations. Perez Roque recalled that Fidel Castro said NAM should also be a space to promote literacy, the training of health professionals and programs for efficient and rational energy use. (*AP, Granma*, 14/6/06)

**June 15:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage started a visit to Ecuador to attend the opening of two ophthalmologic hospitals with the island's equipment and physicians to provide surgery for patients with eye afflictions. According to diplomatic sources, Lage is expected to visit centers of social and cultural interest in this capital, meet with Ecuadorian authorities and attend along with President Alfredo Palacio the opening of the two ophthalmologic centers. One of these facilities, which has been working since May 29, is located in the city of Latacunga, capital of Cotopaxi province, and the second one is in Santa Elena canton, in Guayas province. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/6/06)

**June 15:** In Havana, the vice-president of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Carlos Correa, said Cuba is an example to the world of the integration of social and veterinary medical services in the prevention of the avian flu. Correa added that Cuba could collaborate in the diagnosis, combating and eradication of the influenza virus. (*AFP*, 15/6/06)

**June 15:** Cuba reiterated its complete support to Argentina in the dispute over sovereignty of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands in statements by Cuban UN representative Rodrigo Malmierca to a special UN Committee for Decolonization.

The UN Special Committee analyzed the Malvinas Islands topic in the presence of a numerous Argentine representation headed by Argentinean Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana. Malmierca noted that the UN Committee has given continuous work to this topic for more than 20 years and adopted 23 resolutions in this forum. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/6/06)

**June 16:** Russia has been invited to attend as an observer a summit of a movement that seeks to promote national independence and oppose colonialism and imperialism, Russia's foreign ministry said. The ministry said the invitation to attend a Havana summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which unites 100 nations, had been extended to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Yakovenko by Cuban Ambassador to Russia Jorge Marti Martinez. (*RIA Novosti*, 16/6/06)

**June 16:** Jamaican Minister of Health, Horace Dalley expressed a high level of satisfaction about the quality of ophthalmology care being offered to Jamaican and other Caribbean patients participating in the Jamaica/Cuba Eye Care Project. However, he noted that there was need for greater collaboration between Jamaican and Cuban ophthalmologists to further enhance the programme. The Minister made these remarks in a news interview following visits to the University Hospital in Cienfuegos and the Pasacaballo Health facility, during his first day of an official visit to Cuba. The Minister is accompanied by a six-member delegation. (*Government of Jamaica*, 18/6/06)

**June 16:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage attended the opening of a second eye clinic in Ecuador with Cuban staff and furnishings. The Cuban Vice President highlighted these centers' smooth operations since their inauguration, which has included operating on 14,701 patients, including 401 in Latacunga, Cotopaxi province. Lage recalled that several hospitals have been opened in Latin America since Operation Miracle program was set in motion in 2004: Bolivia (6), Venezuela (1) and Ecuador (2). (*Prensa Latina*, 16/6/06)

**June 19:** Cuban and Chinese writers will sign a collaboration and exchange agreement for the first time in history, said the president of Cuba's National Union of Artists and Writers (UNEAC), Carlos Marti. Addressing the press at Jose Marti international airport, Marti said that a UNEAC delegation, which includes UNEAC executives Francisco López Sacha and Eduardo Heras León, was traveling to China to sign that deal. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** Freedom House and Spanish based FRIDE have recently released the proceedings of the conference "Common goals, different strategies? Options for a transatlantic agenda on Cuba", held on November 8, 2006 in Brussels with support from USAID. The event sought to identify common ground for a transatlantic strategy of democracy promotion towards Cuba, and brought together policy-makers, activists, and academics from the European Union and the United States, such as Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry, USAID representative David Mutchler, the Head of the European Commission's Latin America Desk, Tomàs Duplà del Moral, and several Members of the European Parliament. [[Conference Report](#)] (*Freedom House*, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** Venezuelan justice re-opened the case against Henrique Capriles, the mayor of the municipality of Baruta in Caracas, accused of assault on the Cuban embassy in 2002 during the coup d'état against president Hugo Chávez. Capriles-- of the centre-right First Justice Party-- insisted that the trial be televised and said that "the most important witness they would call on would be Cuban ambassador, Germán Sánchez Otero". (*AFP*, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announced that Cuba has won the King Sejong Literacy Prize for developing the Yo Si Puedo (Yes I Can) literacy program. Cuban Ambassador to UNESCO Hector Hernandez Pardo said the award, given to the Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogic Institute of Cuba, is in recognition of a Cuban project especially developed to assist other countries. (*Granma*, 20/6/06)

**June 19:** A human rights official for the Organization of American States (OAS) has called on the Cuban government to stop restricting access to the Internet. In a statement, the OAS's Ignacio Álvarez said he "observes with concern" that

the Cuban legal system severely restricts the Cuban population's access to the Internet. Álvarez said access to the Internet can strengthen democracy, contribute to a country's economic development, and "uphold the full exercise of freedom of expression." Álvarez, the OAS special rapporteur for freedom of expression, said the source of Cuba's restrictions for using the Internet lies in a government decree called "Access to the World Computer Network from Cuba." But Álvarez said restricting such access to the Internet is "incompatible with the right to freedom of expression." Álvarez said a Cuban journalist, Guillermo Fariñas, has been on a hunger strike since January 31 in protest of restrictions on Internet access in Cuba. (*Washington File*, 20/6/06)

