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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Raúl Castro continues to be a prominent voice in the anti-corruption effort that Cuba's ruling Communist party has launched. Osvaldo Payá urges exiles in Miami to join Cubans on the island in planning for the nation's future transition to democracy. Cuba's government is reasserting central control of the tourism industry. Cuba frees dissident economist Martha Beatriz Roque.

Economy: The United Nations warns that thousands of people might be at risk due to a severe drought afflicting parts of western Cuba. Spanish oil and gas company says that oil found in Cuban waters is not commercially viable.

Exile Community: US President George W. Bush has lost significant support in Florida's Cuban-American community.

Foreign Affairs: Cuba's Foreign Ministry says that it is holding Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante, one of Colombia's top drug kingpins. Jorge Moragas, Foreign Relations Secretary of Spain's Popular Party (PP), completes his visit to Cuba. The ambassadors for Cuba and Mexico return to their posts.

Security: Cuba has ordered a study of its military recruitment program, hoping to enlist more young men into the armed forces.

US-Cuba Relations: The Chief of the US Interest Section in Havana states that Washington does not intend to invade the island. President Bush accuses Fidel Castro of fostering child prostitution in Cuba. Fidel Castro denies charges by President Bush that he encourages sex-tourism in Cuba. Florida-Cuba trade volumes have increased ten-fold in the last five years.



Domestic Affairs

July 1: For Carmelo Díaz Fernández and five other peaceful dissidents who have been released conditionally from prison because of their deteriorated health, the joy of being home with their families is marred by fear and uncertainty.

In some cases state security officers have warned the men that they could be arrested again if they rekindle their opposition activities. Some suggested the men leave Cuba permanently. Caught between exile and the possibility of serving out the rest of his 15-year prison sentence, Diaz Fernandez said he, like some others, will seek asylum abroad. Manuel Vazquez Portal, who served one year, three months and four days of his 18-year sentence, said he is deliberating with his family whether to leave Cuba. When Vazquez Portal told a prison authority he would go back to being a journalist, he recalled the captain responded, "If I were you and they freed me I would go into exile." De Miranda, a former teacher, who was released on the same day as Vazquez Portal, said he may seek asylum abroad because he was fired from his job teaching math and geology several years ago and is unable to make a living. De Miranda and others reject the Cuban government's assertion that dissidents are "mercenaries." "If I were a mercenary I would be a masochist to have my house in these conditions," he said pointing to his bare Central Havana living room, where slats are missing from the windows and ceiling tiles are coming loose. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/7/04)

July 1: Visually impaired attorney Juan Carlos González Leyva denounced review judge Juan Enrique Balar Claro's refusal to let him make a trip to Havana. González Leyva, a Ciego de Ávila resident and leader of the Cuban Human Rights Foundation, is currently serving a 4-year probationary sentence and needed the review board's approval to travel. (*Cubanet*, 1/7/04)

July 1: Speaking on behalf of her husband, dissident poet and journalist Raúl Rivero, Blanca Reyes denounced the systematic harassment her spouse is subjected to at the hands of a prison guard named Alexei. According to Rivero, political prisoners share overcrowded cells with ordinary inmates, who are "encouraged" to ignore them, risking punishment if they don't. (*AFP*, 1/7/04)

July 2: The National Assembly of People's Power --also known as the Cuban Parliament -- began its second day of debates at Havana's International Convention Center concerning the universalization of education on the island. Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón opened the morning session. Fidel Castro, who also serves as a delegate to the island's legislature, spoke from the floor. He recalled how educational programs were negatively affected by the economic problems of what is known as "the Special Period." He noted that the 90s were times of shortages and hardships for the Cuban people -- having severe effects on the social and educational programs of the Cuban Revolution. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 2/7/04)

July 3: The Cuban government's National Centre for Sex Education (CENESEX) has begun publishing on its Internet site a section on sexual diversity, which provides general information, posts public opinions e-mailed to the web site, and gives Cubans the opportunity to consult with experts. According to sexologist Mariela Castro, director of CENESEX, what is occurring "is the result of an effort of more than 30 years, and now we are seeing its fruits more clearly". She says that 10 years ago it would have been nearly impossible to introduce a textbook on sex in the high schools. Nor would there have been such tolerance of training on transsexual and transvestite issues. "In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the resistance against even mentioning sexual diversity was incredibly strong even amongst that population," Castro said. The CENESEX Internet site is part of a broader project of the ministry, which includes a forum to promote reflection and debate about masculinity, relationships, sexual diversity and other issues. (*IPS*, 5/7/04)

