

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

July 2003

Domestic Affairs

July 1: The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in the province of Villa Clara announced that first secretary in this territory, Miguel Díaz-Canel will be replaced by Roberto López Hernández. A report on local TV news recognized Díaz-Canel for his positive work in economic, political and social tasks during his nine-year term in the region, 155 miles from Havana. (Prensa Latina, 1/7/03)

July 2: Fidel Castro attended the gala celebration of the Vocational Workshop of the National School of Ballet. Thousands of young students of ballet enjoyed a cultural presentation at Havana's Karl Marx Theater. Following the gala, the Cuban leader went backstage and personally spoke with the children and their professors, praising them for the performance. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/03)

July 2: Five of Cuba's top dissidents issued a "declaration of principles" that called for unity among opponents of Fidel Castro but acknowledged rifts in the dissident movement and denounced individualism in the ranks. Signed by Elizardo Sánchez, Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, Vladimiro Roca, René Gómez Manzano and Félix Bonne Carcasés, the declaration endorses the right of Castro opponents to "launch projects, initiatives and diverse working ideas" but rejects "any assumption that dissident organizations in general are under the obligation or duty to support them. "No person is entitled to speak on behalf of the whole of the dissidence," the document cautions. "Any pronouncements made by anyone must be formulated only in the name of the organization or group itself." (The Miami Herald, 4/7/03)

July 3: Cuba has now joined the growing list of countries capable of producing one of the most modern information techniques worldwide: the Digital Versatile Disc or DVD produced by the Information Technologies and Advanced Telematics Enterprise (CITMATEL). According to CITMATEL officials, the possibility of assimilating this technology to present products in such a new digital format will ensure the future preservation of the country's films and TV programming. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/03)

July 3: Cuban opposition leader Vladimiro Roca has reported that the Havana government has issued "state reasons" denying him a permit to travel to Mexico to witness federal elections. According to Roca, who is also president of the illegal Social-Democrat Party, "once more the Cuban government has imposed sanctions and vengeance against us" by preventing us to travel, which is a "flagrant violation" of our human rights. (Notimex, 9/7/03)

July 4: New rules for private landlords about to be put into effect by the socialist government of Fidel Castro have begun circulating among renters over the past few days, said a landlord, who agreed to talk to the press on condition of anonymity. "We live in a state of permanent stress, worrying about whether we'll have enough guests, or waiting for more restrictions to be slapped on," complained a 58-year-old Cuban woman who rents out two of the five bedrooms in her home, mainly to foreign tourists. The circular, dated June 5 and signed by the president of the National Institute of Housing, Víctor Ramírez Ruiz, states that "negative tendencies and behaviors have emerged in the exercise of this activity that distort the very essence of renting." The new provision, which is to go into effect shortly, mentions -- as examples of "negative behaviors" -- the use of homes as "brothels", and the "excessive enrichment" of landlords. "That is offensive," said the renter who was interviewed. "I am an honorable person who has worked all my life, and only after retiring did I decide to rent out rooms to improve the income of my large family." (IPS, 4/7/03)

July 6: In an interview for an Italian magazine, Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega said that freedom of worship without religious freedom is the reality the Cuban Catholic Church must struggle against everyday. This means an enormous hurdle for charity endeavours in a society that barely tolerates religion. Religious freedom entails the "possibility to disseminate the Christian perspective on the larger social and ethical issues, and therefore, have access to the media, which are all State-owned in this country," explained the Archbishop of Havana, in the interview for *Famiglia Cristiana*. (Zenit, 18/7/03)

July 8: Most of the 74 dissidents and independent journalists incarcerated last March and April have been assigned to prisons up to 650 miles from their homes and, amid the island's ongoing transportation crisis, visiting can indeed turn into an ordeal for their relatives. "This is hell on Earth," said Laura Pollan, 60, referring to the ordeal of traveling almost 200 miles from Havana to the Alambradas de Manacas prison to visit her husband, independent journalist Héctor Maseda. (The Miami Herald, 8/7/03)

July 8: To the beat of African drums and chants to Babalu Aye, Oggun and Chango, 700 worshipers of Yoruba deities called Orishas gathered for a world congress in Havana. High priests from Nigeria and followers from the Caribbean, Brazil and the United States, wearing flowing cloth robes and lots of beads, said their faith was growing faster than ever. "Our religion today is a world religion embraced by over 100 million people in 28 nations," said Nigerian babalao [priest] Wande Abimbola, president of the World Yoruba Congress, holding its eighth meeting since 1981. Abimbola saluted Cuba's Yoruba ancestors who managed to preserve their religion despite being brought across the Atlantic from Nigeria in chains. (Sun Sentinel, 8/7/03)

July 9: A Cuban court has imposed long prison sentences on 5 Curacao citizens, 2 Spanish, and 7 Cubans for involvement in a drug-smuggling ring run by a Curacao man. (Prensa Latina, 9/7/03)

July 9: The leadership of the Organizing Committee of "Letra del Año", an association of the main Afro-Cuban religious sects, clarified the reasons for their absence from the Yoruba World Congress, currently being held in Havana. "Some foreign press dispatches label us as dissidents. That is not accurate," he said. "Ifá instructs us to respect the governments and laws of the countries we live in, whether we agree with them or not." (Cubanet, 9/7/03)

July 9: Dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe, serving a 20-year sentence in a Cuban prison and suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, may die in weeks unless his conditions are swiftly improved, his wife said. He had been transferred to a hospital in Santiago de Cuba after Leiva expressed earlier concerns, but he refused to undergo any more tests saying conditions at that hospital placed him at even greater risk. (AFP, 9/7/03)

July 10: Havana ranked 52nd in a study of 175 countries performed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on human development. In the latest report, UNDP tied its analysis on human development to important objectives such as the reduction of the infant mortality rate, improvement of the mother's health, the fight against dangerous childhood diseases, the right to primary school education and gender equity. According to the report, "the proportion of hungry people almost tripled in Cuba, from 5% to 13%". (Radio Habana Cuba, UNDP, 10/7/03)

July 13: Democracy activist Oswaldo Paya says he travelled the length of Cuba twice in the spring and found the dissident movement bruised but alive despite a government crackdown that put 75 vocal critics behind bars. "The campaign, our committees, could not be destroyed by this blow," Paya says. But he concedes that many who helped him collect signatures probably will remain locked up during the rest of 76-year-old Fidel Castro's lifetime. He says it doesn't matter that Cuba's parliament rejected as unconstitutional the 11,000 signatures his volunteers delivered a year ago, shortly before former president Jimmy Carter's visit here. "The hope is not that the government responds positively," says Paya. "It's the mobilization for change. We are demanding

our rights." (AP, 13/7/03)

July 13: Compay Segundo, who catapulted to world stardom in his 90s with the Grammy-winning record Buena Vista Social Club, has died. He was 95. Born Máximo Francisco Repilado Muñoz, the wiry, cigar-smoking musician carried traditional Cuban music to the world and was honoured with a Grammy in 1997, when he was 90. He set audiences dancing from Havana to Paris with Buena Vista Social Club hits including Chan Chan, which brought modern appeal to a musical genre that had largely been forgotten. He died two days after attending a tribute concert hosted by his sons, Salvador and Basilio, at Havana's Hotel Nacional, where a concert room is dedicated to him. (The Globe and Mail, 14/7/03)

July 14: The Cuban national soccer team celebrates a rare success in international soccer. Cuba experienced a stunning 2-0 upset of Canada in a CONCACAF Gold Cup Group D meeting at Gillette Stadium. The win was the first for the Cubans in the regional championship and their inaugural triumph against the Canadians, who entered the game poised to seal the group title and book a place into Saturday's quarterfinals. (The Globe and Mail, 14/7/03)

July 14: An independent group that monitors political prisoners in Cuba says that a wave of arrests caused the sharpest growth in its list of such prisoners in two decades. The report released by the Human Rights and National Reconciliation Committee counted 336 prisoners held for "political or sociopolitical motives" as of June. Of those, at least 88 were considered "prisoners of conscience" by Amnesty International and "there are 50 more that are possible" in that category, said the panel president Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz. (The Miami Herald, 15/7/03)

July 14: During a ceremony that took place at Havana's main sports coliseum, Ciudad Deportiva, the Cuban delegation to the Pan American Games in Dominican Republic received the national flag. Cuban baseball player Javier Mendez read the oath of the delegation, stating that "the Cuban athletes will defend the colors of Cuba with dignity, and fully aware of the fact that with each effort, the aspirations of the working people will be represented". (AIN, 14/7/03)

July 14: Three men were shot dead and a boy seriously wounded in the head during an attempted hijacking of a fishing boat in western Cuba, Cuban authorities said. A government statement said the three men, accompanied by a woman and her two sons, tried to hijack a fishing boat in La Coloma, 20 miles south of Pinar del Rio. The statement said the hijackers could not get the boat started and had threatened to shoot hostage fishermen aboard. It did not make clear who shot whom or identify those killed but said the shooting broke out among the hijackers. The kidnapers shot a 10 years old boy in the head and then tried to kill him, but the gun didn't fire. (Sun Sentinel, 15/7/03)

July 15: Following a motion by the Cuban Communist Party's leadership during an Extraordinary Plenary Session of its Central Committee, Miguel Díaz Canel was promoted to the Party's Political Bureau. Also admitted into the Central Committee were Elizabeth Cámara Báez, Iván Ordaz Curbelo, Roberto López Hernández, and Marcia Cobas Ruiz. (Granma, 16/7/03)

July 15: Would-be Cuban immigrants are believed to be responsible for hijacking a boat belonging to a government geographic company and are heading for the United States, according to a statement from the Cuban government. The boat, belonging to GeoCuba, was hijacked from Boca de Nuevitás in Camaguey province, according to Cuban authorities. The vessel may have come ashore in the Bahamas, according to officials there. The Cuban coast guard immediately notified US officials after the hijacking, the Cuban government said. The coast guard followed the vessel but did not try to board it in open seas because it was too dangerous, it said. The crew of the Cuban coast guard ship said seven men could be seen on the deck of the boat and about 20 people were inside. (CNN, 16/7/03)

July 15: University enrollment for Fall classes is up and is fast approaching an historic record.

According to reports from the Cuban capital, some 300,000 students across the island will begin classes in September. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/7/03)

July 15: Thousands of Cubans marched in a funeral procession for Compay Segundo in Santiago de Cuba, the hometown where he began to play professionally nearly 80 years ago. Bystanders threw flowers as the musician's body passed by on a sweltering four kilometre journey to the cemetery from a city building where an overnight vigil was held. No senior government officials appeared for the ceremony, though Culture Minister Abel Prieto attended a memorial service in Havana. Mourners - most of them fellow musicians - burst into a final, emotional round of applause as the hearse carrying Compay's body left the funeral home there. His Grammy stood with other awards and medals before his open coffin, which was draped with the Cuban flag, topped with his trademark Borsalino-style hat and backed by a huge spray of flowers from Fidel Castro. (The Ottawa Citizen, 16/7/03)

July 17: The Cuban Communist party newspaper Granma reported Celia Cruz death in a tiny, two-paragraph story low on page 6 of its eight-page edition. Granma acknowledged Cruz as an "important Cuban performer who popularized our country's music in the United States." But it went on to say that "during the last four decades, she (Cruz) was systematically active in campaigns against the Cuban revolution generated in the United States." Despite the official cold shoulder, musicians in Cuba paid warm tribute to Cruz, a Grammy award-winner who recorded more than 70 albums during her long career. "Cuban music is in mourning because it has lost the greatest singer of its history," Latin jazz pianist Chucho Valdez told the press in Havana. A product of the revolution, born in 1962, Cuban singer Isaac Delgado called Cruz's death, "a monumental loss" to the music industry. "Celia has become a cultural patrimony of humanity," Delgado, who worked with Cruz in 1999 in Spain, told the press. "She is an artist who truly always carried in her lips the name of Cuba." And on the streets of the Cuban capital, some people said they were saddened. "Politics apart, Celia was a star, she generated the energy and rhythm that bring down borders," said a Cuban fan. [For more on this, see Exile Community and US-Cuba Relations] (Canadian Press, Reuters, EFE, 18/7/03)