**June 19:** Despite having gained a seat on the new UN Human Rights Council, the Communist government of Cuba reiterated its refusal to allow a UN rights monitor to visit the island. Cuba will not cooperate with Christine Chanet, a French jurist named several years ago as the world body's human rights representative for Cuba, nor will it allow her to visit the island to carry out her mission, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. "We will not have her visit Cuba because we do not accept that mandate," Perez Roque said in a press conference in Geneva, where he is taking part in the first session of the new United Nations Human Rights Council. (*EFE*, 20/6/06)

**June 20:** Cuba called on the European Union (EU) to end a "silent complicity" under which it said the bloc had allowed secret CIA flights to transport terror suspects to detention centres in Europe for interrogation. Cuba awaited a "rectification to the silent complicity" with which it said the EU had allowed hundreds of secret flights by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) carrying "kidnapped people and the establishment of clandestine prisons right on European soil, where prisoners are tortured and harassed," Perez said. "So far, the European Union has hypocritically hindered the investigation and the clarification of these events," he added. (*Reuters* 20/6/06)

**June 22:** Lebanon's Economy and Trade Minister Sami Haddad will foster cooperation with Cuba in the spheres of culture, health, agriculture, biotechnology, sports, higher education and trade, the island's official sources reported. The Lebanese official will travel to Havana heading his country's delegation to the Third Joint Commission Session for Economic, Trade and Technical Collaboration. Cuba's Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC) Minister Marta Lomas will lead the island's delegation, whose aim is to enhance ties of cooperation with Lebanon. Haddad's agenda includes meeting with Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez and Economy and Planning Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez, among other officials from the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/6/06)

**June 22:** Honduras announced it will name its first ambassador to Cuba in 44 years, marking a new stage in the two countries' often tense relations. Honduras broke diplomatic relations with Havana in 1962, when Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States; it renewed formal relations with the island in January 2002, but did not name an ambassador for the next 4 1/2 years. Foreign Minister Milton Jimenez told reporters that a Honduran ambassador "will be named in January." Since 1998, some ties between the two countries - like medical services - have increased. (*AP*, 22/6/06)

**June 22:** In what could be an indication of warming relations between Israel and Cuba, Fidel Castro will take part this fall in a ceremony honoring Jews killed by the Nazis and their allies during World War II, the press reported. The Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* said the Cuban leader planned to unveil a sculpture of a menorah in October at a Havana plaza in memory of the victims of the holocaust. The monument's creation was promoted by Eusebio Leal, who serves as historian of the city of Havana and is an expert on the history of Cuba's Jewish community, Israeli Pensioners Party leader and Cabinet Minister Rafi Eitan told the newspaper. Castro broke relations with Israel in 1973 during a conference of non-aligned nations in Libya as a show of solidarity with the Palestinians. Israel, one of the main allies of the United States, has rebuffed several overtures from Cuban officials to restore relations, the newspaper said, adding that the countries have cooperated in the areas of agriculture and construction. Israel's interests in Cuba are handled by the Canadian Embassy. (*EFE*, 22/6/06)

**June 23:** Doctors in the Bolivian capital La Paz have staged a protest against an influx of Cuban medics offering free care in poor and rural parts of the country. The doctors, whose protest included offering free treatment themselves, say the Cubans take jobs away from unemployed Bolivian doctors. They want the Bolivian government to subsidise the national medical service, so it is free at the point of delivery. Deputy Health Minister Juan Alberto Nogales said Bolivia's health indices were among "the worst in Latin America, if not the world", and were a permanent preoccupation for the government. "In those places where we are supporting our Cuban colleagues there has never been a medical service," he said, rejecting the doctors' assertion that the Cubans were taking away jobs. (*BBC*, 23/6/06)

**June 23:** Fresh criticism by Cuba of the European Union, which it calls "a lackey" of the United States, marked another step in deterioration of relations between the island's Communist regime and the 25-nation bloc of democracies. In an editorial published in the official daily *Granma*, the Cuban government called "the alliance between the European Union and Bush, pathetic". According to the editorial, "the European Union lacks of morality and authority to dictate conditions or impose decisions on Cuba". "Lackeys have very little power", it added. [[Es muy poco el poder de los lacayos](#)] (*AFP, EFE, Reuters*, 23/6/06)

**June 23:** The Chamber of Deputies of Chile passed a draft agreement requesting that president Michelle Bachelet urge the Cuban regime to put an end to arrests for ideological reasons, and to release opponents of Fidel Castro from prison. The initiative presented by deputies of several political parties passed by 52 votes in favour, one against and 6 abstentions. (*MartiNoticias*, 23/6/06)

**June 26:** More than 80 legislators of the Latin-American Parliament (Parlatino) gathered in Cuba to discuss measures to prevent natural and health disasters, like the avian flu, and to promote the creation of a Latin-American court to settle environmental disputes. The First Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the "Situation of natural and health disasters in Latin American and Caribbean countries," gathered 86 Parlatino deputies from 18 countries, including Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Venezuela, in Havana. In a letter, illegal Cuban opposition organizations urged the parliamentarians to mediate in favour of the activists who work so that the same diverse ideas they represent prevail on the island. (*AFP, MartiNoticias*, 26,27/6/06)

**June 26:** The Spanish Foreign Ministry had to intervene to persuade the regime of Fidel Castro to release Adam Mascaro Paya - nephew of the anti-Castro dissident Oswaldo Paya - who had been arrested on his arrival in Havana. The son of a Spanish man and a Cuban woman, Adam Mascaro Paya - who was born in Cuba and has lived in Spain for 25 years - possesses dual Cuban and Spanish nationality and travelled to Havana on his Cuban passport. The Cuban authorities, like those of other countries, do not accept dual nationality, so Mascaro Paya could only travel to the island with the Cuban passport, which, his relatives told the press, was perfectly in order because it had the mandatory stamp required by the Castro government. The same sources said that when he arrived at Havana airport, ready to visit his relatives as he had done on three other occasions, Oswaldo Paya's nephew - who does not carry out any kind of political activity - was arrested by police on the grounds that his documentation was not in order. The Foreign Ministry gave instructions to the Spanish embassy in Havana to investigate what was going on. The diplomatic representation's efforts with the Cuban Foreign Ministry brought results, and he was released next day after having been detained. (*ABC*, 28/6/06)