July 4: Havana homeowners who do not abide by the Rent-Control Act are risking expropriation of their house or apartment, according to *Tribuna de la Habana*. The weekly capital newspaper reported that, between January 2003 and last April, legislation pertaining to landlord expropriation or loss of property rights was enforced in 89 cases, 43 of which were illegally renting out living quarters in foreign, as well as national currency. (*El Nuevo Herald, Europa Press*, 5/7/04)

July 4: More than one hundred poets from America, Europe and Africa are taking part in the 2nd World Congress of Poetry, hosted in Santiago de Cuba province. This forum is part of the 14th Caribbean Festival, or "Fire Festival". The

international meeting is dedicated to the famous Haitian poets Jacques Roumain, Jacques Stefan Alexis and Jacques Vieux, as well as the Dominican poet Pedro Mir, who recently died. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/7/04)

July 5: Havana is welcoming scholars from the Caribbean basin and Latin America, in a gathering to shed new light on the works of national poet Nicolás Guillén. The main lecture hall at the University of Havana will host an event focusing on theory, music and documentaries on the life and works by late Cuban National Poet Nicolas Guillen (1904-1989). The event, sponsored by Cuba's Writers and Artists Guild and the Cuban Music Institute, is also attended by delegates from France, Canada, Spain and Greece. Participants will also honor Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/7/04)

July 5: Cuba's ruling Communist party has launched a far-reaching assault on "corruption and illegalities" that could lead to the expulsion of moderate members from the party. The campaign - yet to be reported by official government media - reflects the party's ideological retrenchment and underlines the extent to which the government has renounced its timid market-oriented reforms of the early 1990s. Over the past two or three months members of the party's political bureau have been visiting local party branches to tell militants that they have one last chance to clean up their acts. The new focus on corruption has been accompanied by measures to strip state businesses of their limited operational autonomy and to scrap executive perks such as expense accounts. A prominent voice in the anti-corruption effort has been Raul Castro, defence minister and apparently the man next in line to succeed his brother, Fidel Castro, as Cuba's president, according to party cadres who attended high-level national and provincial party meetings two months ago. The meetings were shown in a video prepared as part of Raul Castro's anti-corruption drive. (*Financial Times*, 5/7/04)

July 5: María Benítez, a demographics specialist and author of the 2003 book, *The Cuban Family*, said that, "For every 100 marriages in Cuba, there are almost 70 divorces. It's alarming," she said. The island's severe housing shortage forces many people to live with their in-laws and other relatives, straining even the best of marriages. Economic conditions also create tension that drives many couples apart, Ms. Benítez said. Divorce is usually a simple process, and battles over possessions aren't common because most people have few belongings. "There isn't much property to divide," said Orlando Ramos, 42, an economist. Cuba legalized divorce in 1869 and introduced divorces of "Mutual Consent" by notary public in 1994. "No other country in the world has this kind of divorce," said Ayiadna María Verrier, a notary public in Old Havana. Divorces involving disputes over money, property or children are handled in Cuban courts and usually take several months. (*The Dallas Morning News*, 5/7/04)

July 5: The oppositionist coalition, Arco Progresista, issued a press release bemoaning the Cuban authorities' refusal to grant one of its members permission to attend the recently concluded 36 th Congress of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. (*AFP*, 5/7/04)

July 7: Imprisoned dissident Jorge Luis Garcia Pérez "Antúnez" was harshly beaten by prison authorities in front of his relatives, a Cuban American organization based in Miami denounced. In a statement made public to the press, Directorio Democrático Cubano says that several guards from the Ariza provincial prison, Camagüey, attacked Antúnez after he requested from the prison guards that letters of support from different countries were given to his sister. "He was brutally beaten on the floor". "They handcuffed each hand and dragged him from opposite sides, so he began bleeding and having difficulties breathing", Antunez' sister, Bertha, told members of the Directorio. According to Bertha Antúnez, her brother had requested the letters that the State Security had been keeping without having delivered them. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 7/7/04)

July 7: Fidel Castro attended the graduation ceremony of more than 1,500 social workers. Addressing the newly-graduated young people, Castro noted that there are a total of 21,000 social workers across the island. Norma Barrios Fernández, director of the Social Worker's School in Cojímar, located on the outskirts of Havana, said that this graduation, the fifth, showed better academic results than previous courses. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/7/04)

July 8: Cuba's most prominent dissident urged exiles in Miami to join Cubans on the island in planning for the nation's future transition to democracy. "All Cubans have the right and duty to participate," Oswaldo Payá said in a telephone call from Havana to a small gathering at Our Lady of Charity Shrine. "We should all be protagonists...In no way can the transition represent revenge, eviction, abandonment or neglect for any Cuban," he emphasized. "We call on all to reflect, because the future of Cuba will be determined by us, the Cuban people, among ourselves." The pitch was part of a national dialogue taking place on and off the island so that all Cubans can review and give their opinions on the Cuban Transition Project unveiled by Payá in December. Remarks collected from exiles will be forwarded to Havana in November and added to opinions gathered across the island. A final draft will be turned over to the National Assembly as early as February. [[Levantemos los corazones](#) and [Diálogo Nacional](#)] (*EFE, The Miami Herald*, 7,8/7/04)