July 17: The Plenary Session of the Communist Party's Provincial Committee in Holguín ratified the election of Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez as its First Secretary, at the request of the Political Bureau of the Party's Central Committee. (Granma, 22/7/03)

July 21: Fidel Castro appeared on a televised broadcast of a graduation ceremony for social workers after several recent rounds of rumors that he was ailing -- or may even had died. Dressed in his typical olive-green uniform, the 76-year-old leader stood on a stage at Havana's Karl Marx Theater and handed out diplomas to scores of graduates, shaking hands and chatting with each one. The source of the rumors, which went largely unreported by major news media, was unclear. (Sun Sentinel, Europa Press, BBC, 22/7/03)

July 24: Fidel Castro's birthplace has turned into a tourist attraction. Some 20,000 people over the past year have made their way to the recently restored, little-publicized monument to the man who has led Cuba for the past 44 years. "We have to take care of it. This is a historic jewel," said Alcides Leyva, director of the sprawling, rustic homestead at the heart of 32,100 acres that once belonged to Angel Castro, the Cuban leader's father. "There is no cult of personality around any living revolutionary in the form of statues, official photographs or the names of streets or institutions," Castro said in his May Day speech this year. "The leaders of this country are human beings, not gods." (AP, 24/7/03)

July 24: It is reported that over 400, 000 persons have visited the Beaux Arts Museum, in Havana. The building underwent remodelling in 1996 to create the technical and environmental control infrastructure required for the utmost preservation of its valuable assets. (Radio Habana Cuba, 22/7/03)

July 26: According to Larry Klayman, from Judicial Watch, imprisoned Cuban dissident Marta

Beatriz Roque's health is in critical condition. (Europa Press, 27/7/03)

July 26: Fidel Castro delivered the keynote address during a rally in Santiago de Cuba marking the 50th anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks. [See also Foreign Affairs.] (Radio Habana Cuba, 26/7/03)

July 29: "Suite Habana" a documentary by Cuban filmmaker Fernando Pérez has packed Havana's Charles Chaplin theater for five weeks, drawing tears and standing ovations from audiences stunned by the frank portrayal of their day-to-day lives. The adults don't smile or utter a single word throughout the 80-minute film. The melancholy documentary directed by Perez -- a rapid sequence of images, sounds and music -- is the talk of the town this summer in Havana. The characters eat black beans and rice in silence, bathe with buckets and cycle miles to work against a backdrop of the crumbling beauty of their city. A 79-year-old woman sells peanuts to make ends meet. A hospital employee becomes a transvestite cabaret dancer by night, a doctor doubles as a clown after work and a railway repairman plays the sax in an Adventist chapel. "Suite Habana" documents a day in the life of a dozen Cubans who struggle with the harsher side of life in revolutionary Cuba. (Reuters, 29/7/03)

July 30: Carlos Lage, Secretary of the Executive Committee of Cuba's Council of Ministers, presided over the opening ceremonies of 220 state-run produce markets, built, repaired or remodelled in recent months. (Granma, 30/7/03)

Economy

July 1: Kee Biogenetics, a division of Kee Pharma, has joined with the Cuban company, Heber Biotech to strengthen its oncology portfolio and to introduce a range of biotech products in India. Initially, the company plans to focus on cardiology, immunology and oncology segments with the introduction of melagenina (remedy for leucoderma patients), recombinant streptokinase (cardiac drug), recombinant interferon, gamma and alpha interferon (for cancer) and epidermal growth factor, Dr Alok Dev, head of Kee Biogenetics, told the press. (The Economic Times, 2/7/03)

July 2: Mexico is seeking an arrangement with Fidel Castro to obtain payment of the Cuban debt of \$400 million, outstanding since the early 1990s, according to sources with the Mexican Foreign Office. Undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Miguel Hakim, said that efforts are under way to coordinate a meeting between Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez and Castro during the 24th Summit of CARICOM Heads of State in Jamaica. [See also, Foreign Affairs.] (El Nuevo Herald, 3/7/03)

July 3: Multinational beer company Interbrew SA is sending the head of operations in the United Kingdom and Ireland, Stewart Gilliland, to be the new president of Labatt Breweries of Canada as part of a broader reorganization. In his new role, Gilliland will be a member of Interbrew's newly constituted executive board of management and be responsible for managing the company's operations in Canada and Cuba. (The Toronto Star, 3/7/03)

July 3: A credit agreement of 10 million dollars for a renovative agricultural irrigation project has been signed between Cuba and the International Development Fund, attached to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The agreement was signed by Marta Lomas, Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, and Y. Seyyid Abdulai, Director of the OPEC Fund. This is the second loan that the fund has approved for Cuba after helping to finance a water supply and purifying project. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/03)

July 4: The Namibian government says it is committed to the early establishment of a pharmaceutical plant to be set up in co-operation with the Cuban government. Cuban Foreign Investment and Economic Co-operation Minister, Marta Lomas Morales said the joint venture represented an investment of N\$130 million over the next three years. Lomas was meeting with

Namibian business representatives to encourage trade and investment between the two countries. (Hoover, 4/7/03)

July 4: South Africa and Cuba signed a cooperation agreement in Pretoria for the mining and energy sectors, the Department of Minerals and Energy said. Minerals and Energy deputy minister Susan Shabangu and Cuba's minister of economic cooperation and investment, Martha Lomas, signed the deal to boost collaboration between their countries in electricity, hydrocarbons, mining and human resources development. The agreement envisages cooperation through an exchange of information in various fields, the department said in a statement. These included information on mining technologies and government programmes, as well as policies and strategies on energy. Lomas' visit was part of a five-nation southern African working visit. (Hoover, 4/7/03)

July 7: A score of firms make up the first-ever Japanese trade mission to Havana, currently in progress. (Radio Reloj, 7/7/03)

July 7: Cuba said that the recently harvested sugar crop was the smallest in decades and said a high-level commission was at work to insure that organizational and other problems were eliminated. "The coming harvest could be better than that recently concluded, one of the worst since the 1930s," the state-run information agency, AIN, said. The Sugar Ministry has provided no final tonnage since the harvest closed June 20. (Reuters, 7/7/03)

July 9: Cuba will assist Venezuela in rebuilding its sugar industry by donating old sugar-mills and technical know-how, said Venezuelan Ambassador to Havana, Julio Montes. (Reuters, 9/7/03)

July 11: The Mallorcan hotel chain Blau Hotels has signed contracts to manage two Cuban resorts. One of them is run by state-owned firm Cubanacan and is presently undergoing repairs, while the other is still under construction by Gaviota, a Cuban firm involved in resort development and management. (Hostelmarket, 15/7/03)

July 11: Air Canada has been cleared to fly scheduled service to Cuba, adding to its already existing chartered flights. A release from Canadian Transport Minister David Collenette said the airline will fly from Calgary, Halifax, London, Moncton, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto to destinations in Cuba including Havana, Varadero, Holguín and one other city not yet chosen. But an Air Canada spokeswoman said a final decision hasn't been made on destinations. Renee Smith-Valade said the airline already offers charter vacations to Cuba, but this new designation will allow the company to introduce scheduled service. (The Globe and Mail, 11/7/03)

July 15: Technology starved Indian biotech and pharma companies are eyeing Cuban scientific institutes for licensing technology transfers of biotech products. Currently, Cuban institutes have plenty to offer to Indian companies in the field of generic engineered protein erythropoietin (EPO), including its novel biotech products; hepatitis B and meningitis B vaccines, a skin growth factor, interferons, thrombosis and heart attack medicines as well as AIDS treatments. Also, Cuba has set ambitious plans to increase its drug profits globally by expanding its overseas markets through the development of novel bio-pharmaceuticals and by sale of other drugs. (The Economics Times, 15/7/03)

July 16: Cuba's tourism industry targets two million foreign tourists in 2003, the Minister of Tourism Ibrahim Ferradaz told a press conference. Around one million tourists visited Cuba in the first half of 2003, it was reported on June 29, 2003. The number of one million foreign tourists was achieved at the end of July 2002 and at the end of June in 2001. Most of the five-star and four-star hotels in the country are operated by French hotel chain operator Accor and Spanish hotel chain Sol Melia. (Spanish News Digest, 17/7/03)

July 17: Ernesto Senti, Cuban First Vice Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, informed that 403 international economic associations work in Cuba. These

transactions include joint companies, administration contracts for hotels and joint productions held in 32 economic activities such as Tourism, Agriculture, Basic Industry and Construction. The most efficient methods are in force in the Steel Industry where 60 contracts are being used to acquire technical assistance, supplies, machineries and technology transference. (AIN, 17/7/03)

July 21: The Cuban Central Bank said that state companies must exchange their dollars for local scrip to do business among themselves and purchase foreign exchange for their imports. The government pegs the locally printed currency, called a convertible peso, as equivalent to the dollar, though it has no value outside the country. Cuba's 5,000 state companies must turn in to the Central Bank all dollars they earn in exchange for convertible pesos. The 400 companies authorized to export and import must do the same with export earnings and exchange convertible pesos for hard currency to import, the Central Bank said, in a statement carried by the local media. (Reuters, 21/7/03)

July 22: The Norwegian engineering and construction services provider Aker Kvaerner said that its Engineering & Construction division had won a contract to modify a nickel plant in Cuba. The contract, awarded by Empresa Ernesto Che Guevara, included the design and procurement management of a sulphide concentrate drying system and a sulphur dioxide and soot removal gas cleaning system, Aker Kvaerner said. (Nordic Business Report, 23/7/03)

July 23: China and Cuba signed a memorandum of understanding in Beijing, allowing Chinese travel groups to visit the Caribbean country. Cuba is the first nation in the Western Hemisphere to gain Approved Destination Status from the Chinese government. (Xinhua, 23/7/03)

July 24: Carlos Lage, Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Ministers Council attended the signing of three economic collaboration agreements between Cuban ministries and the Kuwaitian Foundation for Economic Development. The signatures in the three documents will allow the island to grant a US\$ 10 million 70,000 credit, to carry out the modernization and rehabilitation of the aqueduct of Santiago de Cuba, located in the western part of Cuba. (AIN, Radio Rebelde, 24/7/03)

July 24: The US Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs has released a new fact sheet on Cuba's external debt. According to the report, "Dunn and Bradstreet rate Cuba as one of the riskiest economies in the world: only Angola, Congo, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Iraq are worse". (US Department of State, 24/7/03)

July 27: "Self-employment is not an ideal option for the Cuban economy," said Juan Triana, head of the Cuban Economy Research Centre of the University of Havana. "Of all forms of economic production, it is the least compatible with socialism, as it is the one that most emphasizes individualism." Triana added that the economic reforms implemented ten years ago, including among others the legalization of US currency circulation and of self-employment to provide limited services, helped in the preservation of socialism and would have to be "reinstated" to achieve the desired economic growth that would consolidate the system. However, he excluded private enterprise and maintained that cooperatives are a more suitable choice for Cuban socialism. (CubaNet, 30/7/03)

July 28: Cuba plans to open its market for the import of fresh and processed beef from Argentina, the Cuban Institute of Animal Health (IMV) informed Argentine food and animal health inspection service Senasa. Cuba will also import pork meat and milk products from Argentina. (EFE, 28/7/03)

July 28: During a visit to Brazil, Cuba's Vice-President Carlos Lage said that Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva expressed strong interest in accepting the Cuban government's earlier invitation to explore for oil in the Cuban sector of the Gulf of Mexico. Tilden Santiago, Brazil's Cuban ambassador, confirmed that Brazil was interested in exploring for oil in the gulf, but that the technical evaluation had to be completed by Brazilian state-owned oil company Petroleo

Brasileiro SA (Petrobras). "Petrobras's world-class technological expertise to find oil in ultradeep waters qualifies us to research for oil in the (Gulf of Mexico)," said Petrobras President José Eduardo Dutra. (Oil & Gas Journal, 28/7/03)

July 30: The employees of the Petroleum Drilling and Extraction Enterprise of Central Cuba, located in the province of Matanzas, have already extracted one million tons of crude oil this year, setting a new record for themselves. (Radio Progreso, 30/7/03)