**June 27:** Cuban official daily *Granma* said that president Vicente Fox has been "the worst" of all Mexican presidents ever. In an article titled "Fox, the worst of them all," *Granma* said that "just a few days from knowing who will be the next president of Mexico, there are many hoping for a change in the direction of the country". "It is hard to imagine six years worse for Mexico than the first six of the 21st century", *Granma* said. "He came into power promising to refresh Mexican politics to the beat of his Coca Cola franchise. He arrived at Los Pinos presidential residence with his cowboy boots, trying to put a firm foot on shaky terrain. But one thing is handling a company and making campaign promises and another is the art of knowing how to make politics", the article added about Fox presidency.

**June 28:** UN High Commissioner's Special Representative, Christine Chanet, received a request to intervene in the case of the Cuban independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas, who has been on hunger strike for over four months in Cuba. Guillermo Estévez, director of Rescate Internacional, presented a letter to Chanet requesting the mediation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights with the Cuban authorities. Fariñas health condition is very delicate, but insists on maintaining the hunger strike in demand of free access to the use of Internet. (*MartiNoticias*, 28/6/06).

**June 29:** The new Chilean ambassador to Cuba, Jaime Tohá, former minister during Salvador Allende's government (1970-1973), presented his credentials to Cuban authorities. Tohá substitutes Ambassador Celso Moreno, in the post since February 2004. (*AFP*, 29/6/06)

**June 30:** Cuba condemned the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza's Strip, saying that criminal act put the Middle East at risk of escalating violations that endanger international peace and security. At a statement published by Granma newspaper, the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX) states "extreme concern" over the large-scale military operation started by Israel at daybreak June 28, 2006. Israel, notes the daily, has used as a pretext to launch its criminal aggression the detention of one of its soldiers by the Palestinian resistance. In June alone its army killed 52 Palestinians, including nine children, international organizations reported. [[Declaración del MINREX](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 30/6/06)

**June 30:** Former Peruvian presidential candidate, Ollanta Humala, traveled to Cuba to go under surgical treatment due to gallbladder disorders. Peru's former nationalist candidate had announced he would go under surgery in Lima, but a report from the press said Humala flew to Havana from Panama City. (*El Comercio*, 30/6/06)

**June 30:** Laos Prime Minister Bouasane Bouphavanh received the member of Cuba's Political Bureau Esteban Lazo Hernandez starting a friendly and work visit to the Indochinese nation. The leaders discussed traditional bilateral relations between the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party as well as on the tasks intended to encourage development carried out by both nations. Laos is the first stop of Lazo's visit to several Asian countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/6/06)

## **Terrorism**

**June 4:** Baltasar Garzón, Spain's most prominent investigative magistrate, has called on the United States to immediately close the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

"A model like Guantánamo is an insult to countries that respect laws," Judge Garzón said in an interview during a counterterrorism conference in Florence in late May. "It delegitimizes us. It is a place that needs to disappear immediately." As the war in Iraq drags on, criticism in Europe of the Bush administration's prison for terrorist suspects as well as its secret transport of terrorist suspects to third countries has steadily mounted. (*AP*, 4/6/06)

**June 4:** There are many issues dividing Cuba and the United States, but few have been as explosive in recent years as the charge that each nation is harboring the other's terrorists. The US has designated Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism, placing it alongside such nations as Iran, Syria and North Korea. One reason for this distinction is 56-year-old Charlie Hill, an Illinois native who 35 years ago, as a member of a black separatist group, allegedly killed a New Mexico state trooper, hijacked an airliner and fled to Cuba, where Fidel Castro gave refuge to Hill and other fugitives from American justice. Meanwhile, Castro demands that US authorities extradite Luis Posada Carriles, a militant Cuban exile accused of blowing up a Cuban airliner in 1976, killing all 73 aboard. Posada Carriles remains in US custody after an immigration judge ruled that he cannot be deported to Cuba or Venezuela, where the downed plane originated, because he could be tortured there. Cuba also has asked the US to return three Cuban-Americans allegedly implicated

in the airline bombing and a separate plot to kill Castro, according to the US State Department's 2005 Country Reports on Terrorism released this April. (*Chicago Tribune*, 4/6/06)

**June 13:** The International Committee of the Red Cross is to visit the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, following the deaths of three men held at the prison camp there. Military authorities at the camp have also announced a review of its procedures.