July 30: The US Department of State has issued a report on Cuba's economy emphasizing the crisis that the island has faced since the fall of the Soviet Union. [For more on this, click here.] (Radio Martí, 31/7/03)

July 31: Enrique Oltuski, Cuban Vice Minister for Fishing Industry stated that Japan donated Cuba equipment to encourage sea fishes cultivation. This was part of a signed agreement to boost the development of the Japan-Chile-Cuba Sea Fishes Cultivation Triangular Collaboration Project. Production will be directed to the national market and tourism. In this collaboration with Cuba, Chile gives the technical assistance and Japan the resources. (AIN, 31/7/03)

Exile Community

July 1: Changes to Belgium's war crime laws to prevent complaints against President Bush and other US officials shouldn't derail a case against Fidel Castro, an American group that filed charges against the Cuban leader said. Judicial Watch, a Washington-based conservative legal group said the changes would not stop its case filed on behalf of exiled Cubans against Castro. (AP, 1/7/03)

July 1: The president of the Cuban Liberal Union (ULC), Carlos Alberto Montaner, urged the European Union, the U.S., Canada and the Latin American countries to "present a united front" that sends Castro's regime a clear message that "there will be no reconciliation" until democracy is restored on the island. Montaner deemed as necessary "the moral and diplomatic harassment" of the Cuban leadership by the international community. (Encuentro en la Red, 2/7/03)

July 4: In a fervent declaration of unity, representatives of the Cuban dissidence in Miami rejected allegations of divisions within the domestic opposition in Cuba. The representatives abroad of All United called a press conference, with the participation of Vladimiro Roca, via telephone from Havana. (El Nuevo Herald, 7/7/03)

July 7: The exiled daughter of Fidel Castro called on the European Union to take a harder line against her father, urging leaders to form a common policy with the United States in responding to Cuba's recent crackdown on dissidents. "The EU's policy toward Cuba is hardly acceptable because they're dealing with a regime that doesn't listen," Alina Fernandez, the exiled daughter of the Cuban leader, told a news conference. "We need a point of convergence between the US and Europe to create a political consensus in dealing with the Cuban regime," she said. Fernandez was in Rome as part of a European tour organized by Judicial Watch, a Washington-based conservative legal group that has filed a case on behalf of exiled Cubans against Castro. The complaint accuses the leader of false imprisonment, torture and persecution. (AP, 7/7/03)

July 8: Fidel Castro's daughter, Alina Fernández, was received in Paris by 18 lawmakers. Fernández is on a European tour looking for a condemnation to his father's regime by European governments. (Radio Martí, 8/7/03)

July 8: Cuban expatriates gathered outside the Cuban embassy in Caracas to demand the release of 30 journalists imprisoned on the island. The protesters wore shirts bearing the prisoners' faces and slogans expressing condemnation of the Cuban government. (El Tiempo, 9/7/03)

July 9: Cuban-Americans in Miami-Dade County, who political observers have long thought to be rigid in their attitudes toward Cuba, are softening their hard-line stances, according to a poll released. The poll, commissioned by the Southwest Voter Research and Education Project and its research arm, the William C. Velásquez Institute, surveyed 600 Cuban-Americans in Miami-Dade between June 24 and July 1. Among its findings: 62 percent of those polled thought it was more important to spend time and money improving the quality of life in South Florida, compared with 19 percent who said it was more important to work to change the government of Cuba. 65 percent want politicians in Miami to focus more on issues within the local community, as opposed to 12 percent who said politicians need to focus more on international issues. While 49 percent of those polled said the US should use force to overthrow Fidel Castro, 68 percent said the residents of Cuba should decide how and when the political system in Cuba should change. 49 percent said they would vote for a candidate who would take a hard-line approach and continue the US embargo against Cuba. But while 62 percent of respondents 65 or older would prefer the hard-line candidate, only 34 percent of Cubans under age 45 said they preferred such a candidate. (Sun Sentinel, 10/7/03)

July 9: The Miami-based organization Unidad Cubana (Cuban Unity) has launched an on-line campaign on behalf of two political prisoners in Cuba. The organization is encouraging web users to write to world leaders, asking them to intercede in Martha Beatriz Roque and Oscar Elías Biscet's behalf on account of their failing health. (El Mundo, 10/7/03)

July 10: The US Coast Guard has denied a request by a Cuban-American group to leave a security zone around Florida and enter Cuban territorial waters, saying it could lead to violence and may "further inflame relations" with the island's communist government. Democracy Movement leader Ramon Saúl Sánchez had asked for permission to make the trip to Cuba on July 13 on the 39-foot M/V Democracia with the intent to take books for independent libraries to Havana. "They refused to allow us to enter Cuban waters to carry out a cultural exchange of books, which is a universal right," Sanchez, said. (Knight Ridder, EFE, 10/7/03)

July 12: Cuban-born US actor Andy García, filming in Romania, said he was struck by the parallels between the regimes of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and Cuban leader Fidel Castro. "Cuba is under the same kind of totalitarian dictatorship that Romania was," García told the press. García said he had talked with Romanians who witnessed the revolution while he was on the set at the Buftea studios. "As a Cuban, I am looking forward to that day when (Cuba) comes out of the dictatorship," he said. (AP, 12/7/03)

July 13: A small flotilla organized by the anti-Castro Movimiento Democracia (Movement for Democracy), including three of the group's light aircraft, managed to gather on international waters off the coast of Havana, without incident, to hold a remembrance ceremony for the "victims" of Castro's regime. (AFP, 13/7/03)

July 15: As the NAACP spell out its national convention in Miami Beach, a group of Cuban Americans wants the civil rights organization to know about -- and acknowledge -- what they say is the suffering of black residents in Cuba. Activists gathered at the west Miami headquarters of Municipalities of Cuba in Exile to highlight what they portrayed as the persecution of black people under the regime of Fidel Castro. Several Cuban exiles described their imprisonment on the island and said black people continue to languish in Cuban prisons because of their political views. (The Miami Herald, 15/7/03)

July 16: Celia Cruz, the Cuban singer who began performing in 1949 with La Sonora Matancera in Cuba and later became an internationally known salsa star and symbol of Cuban culture, died at her home in New Jersey. Her husband Pedro Knight, and family and friends were at her side. Celia died of complications resulting from surgery in December to remove a brain tumor. She was the latest in a series of legendary Latin performers to succumb in recent years, following master percussionist Tito Puente, bandleader and composer Chico O'Farrill and percussionist Ramón

"Mongo" Santamaría. With them and others, she helped define Latin music for decades and influenced countless performers of various genres from around the world. Celia, who left Cuba in 1961, was also known for her staunch opposition to Fidel Castro's government. In Miami, the singer's death was met with shock and dismay. Though she abhorred the island's communist government, she was proud of Cuba's longstanding ability to produce world-class musicians. [For more on this, see Domestic Affairs] (Sun Sentinel, 17/7/03)

July 19: Tens of thousands of mourners paid their last respects in Miami to Celia Cruz, the Cuban-born "Queen of Salsa." Her body was flown to Miami and laid out for viewing at the city's "Freedom Tower." The ornate bayside building, seen as Miami's Ellis Island, was where thousands of Cubans were processed by immigration authorities in the first waves of exiles who came to the United States after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. Tens of thousands of people, mostly Cuban American but many from other Latin American nations, braved a sweltering sun and lines of several hours to bid farewell to an artist who left Cuba as a star in 1960 and over decades in exile became a grande dame of Latin music. (Reuters, 19/7/03)

July 21: The United States repatriated 12 Cubans who allegedly tried to commandeer a boat from Cuba to Florida. But the decision was not well received in South Florida, where Cuban-Americans frown upon negotiations with Castro's Cuba and typically support granting Cuban immigrants asylum in the United States. "This action makes the US complicit in the fate of the returned refugees," Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republican-Miami, said in a statement. "This act of infamy in coordination with the Cuban tyranny is a condemnable monstrosity." Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Mario Diaz-Balart, the other two Cuban-American Republicans from Miami, also condemned the return. Joe Garcia, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, blamed the return on the Bush administration and on Ros-Lehtinen and the Diaz-Balarts, whom he faulted for not having more influence with the White House. "This is a betrayal by this administration," Garcia said. "And what it demonstrates is the impotence of our Republican congressmen within this Republican administration. When you sell yourself cheap, you get treated cheaply." [For more on this, see US-Cuba Relations] (Sun Sentinel, 22/7/03)

July 22: For some Cuban exiles, performers from the island are representatives of Cuba's communist government. That's why a coalition of Cuban exile groups is planning to protest against them during the Latin Grammys Awards. "If [Fidel] Castro's people are coming to Miami, there are going to be protests," Cuban Coalition spokesman Emilio Izquierdo said. But Izquierdo says the groups will only demonstrate if the Cubans actually show up -- which music industry insiders say is not likely given the time it could take for Cuban performers to obtain visas. The nominees will include nine Cuban artists or groups, among them acclaimed jazz pianist Jesus "Chucho" Valdes, the storied rumba group Los Muñequitos de Matanzas and the contemporary dance band Los Van Van -- whose Miami concert in 1999 was marred by egg- and can-throwing detractors who heckled concertgoers. (Sun Sentinel, 23/7/03)

July 22: Nicolás Guillén Ladrián, widely regarded by critics as the most original Cuban documentarian of all time, passed away in Miami. He was 65. (Encuentro en la Red, 23/7/03)

July 24: With nine Cuban artists receiving nominations for Latin Grammy awards, two of the local Cuban exiles who worked to bring the awards show to Miami said they would boycott it if any of the Cubans are invited onstage to do anything other than accept an award. "If, by any chance, they choose any Cuban artist to perform or to present an award, I will be out of there as quick as I came in," Willy Chirino said in a telephone interview with the press. "I'll probably go join the people demonstrating outside." Emilio Estefan, who was instrumental in bringing the Grammys to Miami for the inaugural 2001 show -- and in luring it back this year after it moved to California because of concerns over protesters -- said he didn't think Cuban artists would be named to perform or to present awards. (The Miami Herald, 23/7/03)

July 24: Visiting Havana from Miami, a former revolutionary commander and a leader of the

"moderate" Cuban exile community suggested that authorities of the Castro regime "in its final stage" must begin an opening toward civil liberties or "they could lose it all." The leader of the opposition group Cambio Cubano, Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, made his remarks in an interview with the press. "Intelligence should prevail" among high-level officials in Fidel Castro's government, he said. "They should realize that the opposition must be able to operate legally and that freedoms must be implemented, in a non-destabilizing and gradual manner. "If the regime (of Fidel Castro) is in its final stage, they should realize that they could lose it all and, before that happens, the right thing is for intelligence to prevail so that in the end we can say that there are no winners or losers," he said. (EFE, 24/7/03)

July 24: Alex Acosta, a Cuban-American lawyer who grew up in Miami, faced little opposition to becoming the assistant attorney general for civil rights as he was questioned by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Acosta, 34, pledged strong enforcement of civil rights law during his confirmation hearing. Republican senators praised his nomination and Democrats used the hearing to criticize the Justice Department's civil rights division under Ralph Boyd. (The Miami Herald, 24/7/03)

July 26: An influential Cuban-American exile organization says President Bush has failed to live up to political promises and could be without their support in the 2004 election. Leaders of the Cuban American National Foundation said they are particularly incensed the president sent back a dozen Cubans suspected of hijacking a boat to reach Florida's shores. The US agreed to return the suspected hijackers after Castro's government pledged to spare their lives and sentence them to no more than 10 years in prison. "This will cost them," Jorge Mas Santos said in a speech to the Cuban American National Foundation's board of directors. "They can't count on the support of our community if they don't fulfill their promises," said Mas Santos, the foundation's chairman. "This administration until now has done absolutely nothing to fulfill the promises they made to this community." (AP, 27/7/03)

July 27: During the 38th San Sebastian Jazz Festival, Cuban pianist Bebo Valdés was presented with the Donostiako Jazzaldia Award, as recognition for his contribution to the musical genre. (EFE, 27/7/03)