The Red Cross is the only outside agency that has regular access to the prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay. (*The New York Times*, 13/6/06)

**June 24:** Fourteen Saudi Arabians were released from the detention center at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and transferred to their home country, the Pentagon said. One was released because US officials determined the prisoner was no longer an enemy combatant. The releases bring to 310 the number of detainees who have departed Guantanamo to other governments, including Albania, Afghanistan, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Kuwait, Morocco, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden and Uganda. (*CNN*, 26/6/06)

**June 26:** The head of Cuba's legislature said that not only should the US naval base at Guantanamo be closed but it should also be returned to Cuba. "What needs to be asked for, of course, is that they close the torture center; even (US President George W.) Bush has said that he's in favor of closing it. But the most important thing is that they return it," said the head of the communist island's National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon. He commented to journalists in response to a question about the European Parliament's resolutions in favor of closing the detention center at the base. The members of the EU body feel that maintaining the detention center for people Washington says are Al Qaeda members or terrorism suspects is a violation of international law and of human rights standards. Alarcon said that "if there has been torture and if (the base) has been turned into what it's been turned into, unfortunately it's because that piece of our national territory has been usurped for more than a century." "So, let them close the installation and return what doesn't belong to the United States or to Europe," he added. (*EFE*, 26/6/06)

## Security

**June 14:** Bolivian President Evo Morales underscored his revolutionary bent by paying elaborate homage to one of his main heroes, Che Guevara, on what would have been the Argentine-Cuban guerrilla icon's 78th birthday. Morales said that he was ready to defend the country "with arms" if the US "empire" attacks Bolivia, Cuba or Venezuela. "Now, it's not the people who are taking up arms against the empire," he said. "What we're seeing is that it's the empire that's taking up arms against the people," Morales said.

"If they do it in Cuba, Venezuela or Bolivia, we're ready to confront (them) and defend - including with arms - the country, the natural resources and the other social transformations," he said. (*EFE*, 14/6/06)

**June 22:** In Panama, Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, said that if anyone invades Cuba "Venezuelan blood would run too" and emphasized that "we are committed to the core" with the Caribbean nation. "The two are one people", said Chávez in reference to the relations between Venezuela and Cuba. "We are willing to defend the sovereignty of our twin peoples", stressed Chávez. (*EFE*, 22/6/06)

## US-Cuba Relations

**June 2:** Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly, will be the guest speaker at the kickoff for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists' convention in Fort Lauderdale, organizers said. Alarcón, a controversial figure for South Florida's predominantly anti-Castro, Cuban-American community, will appear via satellite from

Havana during the convention's opening session on June 14 to take questions from journalists. Cuban-born Mirta Ojito, a New York Times contributor and Columbia University journalism professor, will interview him, and audience members will submit written questions. "In South Florida, anything that has to do with Cuba is going to be controversial, and we know that," said NAHJ Executive Director Iván Román. "As journalists, we don't shy away from controversy or controversial figures." More than 2,000 journalists from the United States and abroad are expected to attend the 24th annual convention, which will be June 14-17 at the Broward County Convention Centre. (*Sun Sentinel*, 2/6/06)

**June 2:** The University of Miami -- in coordination with the American Red Cross of Greater Miami and the Keys and a slew of non-profit groups and local, state and federal agencies -- has completed what officials say is the most comprehensive plan ever put together in Miami to prepare for the critical days following the death of Cuba's communist leader, who will turn 80 this year. The greatest fear among the planning organizations is another mass migration along the lines of the Mariel boatlift in 1980 or the 1994 balsero crisis. Much of the report is dedicated to planning for such an event, such as assigning a county official as the point person and assigning specific tasks to deal with migrants. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/6/06)

**June 2:** Cuba complained that the United States denied a visa to the head of its delegation to a UN AIDS conference, but a US spokesman said he applied too late. Cuba's Public Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer Cabrera did not receive a visa, while four other members of the Cuban delegation were allowed into the United States to attend the conference. The three-day conference was convened to plot a global strategy for battling AIDS. (*Reuters*, 2/6/06)

**June 2:** A toll-free number set up to receive interview requests from Cubans seeking tourist and business travel visas to the United States was shut down after just six days when it was barraged by a half-million calls. The US Interests Section in Havana, which reviews the non-immigrant visa applications, launched the phone-in service from a Mexico-based call center May 25. People in the United States could make appointments on behalf of relatives or friends in Cuba seeking 90-day visas. Interests Section spokesman Drew Blakeney said the phone lines were shut down by Sprint, the telecom company managing the infrastructure, after the call center's server crashed. Sprint officials dealing with the issue could not be reached for comment. The number of calls to the center skyrocketed from previous days, but Blakeney said he did not know why. In just six days, the system scheduled visa appointments through January 2007. As a result, the Interests Section said it is not taking new appointments but will honor those made on June 2 or earlier. (*Sun Sentinel*, 2/6/06)

**June 5:** A controversial children's book about Cuba should stay in school libraries, an advisory committee recommended, almost certainly setting up a showdown at the Miami-Dade School Board. The 16-member review panel debated for more than seven hours over two sessions, highlighting omissions and possible inaccuracies in the book "Vamos a Cuba" and its English-language counterpart, "A Visit To Cuba". Ultimately, only one of those members -- child psychologist Lydia Usategui -- voted to remove the book, which opponents believe is an unreasonably sunny portrait of life under Fidel Castro. The majority of the panel -- which included educators, administrators and community members -- agreed the book was lacking in many areas, but found it sufficient to meet the needs of its kindergarten-to-second-grade audience. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/6/06)

**June 5:** The Bush administration suspended the operations of three of the main travel and remittance agencies to Cuba as part of its stepped-up economic war against the island. The closure order came from the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) against La Perla del Caribe, Transeair Travel and Uno Remittance Inc. The agencies received notifications from OFAC in which they were told that their licenses to provide services related to Cuba were being revoked. La Perla del Caribe has four offices in Miami-Dade County (two of those in Hialeah) and was considered one of the most popular and dynamic agencies for providing a wide range of services related to Cuba. Transeair Travel is based in Washington DC. (*El Nuevo Herald, Granma*, 6/6/06)