July 28: Cuban expatriate Isabel Roque appealed to the US, the European Union (EU) and The Vatican to exert pressure on Fidel Castro to obtain the release of her sister, dissident Martha Beatriz Roque, who "could die in her cell any minute" owing to her serious health condition. (Europa Press, 28/7/03)

July 28: The general secretary of the Fundación Hispano-Cubana (Cuban-Spanish Foundation) Javier Martínez Corbalán, described as "void of content" and "contradictory" Fidel Castro's speech in which he rejected the humanitarian aid of the European Union (EU), "out of an elemental sense of dignity." (Europa Press, 28/7/03)

July 30: Hoping to avert their repatriation if they should be intercepted at sea, an exile group in Miami has given US authorities the names of a score of Cuban dissidents who left the island in a small boat. Ninoska Perez Castellon, president of the Miami-based Council for the Freedom of Cuba, told the press that most of the dissidents belong to the "Feb. 24th Movement," whose president, Leonardo Miguel Bruzon, is currently imprisoned in the island. (EFE, 30/7/03)

Foreign Affairs

July 1: The fifteen EU foreign affairs ministers have begun the revision of their common position on Cuba. They have already decided to participate in a UN meeting on desertification that will be held in Havana. (Radio Martí, 2/7/03)

July 1: The Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Palacio, declared that Fidel Castro's regime

is "depleted" and would not outlast its founder because of its caudillo-centred nature. Palacio asserted that, therefore, "the Cuban (democratic) transition has already started," "the Cuban Suárez is already on the island" and that Cuba "in the near future" will be integrated to the Western democratic world. (El País, 2/7/03)

July 1: The Nicaraguan Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated its strongest condemnation of the upholding by the Supreme Court of Cuba of most of the prison sentences arbitrarily meted out to 75 Cuban dissidents last April. (Radio Martí, 4/7/03)

July 1: Costa Rican President Abel Pacheco denounced that "foreign left-wing leaders (from Cuba and Brazil) have infiltrated" the country and that several of them had taken part in "destabilizing attempts" recently. Meanwhile, the Minister for Public Security, Rogelio Ramos, identified the alleged leftist leaders as Carmen Godínez Cedeño, from Cuba, and Braulio Céspedes Caña, from Brazil, who participated in seminars and a road-blocking demonstration during recent teachers' strike in Costa Rica. (El Nuevo Herald, 2/7/03)

July 1: A Cuban-inspired national literacy campaign was launched in Venezuela. More than 70 Cuban instructors are in Venezuela training for what the Hugo Chávez's government says will be 100,000 volunteer "facilitators" who will teach 1.5 million people to read and write. (The Miami Herald, 2/7/03)

July 2: Reporters Without Borders, a French human rights organization, has begun a campaign to publicize Cuban human rights abuses to Europeans headed to the Caribbean island. The campaign includes public service announcements shown in European movie theaters, garish Socialist-style posters on the Champs Elysees and postcards. The postcards and posters are bright red and black, and combine images from two left-wing college dorm favorites, one of Cuban Revolutionary hero Ernesto "Che" Guevara and another from Paris' May 1968 riots depicting French police as Nazis. The caption says, "Welcome to the World's Largest Prison For Journalists." (The Washington Times, 10/7/03)

July 3: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque have met with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The high-ranking Cuban delegation arrived in Brasilia and held talks with Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorin and other government officials. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/03)

July 3: The 8th Cuba-Panama Inter-Parliamentary Meeting is underway in the Cuban capital. Eight officials from the main Panamanian political parties are delegates to the meeting, led by Panamanian Legislative Assembly President Carlos Alvarado. Delegates are analyzing bilateral programs in the fields of health, education and sports exchange. Other topics on the agenda include an international parliamentary fund and the signing of a joint declaration. (Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/03)

July 3: Diana Díaz López, daughter and heir of (deceased Cuban photojournalist) Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez, "Korda," has requested the Paris High Court to "block the publication, distribution and marketing" of the Ernesto "Che" Guevara photograph taken by her father, in the Reporters Without Borders campaign to protest the repression of journalists in Cuba. (ABC, 4/7/03)

July 3: The 23rd Caribbean Festival of Fire is underway in Santiago de Cuba. During the Festival of Fire, there will be performances of musical and dance groups from several Caribbean countries at a number of locations throughout Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. One of the main attractions will be the performance of the Bahamas National Youth Chorus. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/7/03)

July 4: Fidel Castro has sent a message regretting the fact that he was unable to confer with "my brothers of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) at their annual summit now taking place in Jamaica". "I was unable to meet with my brothers of the Caribbean Community on this occasion.

And believe me, I deeply regret it," states the letter read by Cuban Minister of Government Ricardo Cabrisas at the first session of the summit. After congratulating the regional group for its 30 years of achievements, the Cuban revolution leader asserted that "no other group of countries in the Western Hemisphere has achieved the Caricom results in political, economic and social agreements," an official statement published in Havana said. (Caribbean Media Corp., 4/7/03)

July 4: Iran and Cuba signed a memorandum of understanding on expansion of bilateral athletic cooperation. Iranian ambassador to Havana, Ahmad Edrisian, and head of Cuban Sports Organization, Humberto Rodriguez Gonzalez, reached the agreement. (IRNA, 4/7/03)

July 5: Mexican lawmakers attending a meeting with Cuban legislators are divided over whether the island nation's crackdown on dissidents should be on the agenda. The chairman of the lower house's Foreign Relations Committee, Gustavo Carbajal, told the press that the issue would not be officially raised during the interparliamentary meeting. "It's a domestic issue, they could counter that they also want to know what happened in Chiapas or with (the massacre of) Aguas Blancas," he said, alluding to episodes of political violence in Mexico. But members of the ruling National Action Party (PAN) say the subject of the dissidents is on the agenda and that it will be discussed at the gathering, to be held in Morelia, in the central state of Michoacan. PAN lawmaker Tarcisio Navarrete told the press a session on politics and democracy was on the schedule and that it included a human rights segment, making the issue of Cuba's crackdown "unavoidable." (EFE, 5/7/03)

July 5: Paraguay's President-elect Nicanor Duarte Frutos spoke on the telephone yesterday with Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Duarte Frutos confirmed that their conversation lasted approximately 30 minutes during which they talked about globalization, regional blocs and the possibility of establishing broader bilateral relations between Paraguay and Cuba. The Paraguayan president-elect said Fidel is interested in visiting Asuncion to attend in the presidential inauguration that will be held on 15 August. Nicanor added that Castro has not yet confirmed his attendance, but he did ask about certain details concerning the organization of the ceremony, as well as matters relating to Paraguayan society. (ABC, 5/7/03)

July 6: Angola and Cuba signed a statement of intent defining the areas of future cooperation between interior ministries of both countries. According to Angolan Interior Minister Osvaldo Serra Van Dunem, training trainers is one of the areas that will receive special attention. This government official was talking at the end of his working three-day visit to this Latin American nation. "We would like to take advantage of Cuba's scientific potential and know-how to train our trainers," he pointed out. (Angop, 4/7/03)

July 6: Li Changchun, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, arrived in Havana for an official good-will visit at the invitation of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP). Li was greeted at the airport by Jose Ramon Balaguer, member of the Political Bureau, and head of the International Department of the CCP Central Committee. Cuba is the first leg of Li's current tour, which will also take him to Argentina and New Zealand. (The People's Daily, 7/7/03)

July 7: Fidel Castro and Li Changchun, member of the standing committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, highlighted the excellent relations between both nations during official talks at the Palace of the Revolution. The Chinese delegation was previously received by Carlos Lage, vice president of the Council of State, who affirmed that links between the two nations are becoming steadily stronger and broader based, covering spheres of great importance to the island. (Granma International, 7/7/03)

July 7: The Italian association against the death penalty "Let No One Hurt Cain" expressed severe criticism of Cuba on account of the executions of three individuals who hijacked a ferryboat last April. (AFP, 7/7/03)

July 8: In a show-down with Venezuelan medics who refuse to take on public health services in impoverished districts of his country, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Frias has announced that more almost 1,000 medics will be flown in beginning this week by month's end, 815 Cuban doctors are scheduled to arrive and Chavez Frias says more will follow before the end of August. (Vheadline, 8/7/03)

July 8: Cuba and Canada agreed to share seized profits from the illegal drug trade. This is the first such deal Havana has signed, officials said. "The agreement shows the will of both countries to increase cooperation in fighting against drug trafficking," said Rafael Dausa, the Cuban foreign ministry official in charge of North American affairs. (Radio Reloj, 9/7/03)

July 8: Cuban ballet dancer Alicia Alonso, considered by many to be one of the great dancers of all time, was awarded the Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor medallion, France's highest honor, the state-run daily Granma reported. (EFE, 8/7/03)

July 8: Syrian Health Minister, Dr. Mohammad Iyad Al-Shatti and Cuba's Ambassador to Damascus, Claudio Ramos signed in Damascus the Executive program of the cooperation agreement between Syria and Cuba in field of health. Both sides acknowledged the deep-rooted relations between Syria and Cuba in all fields. (WorldNews.Com, 8/7/03)

July 8: By a majority vote, the Chilean Parliament showed its support for Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas' nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2003. (Radio Martí, 8/7/03)

July 9: Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage had words of praise for his recent official visit to Brazil. In statements to the press Carlos Lage said that the two-day visit ended with a productive, three-hour meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Speaking with reporters, the Cuban vice president said that "Brazil is a country with great natural resources, great potential, and areas of poverty inherited over years and decades; the government has a great challenge to face such inequalities." Lage said that during the Cuban delegation's meeting with President Lula da Silva, they analyzed not only bilateral relations, but the current international situation and the situation of Latin America. Carlos Lage noted that relations between Havana and Brasilia are excellent and will only get better. And he said that he and other members of the Cuban delegation that recently visited Brazil were extremely satisfied with their stay. (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/7/03)

July 9: Spanish President José María Aznar was asked if Fidel Castro, or any other representative of his government, would attend the next Ibero-American Summit, scheduled for next fall in Bolivia, and whether the event's policies and procedures would be modified to prevent their participation. "We expect rules to be observed, and the summit rules are what they are, and I will not be requesting that they be changed," said Aznar. (EFE, 9/7/03)

July 10: During the 6th Mexico-Cuba Inter-Parliamentary Meeting, the delegation of the Mexican ruling party, PAN, sparked a heated debate with the delegates from the island, when it moved for the approval of a condemnatory resolution on the "execution of three Cuban ferryboat hijackers." At the end of the first day's sessions, a declaration of support was passed promoting "bilateral relations respectful of each country's sovereignty." (La Jornada, 10/7/03)

July 10: Dominican migration officers detained five Cubans trying to reach Miami with false documents. (AFP, 10/7/03)

July 10: "The Cuban regime had the right to defend itself against a destabilizing attempt encouraged by the US," said Tilden Santiago, Brazilian Ambassador to Havana, in reference to the execution of three individuals who last April hijacked a ferryboat in an effort to reach US shores. (El Tiempo, 10/7/03)

July 10: Cuba and Argentina are moving forward in new efforts to expand collaboration and

interchange between their universities, students and professors, according to Cuba's Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Eduardo Cruz. In a statement to reporters in Buenos Aires, Cruz highlighted Cuba's desire to increase this relationship, noting that the same intention was reaffirmed recently in Havana by the Argentinean Minister of Education, Daniel Filmus. (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/7/03)

July 10: The Paris-based association Reporters Without Borders (RSF) was banned from using a world-famous image of the revolutionary leader Che Guevara in a campaign against human rights abuses in Cuba. The daughter of late photographer Alberto Diaz-Gutierrez - better known as Korda - applied to the courts after his iconic 1960 head-shot Che Guevara, bearded and sporting a beret, was doctored to show him wielding a club and shield. (The Dallas Morning News, 10/7/03)

July 9: In Spain, Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti warned on Cuba's sovereign right to defend itself from terrorist aggressions. The author of "Gracias por el fuego" regreted the critics made to the Cuban Government after the execution of three kidnappers who tried to go to the US. (AIN, 9/7/03)