**June 5:** The US government accused 12 countries, among them Cuba and Venezuela, of not making even minimally sufficient efforts to combat people trafficking. The annual "Trafficking in Persons" (TIP) report released by the State Department divides the world's countries into three "tiers" based on their efforts to combat human smuggling, and the middle group - those nations who make some efforts to halt the practice but do not do enough, in Washington's opinion - includes a "watch list" of those countries that are receiving special scrutiny. The 12 countries on the "black list" - the third tier, or nations that do not make even the basic efforts to halt human trafficking - may be subject to sanctions by Washington, including the withholding of non-humanitarian and non-trade-related assistance. The United States places Cuba among the countries that are doing little to eradicate human trafficking and calls the island one of the world's main destinations for sexual tourism, the victims of which include a large number of minors. The report notes that it is difficult to calculate the dimensions of the problem in Cuba because of the "closed nature" of the Cuban government and the lack of non-governmental information. [[Trafficking in Persons Report, Country Narratives: Cuba](#)] (*EFE*, 6/6/06)

**June 5:** US union leaders demanded that Fidel Castro free independent union leaders from prison in Cuba. In a letter sent to the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, the leaders from 23 American trade unions asked for the release from prison of eight Cuban workers who tried to form independent trade union organizations. (*MartiNoticias*, 5/6/06)

**June 5:** Representative Charles Rangel, a frequent critic of the US embargo against Cuba, met with Fidel Castro on a trip to the island in 2002, but only acknowledged that the Cuban government picked up part of the tab when a watchdog group began making recent inquiries. The New York Democrat changed his travel disclosure form for the April 2002 trip and reimbursed the Cuban government and a New York grocery store owner \$1,922 for his son's expenses after the Centre for Public Integrity, a non-partisan group that focuses on open records, raised questions about the trip. House ethics rules permit private sponsors of lawmakers' trips to cover the cost of the member of Congress and one relative -- in Rangel's case, his wife Alma, who also went on the trip. The government watchdog group, which released an extensive review of congressional travel, noted that congressional travel disclosure forms "are supposed to make the sponsor and purpose of privately funded trips transparent to the public." (*The Miami Herald*, 8/6/06)

**June 6:** In an effort to free Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles from federal detention and help him qualify for US citizenship, his attorney may call on US Senator John Kerry and Oliver North of Iran-contra fame to testify about Posada's ties to the US government. Posada's lawyer, Eduardo Soto, said that he is considering subpoenaing Kerry and North because their testimony may assure US immigration officials that Posada was working for the US government during the contra war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the mid-1980s. Soto said Posada, who was once a legal US resident, should receive US citizenship because he served as an active-duty soldier for the US Army in Vietnam, and later as a paid US agent in Nicaragua. "He was the lead prosecutor in Iran-contra," Soto said of Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who unsuccessfully challenged President Bush for the White House in 2004. "He is a man who has personal knowledge of investigations, reports, testimony, everything that Iran-contra entails." (*The Miami Herald*, 7/6/06)

**June 8:** Charges that a husband and wife acted as agents for Cuba should be dismissed because the FBI's case is built on broken promises not to prosecute if the man cooperated with the investigation, defense attorneys said. Those contentions contained in defense motions will be the focus of a June 14 hearing in Miami before US District Judge K. Michael Moore, who will determine if the case against Carlos and Elsa Alvarez should be dismissed. The couple, who worked at Florida International University, have been held without bail since being arrested in January. The indictment charged that for 30 years, the Alvarazes supplied non-classified information to the Cuban intelligence agency, mostly about anti-Castro Cuban exile groups in Miami. (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/6/06)

**June 9:** Castro called the US air strike that killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi a "barbarity," saying he should have been put on trial. The United States acted as "judge and jury" against the leader of the al-Qaida in Iraq, Castro said. "They

bragged, they were practically drunk with happiness." "The accused cannot just be eliminated," he told a literacy conference. "This barbarity cannot be done." (AP, 10/6/06)

**June 12:** A group of eight Cuban immigrants arrived to Mona Island, west of Puerto Rico, police reported. The group, seven men and one woman, arrived in Playa Mujeres in a boat that went back to Dominican Republic without having been detained by the authorities. (AFP, 14/6/06)

**June 12:** The Cuban government cut off electricity to the US diplomatic mission in Havana a week ago, and US requests for power to be restored have gone unanswered, the US State Department said. The facility has been operating with generator power.

Work at the mission continues, including interviews of refugees and outreach programs for the Cuban people, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said. "I would just say that the bullying tactics of the Castro regime aren't going to work," he added. He said Cuban authorities also reduce the availability of water to the mission from time to time.

McCormack said he suspects that the decision to cut the power was in response to efforts by the mission to provide information to the Cuban people. "That, of course, is not something that the Castro regime takes kindly to," he said. (AP, 12/6/06)

**June 13:** State-supplied electricity flowed again at the US diplomatic mission in Havana, even as Cuba termed a "blatant" lie US charges that power had been deliberately cut more than a week ago. "The lights came back on in the early afternoon," said mission spokesperson Drew Blakeney, who attributed the service renewal to international coverage of the US charge. But Blakeney said he doubted problems with Fidel Castro's government were over. "We need visas for our personnel who are going to work here, both on a long-term and short-term basis," he said. "We need permission to import cars, we need a regular supply of electricity, we need a regular supply of water (...) or obviously our presence here is unsustainable." The Castro government said earlier that the Bush administration and Miami-based Cuban-American groups were seeking a pretext to close the mission and end limited cooperation between the long-time ideological foes on immigration and other matters. "They lie blatantly (...) We categorically deny that there have been premeditated electricity cuts," a statement carried by all state-run media said. [Editorial Granma] (Reuters, 13/6/06)

**June 13:** The State Department said that it is not prepared to except Cuban authorities' claim that a cut off of power to the US Interests Section in Havana can be attributed to bad weather. At his daily press briefing, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told a reporter who cited the Cuban statement: "You'll excuse me if I don't take that explanation at face value." "Look, you know, this is an authoritarian regime. It's not as though they don't control the power company and whether or not the power gets cut off to the US Interests Section. And I would note it is very, very strange, and I lay this out for whether it's coincidence or not, but it's the only building or compound on the block that doesn't have power. So - and we did pay our power bill," the official said. (EFE, 13/6/06)

**June 13:** Firms including Marathon Oil are lobbying congress to be allowed to bid for oil and natural-gas deposits in Cuban waters. They are backed by Republican legislators bucking Bush by supporting legislation to exempt the oil firms from the 1962 Cuban trade embargo and a ban on drilling within 160km of US shores. The US need for energy and the likelihood that foreign companies will rush in to drill justifies the exemption, advocates say. "Are we supposed to sit by and let China drill in our own backyard?" asked senator Pete Domenici, chairman of the senate energy committee, a co-sponsor with 12 other legislators of legislation exempting the US energy companies. (Bloomberg, 13/6/06)

**June 14:** It was billed as a conversation between a top Cuban government official and a Cuban-American journalist, but it turned into a debate over contentious issues that have long strained US-Cuba relations. Before a group of journalists and media executives on the opening day of the NAHJ convention, Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly, squared off against Columbia University journalism professor and New York Times contributor

Mirta Ojito, a Cuban exile who left the country in 1980 as part of the Mariel boatlift. They covered a familiar list of issues: imprisoned Cuban journalists, immigration and the US embargo. On the embargo, Alarcon said that, "I hope the US would realize that the law is no longer relevant. The U.S. has pretended for many years to dominate us. The embargo is a policy that has been condemned year after year, and it's not working." (*Latino*, 14/6/06)

**June 14:** The House of Representatives voted to make it easier to sell US farm products to Cuba by overriding a Bush administration requirement to pay in cash before the ship leaves harbor. By voice vote, the House adopted language allowing payment to be made before the goods change hands, a more common approach for cash sales that also speeds delivery. It became part of a Treasury funding bill passed on a 406-22 vote. Representatives killed two other proposed amendments aimed at revising US relations with Cuba, including one to end the US economic embargo in place since the early 1960s. (*Reuters*, 14/6/06)

**June 14:** A controversial children's book about Cuba -- and similar books from the same series about other countries -- will be removed from all Miami-Dade school libraries after a School Board vote that split Hispanic and non-Hispanic members in an incendiary political atmosphere. Only the Cuba book, "Vamos a Cuba", and its English-language counterpart, "A Visit to Cuba", were reviewed through the district's lengthy appeals process. Some board members who voted for the ban admitted they had never seen other books in the series, which features 24 nations including Greece, Mexico and Vietnam -- none of which had been formally objected to by anyone. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/6/06)

**June 14:** The recently passed Florida law that essentially bans state academic travel to Cuba promised to escalate into a constitutional battle when Governor Jeb Bush signed it into law in May. The American Civil Liberties Union, representing several professors from state universities, filed a lawsuit against Florida officials in federal court, claiming the travel ban is unconstitutional. The group also demands a temporary injunction to prevent the law from taking effect while the case is in court. "This act is terribly misdirected," Randall Marshall, legal director of the ACLU of Florida, said of the new law. "This is unconstitutional, and we hope to have this law struck down very shortly." (*The Miami Herald*, 14/6/06)

**June 14:** Cuba's future may not be predictable, but the South Florida business community now has a much clearer picture of the island economy and the challenges ahead than it did when the Soviet bloc first began to unravel and undermine the Cuban economy. The half-day conference, "A Future and Free Cuba -- Opportunities and Threats for Florida," touched on areas where Cuba will complement Florida -- trade, investment and services -- and where it will compete -- tourism and agriculture. Speakers discussed Cuba's future needs and various scenarios for South Florida after the death or retirement of Fidel Castro and the possible succession of his brother, Raul. "This is a bankrupt economy," said Andy Gomez, a senior fellow at the Institute of Cuban and Cuban American Studies at the University of Miami. "Only Haiti is poorer." (*The Miami Herald*, 15/6/06)

**June 14:** Florida's determination to block oil drilling close to its coastline irritates some members of Congress. And this week they weren't shy about expressing their frustration, with one House member asking how the state can "dictate to America" where to drill. Colleen Castille, secretary of Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, took a drubbing from members of the House Resources Committee as they reviewed the latest gambit to open offshore waters to drilling -- offer states a share of the royalties if they agree to permit energy exploration along their coasts. Though Castille said her boss, Governor Jeb Bush, isn't necessarily opposed to the legislation -- provided it gives Florida a significant buffer -- the state's no-drill position came under fire from lawmakers who want to open the outer continental shelf to drilling but have been thwarted by the governor and the Florida congressional delegation. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/6/06)

**June 15:** Pastors for Peace, an ecumenical solidarity movement, condemned what it called the immoral and cruel US blockade on Cuba, noting that it impedes provisions of food, medicines and other supplies to the Caribbean island. According to a press release from the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), in June and July

the 17th US-CUBA Friendship Caravan will visit more than 120 US and Canadian cities through 13 different routes to collect supporters, donations and funds for its solidarity cause with Cuba, announced IFCO, which is headed by the Reverend Lucius Walker. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/6/06)

**June 16:** The US University of Yale has donated to Cuba a collection of unpublished documentary films shot on the island between 1964 and 1969 and several movies filmed from 1957 to 1959. These historic documents, work by US filmmaker David Stone, were delivered to the History Institute in Cuba, Granma newspaper reported. Together with the 62 digital films, another 5,000 photos, most of them unpublished, were also donated. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/6/06)