July 10: More than 300 Mexican lawmakers, mostly deputies and senators, have expressed solidarity with five Cubans jailed in the United States under espionage charges, and claimed a new trial to be held. A document was handed over to Jorge Bolaños, Cuban ambassador in Mexico, and to Eusebio Leal, Cuban deputy. The Mexican lawmakers expressed their concern for the five Cubans' arbitrary arrest. (AIN, 10/7/03)

July 11: Cuba has been chosen to preside over the Ibero-American Society for Scientific Research into Drug Dependence and Addiction, it was informed on the last day of the 1st National and Ibero-American Drug Addiction and Alcohol Abuse Congress. José Piñón Vega, Cubanacán Health and Tourism's director of international medical services, is to head the Society, which will include representatives from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Brazil. (Granma International, 11/7/03)

July 12: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has confirmed that he will visit Cuba at the end of September, responding to an official invitation from his Cuban counterpart, Fidel Castro. According to Brasilia's ambassador to Havana, Tilden Santiago, the Brazilian president will visit Cuba for two days. Lula da Silva and other members of his accompanying delegation will also take advantage of the opportunity to sign bilateral agreements. (Radio Habana Cuba, 12/7/03)

July 13: The head of the Cuban legislature's international relations committee, Ramón Pez Ferro, expressed hope that bilateral ties with Mexico would continue to improve. Pez Ferro and other Cuban lawmakers returned to Cuba after attending a Mexico-Cuba interparliamentary meeting, which they characterized as "positive." Legislators signed agreements in the fields of education, science and technology, trade, the environment and the economy at the gathering, which was held in the Mexican city of Morelia, in the central state of Michoacan, Pez Ferro said. (EFE, 14/7/03)

July 13: The US embargo on Cuba is solely a "political question" Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said at a conference attended by centre-left leaders from around the globe. "In the same manner that France won't stop agricultural subsidies for political reasons, the United States won't end its embargo on Cuba," said the Brazilian leader after castigating the European Union's heavily-subsidized farm policy. He said the embargo has continued because of "Cuban voters in Miami, in Florida. It is really a political question." (La Jornada, AFP, 13/7/03)

July 14: Costa Rica gave political asylum to a Cuban nuclear engineer after she defected and requested the protection of the San Jose government. The Foreign Relations Ministry announced that after a careful study of the legalities of the move, asylum had been granted for Yoandi Sánchez Díaz. Sanchez Diaz argued that as an official of the Cuban Science and Environment

Ministry she was being subject to measures by Havana to "restrict her fundamental rights and is subject to an ever stricter control and monitoring regimen." (EFE, 14/7/03)

July 14: France loaded its Embassy's National Day guest list with dissidents this year. Cuban officials stayed away en masse. The July 14 celebration is usually a notable date on Havana's social calendar, a place for officials -- sometimes even Fidel Castro -- to hobnob with diplomats and foreign businessmen and sip French wines. In a sign of continued tension between Cuba and the European Union, guests said they saw no Cuban officials at all during the embassy reception, though many were invited. A handful turned up at the front gate before the event to turn in their invitations and then walk away. Instead, an unprecedented number of dissidents turned up. If the situation was politicized, "it was due to the government, not to us," said Vladimiro Roca. "The majority of my colleagues and myself are going to attend this celebration not with an attitude of defiance toward the government but defending our essential right to accept any invitation we receive on civilized terms," said Elizardo Sanchez. (AP, 14/7/03)

July 14: The 214th anniversary of the Taking of the Bastille, National Day of France, was celebrated in Havana by the Cuban government with a function held at Víctor Hugo park. Poet Roberto Fernández Retamar, President of the Casa de las Américas, highlighted the influence of La Marseillaise on Cubans, which inspired Cuban National Anthem. Abel Prieto, Minister of Culture, attended the act. (AIN, 14/7/03)

July 14: The Cuban National Association of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) condemned the EU attempt to restrict cultural exchange between its member countries and Cuba. The denunciation took place during a gala concert at the Amadeo Roldán Theatre in Havana in remembrance of the 214th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto was in attendance. (Prensa Latina, 14/7/03)

July 15: The Ukrainian parliament passed a resolution of support to the Cuban program of health care to the children of that nation, victims of the Chernobyl aftermath. (AIN, 15/7/03)

July 15: The Venezuelan government began to distribute more than 13 million books donated by Cuba for students who just completed grade school. President Hugo Chavez and Education Minister Aristobulo Isturiz attended an event kicking off the distribution process at the multi-purpose Poliedro de Caracas. The so-called "family libraries" printed and donated by Cuba are sets of 25 books by renowned world authors. They are to be presented to approximately 550,000 Venezuelan children who successfully completed sixth grade this year. (EFE, 15/7/03)

July 16: Over 2000 Canadian young people have visited Cuba in solidarity brigades organized by the Canadian ARO Cooperation over the last decade. According to Colette Lavergne, president of ARO, most of the brigadistas from Canada are from 13 to 18 years of age. Lavergne told reporters that ARO works with the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), organizing brigades so that members of the group can work during their summer vacations or school breaks. While many of the brigadistas come from the Canadian province of Quebec, she said that participants come from all over Canada. (Radio Habana Cuba, 16/7/03)

July 16: Cuba and Mexico have signed an agreement in neuroscience, with the aim of developing a new method to rehabilitate patients with advanced Parkinson's disease. (Radio Habana Cuba, 16/7/03)

July 16: The Uruguayan Parliament passed a resolution of support for the nomination of Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas for the Nobel Peace Prize, according to the office of the legislative body's press secretary. The discussion of the proposal, submitted by the International Affairs Commission, sparked a stormy debate between left-wing members and representatives of the Nacional and Colorado parties. (AFP, 16/7/03)

July 16: A Canadian travel company facing a demand for \$10,000 US from a 75-year-old

American grandmother, fined by the US government for taking a cycling trip in Cuba, has found itself in the middle of a political drama playing out in Washington, D.C. "I'm not quite sure what action I should be taking," Lewie Gonsalves, owner of Toronto-based Worldwide Adventures, said. "To me this is idiotic." In January 2000, Joan Slote, of San Diego, a gold-medallist at the senior Olympics, booked a cycling trip to Cuba through Worldwide. (The Ottawa Citizen, 16/7/03)

July 17: The EU Council diplomatic representatives approved a document harshly condemning human rights violations in Cuba. The document that will be submitted to the Ministers, says that respect for human rights has deteriorated in Cuba since December and economic reforms remain conspicuous by their absence. But it says also that the EU intends to continue dialogue with Havana - because it is the most constructive way to achieve political, economic and civil rights reforms - and that it is willing to provide aid, where possible via non-governmental organisations, to promote democratisation and improve living standards for ordinary Cubans. (AFP, 17/7/03)

July 17: The Socialist International made harsh statements against Cuba, describing as "intolerable, the death sentences, the intimidation of journalists, the murders of civilians at the hands of the military." The secretary of Democrats of the Left (DS), Piero Fassino, voiced the condemnation of the IS and that of his own party, the most important one among the Italian left. (AFP, 17/7/03)

July 18: While France believes that Cuba is misguided with regards to human rights observance, it also considers that the Cuban issue should "not be addressed with embargoes" but with an open dialogue and cooperation, said in Mexico the French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin. The French government official said that the situation on the island has given Paris "cause for concern". (AFP, 18/7/03)

July 18: France announced that it has called off two institutional exchange programs with Cuba and that it will relocate the French-Cuban Comparative Law Institute, following the revision of its bilateral cooperation ties with the island on account of its poor human rights record. "We have suspended the customs and law enforcement components of our administrative and judicial collaboration, which started in 2001," explained a French Foreign Ministry spokesperson. Also, a project "that should have been under way with Cuban authorities concerning geographical data and disasters" has been "cancelled" and "the decision has been made to move the offices of the French-Cuban Comparative Law Institute, currently located at a Cuban government-owned building, to a private one." (El Nuevo Herald, 18/7/03)

July 18: Renowned Peruvian journalist Gustavo Gorriti traveled to Cuba on behalf of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and confirmed the dire situation for independent Cuban journalists and their families, who are suffering from harassment, humiliating prison conditions, and psychological pressures. During his stay in the capital, Havana, Gorriti visited the families of imprisoned journalists Oscar Espinosa Chepe, Ricardo González Alfonso, Raúl Rivero, and Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez to convey CPJ's concern. Gorriti concluded that the Cuban government may be trying to use the jailed journalists as bargaining chips with the United States to achieve an exchange for the five Cuban spies who were arrested and sentenced to stiff prison terms in the United States two years ago. This, noted Gorriti, "helps explain the efforts, the pains the Cuban regime went through in trying to depict the dissidents and journalists as 'mercenaries' and 'spies.'" (CPJ, 18/7/03)

July 19: The promotion of democracy in Cuba got most of the time of the prime minister of the Czech Republic during his travel to Miami. "The main reason why we have come is that we cannot simply remain indifferent to the facts, such as 75 people who are inappropriately sent to prison for just having expressed an opinion," Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla said. "We also wanted very much to meet the Cuban-American community. Transformation in Cuba is imminent. And we want that transformation to take place calmly and peacefully." (The Miami Herald, 19/7/03)

July 21: The foreign ministers of the European Union approved a document that denounces human rights violations in Cuba but at the same time calls for continued "constructive engagement" with the communist-ruled island. The document outlines detailed cases from this year that highlight the "serious" deterioration of basic human rights under the Fidel Castro regime. (EFE, 21/7/03)

July 21: Members of the Cuban internal opposition hailed a statement from the European Union blasting the island's communist regime for human rights abuses as an important element of support for Cuba's people. Elizardo Sánchez, head of an outlawed commission on human rights, said the EU statement "is fully justified by the abysmal state of civil, political and economic rights in Cuba." Vladimiro Roca, representing the opposition coalition Todos Unidos (All United), was also pleased with what he described as a "very measured" declaration from the European Union. (EFE, 21/7/03)

July 22: Chilean author Carlos Franz is turning down a journalism award from Cuba to protest the crackdown on dissidents by the government of President Fidel Castro. "I decided that I could not accept a journalism award purported to support freedom of expression because among 78 dissidents imprisoned in Cuba there are a number of authors and some 20 newsmen," Franz told the Chilean daily La Segunda in an interview from his London residence. He said "it was a hard decision" to turn down the Jose Marti Journalism Prize awarded by Cuba's government news agency, Prensa Latina. (ABC, The State, 23/7/03)

July 23: Panamanian entrepreneur Alejandro Abood, imprisoned in Cuba since October 2001 on bribery and corruption charges, will be released and deported back to his country, confirmed Panamanian Ambassador, Abraham Bárcenas. (AFP, 23/7/03)

July 24: The Brazilian government does not support the 40-year-old US embargo against Cuba and that is why it shows "solidarity" with the island; however, it does not advocate the death penalty or summary trials either, said the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim. "The end of the US embargo against Cuba would do much to advance the issue of democratization" of the island, he added. (Europa Press, 25/7/03)

July 24: The United Nations barred media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) from taking part in UN meetings for one year in response to a protest RSF staged against Libya at a human rights gathering in March. RSF, backed by France in the ECOSOC debate on the suspension, complained that it had not been heard during the sanction procedure started by Cuba. Twenty-seven countries, including Libya, China and Cuba supported the suspension. Twenty-three countries voted against the ban on RSF, and four abstained. (AFP, 24/7/03)

July 26: Fidel Castro responded to European Union criticism of human rights abuses in Cuba by rejecting EU aid and closing the door on political contacts. "Cuba does not need the aid of the European Union to survive," Castro said in a speech to 10,000 supporters marking the 50th anniversary of the assault he led on the Santiago army garrison that launched his revolution. "The government of Cuba, out of a basic sense of dignity, relinquishes any aid or remnant of humanitarian aid that may be offered by the European Commission and the governments of the European Union," Castro said. He accused the EU of kowtowing to pressure from the United States to censure Cuba and called Europe the "Trojan horse of a superpower." "They are full of hatred against Cuba," he told the crowd. "They don't forgive that we have demonstrated that socialism is (...) a thousand times more humane than the rotten system which they have adopted." (Reuters, Sun Sentinel, 28/7/03)

July 26: During his speech at the 50th anniversary of the attack on Moncada barracks, Fidel Castro insulted Spanish Prime Minister Jose María Aznar, whom he described as a "character of fascist stock and ideology," for supposedly engineering the EU's censure of Cuba for jailing peaceful dissidents and executing hijackers. The Cuban leader said Spain's education system was equivalent to that of a "banana republic" and "an embarrassment for Europe". (EFE, The

Financial Times, 26/7/03)

July 27: The European Union has said it will continue to offer aid to Cuba, despite Fidel Castro's denunciation of the EU as the United States' "Trojan horse". In a statement, the EU's executive arm said it regretted Mr Castro's remarks but intended to continue offering its support in the absence of an official Cuban request not to do so. (BBC, 27/7/03)

July 27: The Popular Party's spokesperson before the Spanish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission, Gustavo Arístegui, asserted that Fidel Castro cannot afford to "lecture" the European Union (EU) on matters of "democracy." (Europa Press, 27/7/03)

July 27: The United Left Party's spokesperson before the Spanish Parliament, Felipe Alcaraz, thinks it "makes sense" that Cuban President Fidel Castro blames his Spanish counterpart, José María Aznar, for the current European policy toward the island. He also warned Aznar that if he continues to "put conditions" on the "sovereignty" of the Caribbean State, the Cuban people will "rally even more" around their leader. (Europa Press, 28/7/03)

July 28: Cuban dissidents criticized Fidel Castro's decision to cut off political dialogue with the European Union and reject any assistance from the 15-member bloc. They said such intransigence will only harm the island's people, already hard pressed by a faltering economy. Vladimiro Roca, speaking for the opposition Todos Unidos (All United) movement, said the situation created by Castro's decision borders on the "absurd." "It can be explained by the fact that the government, and specifically Fidel Castro, does not suffer the problems the Cuban people face regarding food, work, transportation and housing," he told the press. "Clearly he can reject (the aid), and that means he is totally selfish and has no regard whatsoever for the Cuban people," said Roca. (EFE, 28/7/03)

July 28: Ecuadorian Vice President Alfredo Palacio González arrived in the Cuban capital at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart, Carlos Lage. The Ecuadorian official is heading a high-level delegation from his country, that will tour economic, social and cultural places of interest during their stay. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/7/03)

July 28: The premiere of Romeo and Juliet by the Cuban National Ballet in the Second Biennial in Valencia, Spain received long ovations and exclamations of "bravo". This is a co-production of the Cuban company and the Stage Arts City Foundation of the Valencian Generalitat, that had its premiere at La Nave de Sagunto, directed by the famous Greek actress Irene Papas and specialized in huge theater spectacles. (AIN, 28/7/03)

July 28: The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) awarded the Cuban independent press a special distinction under the category of the IAPA Grand Prize for Freedom of the Press, especially to Raúl Rivero, IAPA director and regional vice chairman for Cuba of the Committee on Freedom of the Press, and the other 28 journalists who were also convicted to long prison sentences, as well as those journalists that continue to report under official persecution. (IAPA, 28/7/03)

July 29: Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez expressed agreement with Fidel Castro's tirade against the EU, stating that his Cuban counterpart had "called a spade a spade." (Europa Press, 29/7/03)

July 29: For the last century, Cuban-Canadian relations have flourished in various branches and the two countries currently maintain more complex and deeper links, Michael Small, the Canadian ambassador to Cuba confirmed to the press. He added that both nations have worked together during the last 100 years and he hoped they would carry out even more joint work in the years following the centenary, celebrated with a full program of activities. The diplomat and Eusebio Leal, City of Havana historian, inaugurated a photography exhibition at the Fototeca de Cuba displaying the principal activities that have taken place between the two countries. Leal recalled

that in 1903 the first commercial office of the Republic of Cuba was opened in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. The city historian commented on a 16th century voyage through the Caribbean Sea by Admiral Samuel de Champlain and the many valuable maps he made. Also mentioned was famous soldier and sailor Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, who died in Havana in 1706; both men were the precursors of modern Canada. Leal paid tribute to William Ryan, the Canadian revolutionary who rose to the rank of brigadier general in Cuba's 10-year War of Independence. Ryan was captured and shot by the Spanish in 1873 in Santiago de Cuba. (Granma International, Radio Progreso, 29/7/03)

July 29: Over 15 Cubans were detained while trying to get to Puerto Rico from the Dominican Republic in a boat. Dominican marine officers sent the group to the National Immigration Department to be interrogated. (EFE, 31/7/03)

July 30: Three famous Cuban painters, Ernesto García Peña, Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco) and Zaida Del Río, have brought to Toronto "Cuban Cantos" (Cuban Songs), a comprehensive exhibition of their art. The Toronto public has received them warmly, demonstrating enthusiasm during the show's duration. (Granma International, 31/7/03)

July 31: Ministers of Work from Cuba and South Africa, Alfredo Morales and Membathisi M. S. Madladlana are going through working sessions to evaluate common fields of interests. Madladlana is on a brief visit to Havana. (AIN, 31/7/03)

July 31: The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs dispatched a letter to the European Commission and the embassies of the fifteen in Havana, confirming the Cuban rejection of further EU humanitarian aid. In 2003, Brussels was planning to put Euro 5.5 million into development projects in Cuba, with the total value of each EU member state's projected contribution adding to this figure. (Europa Press, 1/8/03)

July 31: Cuba and Ecuador have signed several important bilateral agreements, including an accord for the development of biotechnology and its medical application. The agreements were signed in the Cuban capital between visiting Ecuadorian Vice President Alfredo Palacio González and his Cuban counterpart, Carlos Lage Dávila. Palacio González said that among the issues discussed with Cuban officials, including Fidel Castro, were topics linked to science and technology, biotechnology, agricultural research and farming and medicine -- from patient care to producing generic medicines. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/7/03)

Security

July 30: The US Department of State issued a fact sheet examining Cuba's history of espionage against the United States and outlining several examples of recent anti-US spying by Cuban agents. (US Department of State, 30/7/03)

Terrorism

July 4: President George W. Bush has designated six captives in what he has called the war on terrorism as eligible to be tried before US military commissions, the Defence Department says. The six were believed to be among the more than 600 prisoners being held at a US military prison in Cuba. (Reuters, 4/7/03)

July 9: Cuba denounced at the United Nations that the illicit traffic of small and light weapons, tolerated by the US Government, favored the implementation of many terrorists actions suffered by the Cuban people. Cuban Ambassador to the UN Bruno Rodriguez, made reference to the use for those purposes of weapons that were registered in the United States of America, during a biannual meeting devoted to the action program for the control of such types of armament. (AIN, 9/7/03)

July 12: A British detainee held by the Americans at Guantánamo Bay US naval base has tried to kill himself. Feroz Abbasi, 23, tried to hang himself with a towel - one of the few possessions he is allowed in the harsh Cuban detention centre. He was spotted by a guard, and marines raced to his cell to rescue him. Abbasi, from Croydon, Surrey, who was arrested in Afghanistan, is said to be increasingly withdrawn. Officials are becoming increasingly concerned about the mental state of those held in total isolation. The 680 detainees are referred to by America as "illegal combatants". (Daily Record, 12/7/03)

July 16: A prisoner tried to kill himself again in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where US authorities are preparing for military tribunals to try terror suspects, officials said. The attempt was the 29th since the detention mission began 1 1/2 years ago, said spokesman Lt.-Col. Barry Johnson. Most attempts occurred this year, a sign that the indefinite detentions are beginning to take their toll on the prisoners, who have not been formally charged or allowed to see lawyers. (The Toronto Star, 16/7/03)

July 17: The Canadian government is being accused of doing too little on behalf of Canadians imprisoned as suspected terrorists by the United States at the US navy base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Two Canadian brothers - Omar and Abdul Rahman Khadr - are among the 680 foreign citizens from 40 countries being held without charge at the base in the Caribbean and possibly subject to trial by a military tribunal. "The Canadian government's silence has been deafening, particularly when there are Canadians being held there," New Democratic Party MP Svend Robinson (Burnaby-Douglas) said. (The Toronto Star, 17/7/03)

July 18: President Bush announced that he had halted military legal proceedings against two Britons and an Australian being held as suspected terrorists, allowing time to negotiate additional legal protections with their governments. Separately, the Pentagon announced today that it had transferred 27 detainees from Guantanamo Bay for release in their home countries because the U.S. government had determined they were no longer a threat. The announcement also said approximately 10 new enemy combatants had arrived at the naval base, bringing the total number of detainees to approximately 660. (The Washington Post, 19/7/03)

July 26: A US congressional delegation has visited the prison for terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay amid complaints of abuse by inmates. The six representatives toured the US Navy base in Cuba, viewing interrogation rooms and discussing techniques for questioning. (AP, 28/7/03)

July 30: A previously unheard-of organization, the self-styled "Paraguayan Anticommunist Squadron," is threatening to assassinate Fidel Castro if he visits Paraguay for the new President's swearing-in ceremony. "Marxism-Leninism will die here," says a pamphlet distributed by the organization. (Europa Press, 30/7/03)

July 30: Niall Connolly, former representative in Cuba of Irish Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, pleaded his innocence in a Colombian court. Connolly has been accused of being an Irish Republican Army guerrilla. (Reuters, 31/7/03)

July 31: The mother of a British terrorist suspect held by the US at Camp Delta in Cuba was speaking in public for the first time about her son's plight. Zumrati Juma hopes to send a strong message to Attorney General Lord Goldsmith as he prepares for his second trip to Washington to discuss the future of the nine Britons held at the military base in Guantanamo Bay. Her son, Feroz Abbasi, 23, from London, along with Moazzam Begg, 35, from Birmingham, is on an initial list of six detainees who could face US military tribunals. (The Scotsman.Com, 31/7/03)

US-Cuba Relations

July 1: FBI agents did not inform two Cuban men of their constitutional rights until after they confessed to helping hijack an airliner to Key West in March, federal prosecutors acknowledged. After recognizing their initial mistake, agents awakened hijack suspects Neudis Infantes Hernandez and Yainer Olivares Samon and read them their Miranda rights against self-incrimination and having an attorney present during questioning. Both men waived their rights, confirmed that their confessions were accurate and voluntary, and then went back to sleep, said Assistant U.S. Attorney John Delionado. "We had what would be a clear violation of Miranda initially," Delionado said. "The agents had forgotten Miranda." (The Miami Herald, 2/7/03)

July 1: Thirteen Mainers loaded up a big green bus full of supplies to send to Cuba as part of a humanitarian effort that disregards a US blockade. The members of "Let Cuba Live," a group from Brunswick, gathered in Portland's Monument Square to rally support for their cause. The group is sending supplies to Cuba in defiance of a blockade imposed by the US Treasury Department that prohibits humanitarian aid without a permit. "For a lot of us, Cuba's more than just a place on the map," said organizer Steve Burke. (AP, 1/7/03)

July 1: A special citation for bravery has been awarded by New York's Columbia University to a Cuban group called La Sociedad de Periodistas Manuel Marquez Sterling, many of whose members were arrested and sentenced to prison during a recent crackdown on dissidents in Cuba. The Maria Moors Cabot Prizes for 2003, administered by the university's graduate school of journalism, cited La Sociedad for "an unprecedented demonstration of courage and professionalism at enormous personal cost" during the latest wave of repression undertaken against dissidents by the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. (Washington Files, 2/7/03)

July 2: Federal anti-terrorism efforts have forced a band of Cuban musicians to cancel an appearance in Hampton, Virginia, a spokesman for the group Sierra Maestra said. The nine-member band - which plays a style of traditional guitar-based music called "son" - was scheduled to perform at the American Theatre in Hampton as part of a tour celebrating the band's 25th anniversary. But the FBI, which now screens visa applications from countries identified as connected to terrorism, has held up approval, according to Sierra Maestra's American booking agency. (The Daily Press, 2/7/03)

July 2: During an interview in Spain, Otto Reich, President George Bush's top advisor on Cuban affairs, declared that the United States would not be taking military action against Cuba. "Military action, no. We do not believe it is required," said Reich. "The strategy is to weaken the government, with the use of diplomatic restrictions and information (...) increase contact with the population through the media," he added. (El País, 2/7/03)