**June 17:** A small group of Baptists, sponsored by the Cary-based North Carolina Baptist Men, has just returned from working to build a retirement home in Cuba. "On any given Sunday in Cuba, there are over 200,000 people worshipping in Baptist churches," said Neil Yarborough, an attorney back from his second trip since December 2004. Yarborough put aside his legal business, and with a religious visa in hand, he led seven people, including a son and a daughter, to the city of Santiago, located on the eastern end of Cuba. Yarborough, of Fayetteville, spoke of seeing well-educated people trying to live in a depressed economy. He cites a more-than-40-year US embargo, the meltdown of the Soviet empire in the early 1990s and "probably the inefficiencies of communism, too," as reasons he believes Cuba is so poor. "I mean, there's a lot of things that Fidel did that probably helped people, but the country would collapse if it wasn't for an effective black market," he said. (*The Herald Sun*, 17/6/06)

**June 19:** The presence of Chinese oil rigs along the coast of Cuba and a new attempt in Congress to tap the eastern Gulf of Mexico are putting pressure on Florida to allow American companies to drill for oil and natural gas near the state's shores. Drilling advocates unveiled a proposal that would remove the federal ban on drilling 100 miles beyond the coast and offer states financial incentives to allow it closer. At the same time, some drilling advocates in the House and Senate are pressing to compete with companies from China, Canada and other countries to explore off the Cuban coast only 50 miles from Key West. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/6/06)

**June 20:** Cuba hailed the opening of the new UN Human Rights Council, praising its own election as a founding member of the 47-nation body and the exclusion of the United States, which declined to stand as a candidate. Cuba -- which has been criticized by the United States and rights groups for its record -- said its victory in the May election was a reward for its humanitarian work, including the contributions of its doctors in 70 other countries and cost-free surgery by Cuban eye specialists for patients from elsewhere in the Caribbean and Latin America. US officials in Geneva said they were not immediately able to comment. "Today is a particularly symbolic day. Cuba is a founding member of the Human Rights Council, and the United States is not," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. "The absence of the United States is the defeat of lies; it is the moral punishment for the haughtiness of an empire. "The election entailed a demanding assessment. Each one got what they deserved," Perez Roque added. (*CNN*, 20/6/06)

**June 19:** Despite a setback in the US Supreme Court, Cubatabaco, the Cuban cigar company, announced that it will continue to fight for the rights to the COHIBA trademark in the United States. COHIBA is Cuba's most renowned cigar brand, but cannot be sold in the US because of the US economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba. Cubatabaco made its announcement in response to the US Supreme Court's June 19, 2006 order denying review of a lower court ruling that, in the absence of specific US government permission, the US blockade bars Cubatabaco from obtaining judicial protection of its COHIBA trademark in the United States. Cubatabaco will now pursue its pending application for US government permission from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which administers the US blockade. (*PRNewswire*, 19/6/06)

**June 19:** A woman accused of spying for the Cuban government has been freed on bond after five months in jail. Elsa Alvarez left the Federal Detention Center in Miami after family members put up their homes as collateral for her \$400,000 bond, but her movements are restricted. Alvarez and her husband, Carlos, a Florida International University professor who remained jailed, are charged with failing to register as agents of a foreign government. Prosecutors

contend they spied for Fidel Castro's government for decades, mainly reporting on activities of Miami's large Cuban-American exile community and US political developments. They were arrested in January and have pleaded not guilty to the charges. (AP, 20/6/06)

**June 19:** Cuban and American academics are participating in the 18th Conference of Philosophers and Social Scientists being held at the University of Havana. In his opening words, Jose Carlos Vazquez, dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History at the University of Havana, said representatives of 15 US universities are attending the event despite efforts by the Bush administration to impede exchange between the two countries' professionals. Cliff Durand, coordinator of the research network of the Association of Radical Philosophers of the US and a member of the Center for Global Justice, noted that in the last two years the number of US academics attending has declined due to the anti-Cuba policy of the Bush administration. (*Granma*, 22/6/06)

**June 20:** Cuba and the United States accused each other of violations as the gloves came off on the second day of a new UN human rights forum intended to rise above finger-pointing. Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque accused the United States of running a "concentration camp" at its Guantanamo naval base on Cuba, where some 460 terror suspects are being held. Perez said in a speech that his country would "speak out for the rights of American people" as the United States does not have a seat on the 47-member UN Human Rights Council. But his remarks drew a sharp rebuke from the US observer delegation for what it called Cuba's "gratuitous and unfounded attacks" against the United States. "The American people need no one else to speak for them, particularly officials of an autocratic government," US political counselor Velia De Pirro said in a right of reply to the remarks from the communist country's representative. The US delegate noted that Cuba, like other states, to win election to the new human rights body, had pledged to promote human rights both in its territory and elsewhere. (*Reuters*, 20/6/06)

**June 20:** A toll-free number for Cubans seeking visas to the United States is working again, less than three weeks after the US Interests Section in Havana was forced to shut down the hotline due to a flood of a half-million calls. The number, available to people in the United States making interview appointments for Cubans requesting 90-day tourist or business visas, resumed full service, the Interests Section said in a statement. The Interests Section initially launched the toll-free service in late May. It was cut off on June 2, after six days, because the Mexico-based call center's infrastructure could not handle the volume of calls -- which received from tens of thousands daily calls to a half-million in just one day. It was not known whether the calls were legitimate or due to sabotage; the Interests Section said it did not know the reason. (*Sun Sentinel*, 21/6/06)