July 3: A truck loaded with relief supplies will leave Rochester's Downtown Presbyterian Church to join a convoy bound for Cuba. The group "Pastors for Peace" is organizing what they call a "non-violent" challenge to the US trade embargo against Cuba. Doctor Peter Mott of the Rochester Committee on Latin America says this is the 14th such caravan to challenge the embargo. Previous ones have made it across both the Mexican and Canadian borders, but with the USA Patriot Act now in effect, the activists aren't sure. (WXXI, 3/7/03)

July 3: In Havana, this year's US-sponsored Fourth of July celebration was different: Gone were dozens of Cuban artists, musicians and writers. A government crackdown -- in which 75 dissidents, journalists, librarians and others were jailed -- scared many of their compatriots off. Others weren't invited because the Americans knew that the political climate has changed and that many Cubans wouldn't attend no matter how many M&Ms and radios were passed out. Rubbing elbows with US diplomats -- always a hazardous proposition for Cubans -- is more perilous than ever. "It's like poison," said Felix Bonne, a Cuban dissident who attended the traditional festivities. (The Miami Herald, 5/7/03)

July 3: The chief of the US mission in Cuba toasted the island's imprisoned dissidents on the eve of US Independence Day celebrations. "To those willing to illuminate the darkest night so that their countrymen may one day live in the light of freedom," US Interests Section Chief James Cason told about 300 people, including a sprinkling of dissidents, who gathered at his official residence. "There are those in this country who recognize and promote these universal values of tolerance and respect of the individual." Cason said earlier in his homage to Cuba's opposition. "Unfortunately, many of them are suffering for stating openly what most of their countrymen believe, but our afraid to articulate," he said. (AP, 4/7/03)

July 4: Cuba marked US Independence Day this 4th of July with a cultural gala concert at one of Havana's main theaters. The function was attended by the Cuban minister of Culture, writer Abel Prieto, as well as by numerous other intellectuals and artists. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/7/03)

July 5: A Colorado man who bought a Cuban plane used this year in a hijacking is selling the aircraft on the Internet auction site eBay. Matthew Overton, 25, a mechanic and pilot from Greeley, Colorado, paid \$6,500 for the Soviet-era Antonov AN-24 at an auction run last month by government officials. But Overton said the hassle of getting the plane decertified as Cuban property is too costly and frustrating, so now he is selling it. (The Miami Herald, 5/7/03)

July 5: Volunteers from the Rochester Committee on Latin America in New York, have put together a shipment of medical supplies bound for Cuba, with the objective of breaking through the the US blockade against the island and finally reach the Cuban people. (Radio Habana Cuba, 5/7/03)

July 7: Federal prosecutors in Miami have failed for a third time to overturn a judge's order that allows bond to be set for six Cubans accused of hijacking a passenger jet to Key West in March using knives and a hatchet. The recent ruling, by a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, has plenty of symbolic resonance but little practical application, because the suspects are going to remain in US immigration custody even if each posts a \$100,000 bond in the criminal case. US Attorney Marcos Jiménez has said his office has aggressively pursued the issue to send a message to Cuban citizens and Fidel Castro that the United States won't tolerate hijackings as a means of fleeing the island. (The Miami Herald, 8/7/03)

July 8: In a rare show of cooperation between Havana and Washington, the Cuban pilot of a hijacked Cubana Airlines plane testified in a Florida court that the hijacker threatened to detonate hand grenades and kill everyone on board the aircraft. On the opening day of testimony at the trial in Key West, pilot Jorge Armando Rojas, 55, said Adelmis Wilson Gonzalez, 34, threatened to explode hand grenades on board the Antonov-24 with more than four dozen people on board last March. If convicted of one count of aircraft piracy, Wilson could be sentenced to life in prison. (Reuters, 8/7/03)

July 9: The Center for International Policy (CIP) released a statement by Cuban dissident Rene Gomez Manzano, speaking on behalf of two of Cuba's largest coalitions of political dissidents, his own organization, "Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil" (Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society), and "Todos Unidos" (All United), led most notably by Vladimiro Roca and Elizardo Sanchez. In his statement, recorded on camera for an upcoming conference in Washington by representatives of CIP visiting Havana, Dr. Gomez Manzano urges international support for those arrested in the 100 days since the Cuban government's crackdown against political dissent began - especially for prisoners in need of medical assistance. Informed that human rights organizations, business groups, public policy groups, congressional leaders and other representatives of US public opinion have launched a campaign to lift the ban on the travel of American citizens to Cuba, Dr. Gomez Manzano said: "My colleagues, and the internal dissidents and I are sure that this question will be solved in accordance with the secular traditions of the United States: traditions of freedom, tradition of democracy, and tradition, traditions of respect for human rights and traditions of international solidarity. (USNewswire, 9/7/03)

July 10: After paddling for a grueling 25-hours and 44-minutes with just their arms, members of an international relay team became the first women ever to make a 112-mile ocean crossing from Havana to Key West on paddleboards. The quartet, all trained athletes and members of the Millennium Woman Team, took turns paddling with their arms and hands a 16-foot fiberglass paddleboard -- a cross between a surfboard and a kayak. (Sun Sentinel, 10/7/03)

July 10: Abel Francis Acea, a Cuban artist allowed to fly to Toronto last month for an exhibit of his work, made his request for political asylum in New York state. He and four other Cubans who crossed the border from Canada into Buffalo, N.Y., are being held at a federal immigration detention center, where they face an uncertain future -- possibly even deportation, according to immigration officials. One of them -- an engineer who worked at the controversial Juragua power plant in Cienfuegos and was also headed for Miami -- has been held for more than three months and has already been denied parole. Those cases are indicative of disparities between South Florida, where the arrival of Cuban migrants is commonplace, and other border cities where many federal authorities are unfamiliar with policies specific to Cubans. (The Miami Herald, 10/7/03)

July 10: A Cuban who forced a Cubana Airlines passenger plane to fly over the Florida Straits to the United States in April was found guilty of air piracy by a Florida court and faces up to life in prison. Adelmis Wilson Gonzalez, 34, was accused of using fake hand grenades to hijack the twin-prop Antonov-24 plane, which began as a domestic flight from Cuba's Isle of Youth to Havana and ended up the next day in Key West on the southern tip of Florida. The 12-person jury in a Key West federal court took less than two hours to find Wilson Gonzalez guilty of one count of air piracy, a conviction that carries a sentence of 20 years to life in prison. Sentencing was set for September. The hijacking was one of three in March and April by Cubans trying to flee communist-run Cuba for the United States. (Reuter, 10/7/03)

July 10: A US port and a Cuban state company signed an agreement to ship US agricultural and food products to the island. The president of the Cuban company Alimport, Pedro Alvarez, and the head of the administrative council of the port of Corpus Christi, Texas, Ruben Bonilla, agreed that this was a historic agreement, the first of its kind to be signed since the more than four-decade-long US economic embargo was imposed on the island. Alvarez said that the agreement allowed for the annual shipment of 2.1 million tons of bulk and frozen products from the United States to Cuba. He added that US firms had already sold Cuba \$480 million worth of goods, of which Havana had already paid some \$339 million for shipment to the island of some 1.4 million tons of goods from 11 US ports. Cuban imports from the United States include grain, vegetables, eggs, frozen chicken, animal feed, butter and pork. (EFE, 10/7/03)

July 11: The US Coast Guard said it returned 22 Cuban migrants to their home country, after they were caught at sea in four different groups. All were brought on a Coast Guard cutter to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, officials said in a statement. (Sun Sentinel, 11/7/03)

July 11: An American-flagged vessel docked in Havana harbor for the first time in nearly four decades to deliver a cargo of wood and paper to Cuba. The Helen III, of Maybank Shipping firm, South Carolina, delivered six tons of wood and 1,614 tons of paper, which were imported by Cuban food company Alimport. The 97-meter-long vessel acquired special authorization from the US government to enter Cuban waters. Alimport Director Pedro Alvarez and President of Maybank, Jack Maybank, received the vessel at the port. The shipment worth about 1.5 million US dollars was part of a contract to ship a total of 10,000 tons of cargo, said Alvarez. (The People's Daily, 11/7/03)

July 12: The United States should work harder to improve relations with Cuba and streamline its immigration policy to allow Haitians to migrate to America, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP's President and CEO Kweisi Mfume said. (Sun Sentinel, 13/7/03)

July 12: Cuba's archery team will miss the world championships and possibly the Olympics because the athletes weren't granted US visas in time, sports officials said. Nemesio Rodriguez, president of the Cuban archery federation, said two archers received visas and two others received no response. "We began the process within the time specified by the United States," Rodriguez said, adding that US consular officials interviewed the athletes about their requests May 19. He said the delay in visas was "a result of a hostile policy toward our country, in detriment to the purest values of Olympism." (AP, 13/7/03)

July 14: A plane used by a Cuban hijacker to get to the United States has gone for almost \$60,000 on an internet auction site, according to the seller. Matthew Overton bought the Soviet-era aircraft for \$6,500 (£3,986) through a government auction in Florida in June. He told the press that the Antonov-24 fetched \$59,100 (£36,248) after a 10-day auction on the internet site Ebay. Proceeds from the initial sale of the plane were given directly to a Miami woman who successfully sued Fidel Castro's government for £27m. (BBC, 14/7/03)

July 15: The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) condemned Cuba's jamming of US international broadcasts to Iran, calling the action a "deliberate and malicious" effort to block Iranian audiences from gaining access to truthful news and information. The BBG, the federal agency which oversees all US non-military international broadcasting, also urged providers such as Intelsat and Eutelsat to stop giving service to countries that have jammed satellite transmissions to Iran, where pro-democracy advocates have staged repeated demonstrations against the ruling Islamic government. (BBG, 15/7/03)

July 15: Supporters of ending a 4-decade-old US ban on travel to Cuba said there were enough votes in Congress to lift the restrictions, but Cuban-American lawmakers predicted the effort would fail. Representative Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican, said Fidel Castro's recent crackdown on dissidents was more proof the US embargo on Cuba had not forced democratic change on the island. "It's time to get tough with Cuba, and there's no better way to get tough than to have Americans export their freedom and values there," he said. "You can only have that if we don't have (...) our own government telling us we can't travel." The House of Representatives voted 262-167 last year in favor of lifting the travel ban. The effort died after the Senate failed to pass similar legislation. (Reuters, 15/7/03)

July 16: President George W. Bush suspended for another six months Title III of the Helms-Burton Act that, if signed, would enable U.S. citizens to sue those who traffic in property confiscated from them by the Cuban government. (Radio Martí, 18/7/03)

July 16: The 14th Pastors for Peace Caravan is poised on the US border with Mexico, preparing to deliver 80 tons of material aid to Cuba. The caravan -- organized by the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) -- is a challenge to the US restrictions on travel to Cuba. Volunteers from across the United States, Mexico, Canada and Europe began arriving in McAllen, Texas and are undergoing an orientation before attempting to cross the border into Mexico. (Radio Habana Cuba, 16/7/03)

July 16: Three months after swift trials sent three hijackers before a firing squad, a group commandeered a mapping vessel from a Cuban port with more than two dozens people on board. In Miami, Petty Officer Danielle DeMarino said the Coast Guard was "monitoring the situation and standing by in case it escalates into anything." Ralph Fernandez, a Tampa attorney who has represented Cubans who have been accused of hijacking, said he was aware of cases in the past where Bahamian authorities have detained Cubans. He also said the United States might exercise "long-arm jurisdiction" and prosecute some of the Cubans on the boat for hijacking, even though the incident did not happen in U.S. territorial waters. A State Department official in Washington said it was too early to discuss any US role in the Cubans' fate. (Sun Sentinel, 16/7/03)

July 17: One day after US authorities stopped a Cuban government-owned boat as it meandered

toward Florida, FBI agents and a federal prosecutor flew to the Coast Guard cutter where its 15 passengers are being held, after initial interviews suggested the vessel may have been hijacked after all. Criminal investigators were dispatched to the cutter after several of the Cuban passengers implied or told an interviewer that they were forced along on a ride through the Bahamas toward Miami after the vessel was taken from the Cuban port of Boca de Nuevitas, sources familiar with the investigation told the press. (The Miami Herald, El Tiempo, Reuters, 18/7/03)

July 17: The Cuban government called upon Washington to honour bilateral migratory accords, by which, it said, "the vessel and the hijackers must be returned to Cuba." Cuban authorities are waiting for the US reply to their request for extradition of hijackers that fled from the island to Miami on a state-owned GeoCuba surveying boat. (Encuentro en la Red, 18/7/03)

July 17: The Senate Appropriations Committee voted to make it easier for US businesses and farm groups to visit Cuba and sell food, other farm products and medicine there. Despite President Bush 's opposition to any warming of relations with Fidel Castro 's government, the Senate panel included language in a \$17 billion spending bill that would allow visitors to bypass a Treasury Department licensing restriction. Farm state lawmakers were unopposed in tacking the provision by Senator Byron Dorgan, Democrat-North Dakota, onto a bill funding the Agriculture Department and Food and Drug Administration next year. A Senate panel's action sets up a confrontation with the House, where the chairman of its appropriations committee, Representative Bill Young, Republican-Florida, opposes any further lessening of sanctions against Castro's government. John Scofield, a spokesman for the House Appropriations Committee, said the measure invites a presidential veto. (AP, 17/7/03)

July 18: The boat that was allegedly hijacked from the port of Nuevitas in Cuba, has been returned to the island. The Cuban government has informed American diplomats that the individuals, now being held on a Coast Guard cutter off the Florida coast, would not be executed if returned to Cuba, a State Department official said. "The Cubans informed our mission that those principally responsible for armed robbery and kidnapping would have to face justice," the State Department official said. But, the official said the Cubans said they would receive sentences not exceeding 10 years in prison. "We're finding out through a number of avenues what would happen if they are repatriated." State Department and Coast Guard officials said the incident is still under investigation. (Europa Press, Knight Ridder Tribune News, 19/7/03)

July 18: Members of the 14th Pastors for Peace Caravan arrived at Jose Martí International airport in Havana. The 14th Pastors for Peace Friendshipment brought over 80 tons of material aid to Cuba -- including medicines, medical equipment, hospital beds, portable generators and computers, as well as ambulances, school busses and trucks. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/7/03)

July 18: The US State Department has given the Cuban government a formal request to investigate allegations that transmitters thought to be in Cuba are jamming US satellite broadcasts to Iran, a spokesman said. The State Department called in officials of the Cuban interests section in Washington to put in the request, spokesman Richard Boucher told a briefing. "We would expect to hear back from them," he added. (Bahrain Times, 18/7/03)

July 18: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón has flatly denied that Cuba is jamming US satellite transmissions to Iran. In statements to reporters in Ciego de Avila, Cuba's top legislator referred to Washington's accusation that Havana was "deliberately and maliciously" jamming US signals. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/7/03)

July 19: The Cuban Government has denied that it is intentionally jamming an American satellite TV broadcast to Iran. "Cuba has never undertaken nor will it ever undertake these types of interruptions in US television satellite transmissions," a Cuban Foreign Ministry statement said. Cuba described as a "new campaign of anti-Cuba lies" the US accusation that it is jamming satellite broadcasting from the US to Iran. "Cuba has never embarked, nor will it embark on this

sort of interference with US satellite television signal broadcasting," the Foreign Ministry statement said. However, officials promised to bow to US requests that they investigate whether signals originating in Cuba could be unintentionally interfering with the broadcasts. (BBC, Toronto Star, 19/7/03)

July 21: US officials returned 15 Cuban migrants intercepted at sea on a boat owned by Fidel Castro's government in a move that Havana praised as an important step in the fight against illegal migration. US officials agreed to the repatriation after Havana promised those who stole the boat would serve no longer than 10 years in prison, the Cuban government said in a statement. The statement also praised the decision by American officials earlier this year to prosecute a Cuban charged with hijacking a plane full of passengers to the United States. (AP, 21/7/03)

July 21: Rumors have been circulating in Havana that the United States may be easing immigration restrictions for Cubans. But, American officials deny the allegation. "Those rumors are false," James Cason, America's top diplomat in Havana, said in an unusual nationally televised statement read by a Cuban announcer. "Cuban citizens who take to the seas in a misguided effort to reach the United States" will be sought and "prosecuted with the full force of the US legal system," he said. It was the second time Cason was allowed to express his views to Cubans. The first was in April, during negotiations over yet another hijacking. (The Dallas morning News, 22/7/03)

July 21: The Bush administration says it is still waiting for Cuba to formally respond to complaints about the jamming of US satellite television broadcasts to Iran. State Department spokesman Richard Reeker said in Washington that US officials have asked Cuba to investigate the matter. Mr. Reeker also says that while the jamming appeared to be emanating from Cuba, US officials at this point do not have enough information to know who is responsible. (VOA, 22/7/03)

July 21: Financial conservatives are looking to discontinue a Cuban-American, PBS-style newscast beamed out of the United States, saying the Spanish-language program is broadcasting to nowhere. TV Marti, a multi-million dollar venture in Florida that takes aim at Fidel Castro, doesn't seem to be reaching the target audience it seeks - Cubans on the island nation. "I can tell you the taxpayers across the country aren't getting their money's worth," said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona. Since its inception, US taxpayers have spent at least \$100 million on TV Marti. It currently has 55 reporters, anchors and writers on the payroll, though it cranks out only about five hours per day of news and programming. On top of that, satellite (UHF) antennas are illegal in Cuba, and even though as many as 100,000 satellite dishes have been bought on the black market, critics say Cuban engineers have managed to use a \$100 piece of hardware to block TV Marti's signal. (Fox News, 22/7/03)

July 22: Taking her final ride in a horse-drawn carriage piled high with flowers, Queen of Salsa Celia Cruz was hailed in a funeral tribute both raucous and reverent. Inside St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, the packed crowd of more than 2,000 included Cruz's husband of 41 years, trumpeter Pedro Knight; Mayor Michael Bloomberg; actor Antonio Banderas and wife Melanie Griffith; singer Jon Secada; singer-actor Ruben Blades; Cheo Feliciano, Ismael Miranda, Johnny Pacheco, Willie Colon. Also in attendance were salsa star Tito Nieves, Cuban saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera, and Governor George Pataki, Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton, and City Council Speaker Gifford Miller. US singer Patti LaBelle sang "Ave Maria", and salsa singer Victor Manuelle also performed. Governor George Pataki proclaimed Celia Cruz Day across the state to celebrate her "extraordinary accomplishments, talent and grace." Celia Cruz was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in The Bronx, in a private ceremony. (Toronto Star, Fox News, EFE, 22/7/03)

July 23: A growing number of US legislators, human rights groups and influential Cuban-Americans are calling for an end to the ban on travel to Cuba, with a new amendment set to be introduced in Congress by September. "Whenever it comes up, we're in a good position," said

Jeff Flake, an Arizona republican and sponsor of the Export Freedom to Cuba Act of 2003 in the House, which would halt enforcement of the travel ban. "We're in the right position to win." Last year, the House of Representatives voted 262-167 in favour of lifting the four-decade-old travel ban to the socialist island, but the effort died after the Senate failed to pass similar legislation. (IPS, 23/7/03)

July 24: Twelve Cubans aboard a floating truck crossed the turbulent waters of the Florida Straits and made it to within 60 kilometers (40 miles) of Key West, Florida, before being intercepted by the US Coast Guard. The men, who were repatriated to Cuba, mounted the Chevy, tires included, on empty metal drums that served as pontoons. According to Coast Guard officials, the Cubans attached a propeller to the drive shaft of the green vintage flatbed, which was controlled using the steering wheel. Coast Guard spokesman Ryan Doss said in his years of service he has seen Cubans make the perilous crossing in rafts or small boats made out of refrigerators, bathtubs, surfboards and inner tubes, but never in a truck. (EFE, 24/7/03)

July 25: A shipment of livestock including 140 cattle, one of which was born during the trip, arrived in Cuba, the first significant batch of American animals to be sold in the island. The shipment was made under a 2000 exception to the long-standing US trade embargo on Cuba. American agricultural products can be sold to the island as long as transactions are done in cash or by financing from a third country. (ABC News, 25/7/03)

July 28: Citing a perceived change in US policy toward Cubans interdicted at sea, Florida Democratic Senator Bill Nelson said he will call for an investigation into negotiations that led to the recent repatriation of a dozen people who stole a boat in a failed bid to flee the island. In a three-minute address in the Senate, Nelson said he will call on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to "investigate the matter" for answers on why the Bush administration entered into negotiations with the government of Fidel Castro and why the group was not sent to a third country rather than returned to their homeland. "This appears to be a change, a subtle change, in policy," Nelson said. "The long and short of it was that the United States was negotiating (...) I don't think this is right." (AP, 28/7/03)

July 29: A delegation of US young people who took part in the 3rd US-Cuba Youth Encounter is touring the eastern provinces of the island. The members of the youth delegation were special guests at celebrations to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the attack on the Moncada garrison. (Radio Habana Cuba, 29/7/03)

July 29: The United States is deeply concerned over the failing health of Cuban political prisoner Marta Beatriz Roque. According to family members, Ms. Roque was transferred to the Carlos J. Finlay Military Hospital in Havana due to high blood pressure, chest pain and nose bleeds. Her health has worsened since her incarceration. The Cuban government should provide her with the best possible medical treatment. (US Department of State, 29/7/03)

July 29: Readers of a US travel magazine have selected Cuba as their preferred destination within the Caribbean, despite the ban on travel to the island, where they are furthermore not supposed to spend any money. Cuba was chosen by the readers of Travel and Leisure as the best Caribbean island in the publication's annual survey. (Granma International, 29/7/03)

July 29: Members of the 34th Contingent of the Venceremos Brigade are on a visit to Cuba. The Venceremos Brigade is the oldest international solidarity brigade with the Cuban revolution. Formed in 1969 in the United States, thousands of American activists have gone to Cuba over the years to do volunteer work and tour the island. (Radio Habana Cuba, 29/7/03)

July 29: Democratic presidential hopeful Joe Lieberman criticized the Bush administration for returning for prosecution a dozen Cubans accused of hijacking a boat in an attempt to reach Florida. "When they were sent back to Cuba, that was a setback for America's best values," Lieberman said during a South Florida campaign swing. "For the US government to negotiate a

jail sentence for these people with an oppressive regime, that we know do not have fair trials, is simply outrageous. No due process. No fair trials." (AP, 29/7/03)

July 30: The Cubans who sailed a pickup truck converted into a boat to within 40 miles of Florida are making a legal bid to reach the United States. The group turned in the completed immigration forms that American officials had given them on the high seas. American officials said they would respond within two months to the requests to emigrate legally to the United States. (AP, 30/7/03)

July 31: Several Cuban dissidents who left the island in a small boat were taken to the US naval base at Guantanamo, the Cuban American National Foundation reported. Immigrants intercepted at sea who have valid reasons to request political asylum are taken to Guantanamo and remain there until they are accepted by some other country. In contrast to those who actually step on US territory, who are allowed to stay, Cuban "rafters" stopped at sea are normally returned to Cuba. (EFE, 31/7/03)

July 31: A group of about 50 Cubans, one of the largest to arrive on Florida soil, came to shore in Key Largo, on a strip of beach near mile marker 106, behind the Ocean Reef Club. The US Border Patrol, which took the Cubans into custody, suspects the migrants may have been spirited to the United States by smugglers, said agency spokesman Cameron Hintzen. (The Miami Herald, 1/8/03)

July 31: Jeb Bush took the unusual step of criticizing his own brother's administration for the negotiations that led to the repatriation of 12 Cuban boat hijackers. "Despite the good intentions of the administration to negotiate the safety of these folks, that is an oppressive regime, and given the environment in Cuba, it's just not right" to have sent the Cubans back, Governor Bush said. "There's an expectation that I'm going to be in lock step with the administration, and that tends to happen," the governor added. "But from time to time I have to disagree, and this is one of them." (The Miami Herald, 1/8/03)