**June 21:** The Miami-Dade school district's own Student Government Association joined the American Civil Liberties Union in filing a federal lawsuit challenging the School Board's decision to ban controversial children's books about Cuba and 22 similar books about other countries. "We as students are thirsty for knowledge, but the School Board's decision hinders that thirst," said Ronald Bilbao, immediate past president of student government, who graduated this spring from South Miami Senior High. "We don't ban books in America, period." The groups argued that the two books at the center of the controversy -- *Vamos a Cuba* and its English-language counterpart, *A Visit to Cuba* -- were removed purely because they were politically unsavory. "This is what happens in communist countries; this is what happens in communist Cuba," said Virginia Rosen, president of the ACLU's Greater Miami chapter, who said it was "a case of a school board gone wild." (*The Miami Herald*, 22/6/06)

**June 24:** Four engineering students from Bristol University are preparing to fly to Havana in an attempt to improve the Cuban capital's water supplies. The students belong to the university's Engineers Without Borders society which is working on a project to optimise and control urban Cuban water. They aim to test their system in the area of the Polytechnic University of Havana, which serves 5,000 people. The final project's aim is to set up an efficient automated water network. (*BBC*, 24/6/06)

**June 25:** Miami-Dade County police found 39 Cuban immigrants in a public park after they were smuggled in by speedboat, authorities said. The 28 men, eight women and three children were uninjured and seemed healthy when they were found in Crandon Park, said US Border Patrol spokesman Steve McDonald. Border Patrol took them into custody. No smugglers had been identified. Boarder Patrol agents were unsure how many people were involved in the smuggling and if the smugglers were part of the group in custody. (*Sun Sentinel*, 26/6/06)

**June 26:** A group of Americans clinging to makeshift rafts made of cardboard and Styrofoam have managed to sail to Cuba, seeking refuge. The so-called, "Anti-Freedom Flotilla" sailed from the United States. A leader of the group of five men and two women said they were fleeing the tyranny of high credit card debt and rising interest rates. The spokesman, Thurley Howell, 42, told reporters that he could no longer live in the manner to which he had grown accustomed in the United States, and so sought a better life for himself and his wife, Lucy. "We had a mountain of credit card debt, and a mortgage payment to make. When I looked for a bill consolidation loan, I discovered that interest rates had gone through the roof," he was quoted as saying. Howell, a day trader, lived in a poor section of Boca Raton, a neighborhood of \$500 million dollar mansions. "There is just no way I could make those kind of payments, so I decided to come here." When informed of the American flotilla, Fidel Castro immediately rushed to the beach to survey the situation. "Of course we will make a place for our American brothers and sisters," he said. Although, he admitted that Cuba had no need of day traders, accountants or insurance adjusters, homes would be prepared for the new arrivals. "We will prepare a home for them in the manner to which WE have grown accustomed," he was quoted as saying. (*Reuters*, 26/6/06)

**June 27:** US academic researchers caught in the contentious relations between the United States and Cuba said they are concerned research that could benefit both countries will be suspended. The tense relations between Havana and Washington deteriorated even further early this month, when the United States Interests Section in Havana accused authorities of harassment, reporting interruptions of water and electricity to the office. The Cuban government responded with an editorial in the local press, accusing Washington's representatives of searching for pretexts to once and for all put an end to what little relations are left between the two countries. Professor Charles Verharen, of the Washington-based Howard University, told the press that "it is getting harder" for US citizens who want to visit the island nation, and said his status as a researcher is the only reason he was able to get into Cuba. He said that academic bilateral relationships are "indispensable; communication among academics is a prerequisite for building a theoretical foundation through which the two countries can begin to bridge their gap." (*IPS*, 27/6/06)

**June 28:** Nineteen Cuban immigrants arrived in a dessert Puerto Rican island. Sailing from Dominican Republic in two different boats, the first group of six men and two women arrived at Playa Ubero in Mona Island, while the other eleven immigrants reached Mujeres Beach later same day. According to police reports, the first group traveled in a boat that immediately returned to Dominican Republic. (*AP*, 29/6/06)

**June 30:** Cuban librarians criticized attempts by the Miami-Dade County school board to ban a children's book because of its positive depiction of life on the communist-run island. "It's outrageous the Miami school libraries would prohibit the presence of the book "Vamos a Cuba" because it shows the truth about how our children live," librarian Margarita Bellas Vilarino told the communist youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde. Bellas, of the Cuban Association of Librarians, and Abel Ponce, of the Jose Marti National Library in Havana, told Juventud Rebelde that government-run libraries island-wide were protesting the Florida book ban. (*AFP*, 30/6/06)

**June 30:** The commission that steers Bush administration policy on Cuba is recommending creating an \$80 million fund to boost opposition to Cuban leader Fidel Castro and tightening economic sanctions on the island. A draft of the commission's report leaked to the press also recommends a major diplomatic effort to offset the "Venezuela-Cuba axis" and identifies President Hugo Chávez as a key player whose oil wealth could help extend the communist system after Castro's death. The report summarizes the work of more than 100 officials from 17 government departments and agencies on behalf of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, co-chaired by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, a Cuban American. The recommendations must be approved by President Bush, although he approved virtually all the items on the commission's first report in May 2004. Unlike the

2004 report, the current set of recommendations include an annex that will remain classified "for reasons of national security and effective implementation," according to the text. There was no immediate indication of what the annex might contain. No major changes in US policy toward Cuba are recommended, and the text repeatedly underscores that it is the Cubans, and not the US government, who will decide the future course of their transition. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/6/06)