July 7: In the Havana municipality of Guanabacoa, a family was finally evicted from their home following a previous attempt thwarted by neighbors last March. In a combined operation by the municipal Housing Agency, the fire department and the police, who sealed off the block, Aracelys Gutiérrez Leyva, her husband and their 16-month-old baby daughter were removed from their home. (*Cubanet*, 7/7/04)

July 8: More than 40% of mailed packages handled by the Cuban National Postal Service so far this year have not reached their intended destinations. Services offered include national and overseas delivery of postal packages, but employees of that state-run agency often steal the assorted items mailed. (*Cubanet*, 8/7/04)

July 8: Over a month ago, members of the illegal dissident organization Movimiento Liberal Cubano were arrested and sent to Villa Marista, the political police headquarters in Havana, without any notice to their relatives about the charges against them. José Lorenzo Pérez Fidalgo and Alexis Triana Montesinos, both residents of El Diezmero, Havana, were detained by National Police forces and the State Security Department agents. Their relatives have denounced that they still do not know about the charges against their loved ones, nor about their situation. (*Cubanet*, 8/7/04)

July 8: In Havana, over 160 scholars from 13 countries began debates on the prospects of religion against the backdrop of growing poverty, violence and a worldwide neoliberal crisis. At the opening of the IV Meeting of Social Religious Studies, Belgian theologian Francois Houtart warned that under present conditions, class relations as well as social struggles in favor of resistance to globalization need to be strengthened. The meeting will also address topics such as Africa's contribution to culture and religiousness, religious plurality, the impact of Eastern spirituality on the West and new religious movements. Academics, Catholic priests, Protestant pastors and practitioners of several religions and rites are attending the event. At the same time, a workshop on religion is taking place sponsored by the Social Sciences Religion Council. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/7/04)

July 9: Cuba's Olympic team heads to Athens with hopes of another strong showing in the medals standings. Patriotism is key as Cuba prepares its athletes in 16 of 28 Olympic events. Separate ceremonies presenting the red, white and blue national flag to the team for each sport ends with the cry of "Homeland or Death! We will triumph!" -- the slogan President Fidel Castro uses to close his speeches. The baseball team ceremony earlier this month included something else: an oath by players to "fight for victory with dignity, patriotism, simplicity and total surrender." They also vowed to "reject any offer that goes against Cuban principles" -- a reference to sports agents who offer athletes, especially ball players, huge sums of money to defect. This year's Olympics team is comprised of 159 athletes, compared with the 238 who went to Sydney. (*AP*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Prisoner of conscience Normando Hernandez Gonzalez continues to be held in a punishment cell after having already spent 54 days in it. His wife, Yarai Reyes Marin, spoke via telephone with the prison's chief of internal order, who refused to give his name. He told Yarai that her husband, as well as Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero, Leonel Grave de Peralta and Jose Daniel Ferrer Garcia, will continue in their punishment cells in Kilo 5 1/2 prison in the province of Pinar del Rio for 21 more days, for refusing to be transferred to a cell with common prisoners, where their lives are in danger. (*Marpocuba*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Former Fidel Castro supporter, later political prisoner, still later Miami exile and now Havana resident, Eloy Gutiérrez-Menoyo said he is taking his time forming partnerships with other dissidents on the island to sidestep government charges that Washington is behind them. "I'm being very careful to identify dissidents who are completely independent from any foreign influence," he said. "I'm getting to know them and they me and we are finding common ground so we can work together. Transition in Cuba depends on Cubans, not a foreign force." "For a long time, the repression in Cuba was targeted against all those dissidents who are known or had traveled to other nations," he said. "My case is different. I have no links to any government or entity. I represent a totally independent movement, and in Cuba there would be no justification for arrest." He also applauded the petition drive known as the Varela Project, which seeks a referendum on democratic reforms. But, he added, "it served its function, played a positive role in terms of publicity (...) and died at birth." Gutiérrez-Menoyo said he will remain in Cuba as long as necessary to continue to push for democratic change, which he said is possible even with Castro in power. "It's a question of timing," he said. "They dollarized the economy and allowed foreign investment when they didn't want it. Eventually, they will have to accept transition even if they don't want it." (*The Miami Herald*, 10/15/04)

July 10: Cuba's Villa Clara province will be the venue for the main rally marking the 51st anniversary of the Attack on Moncada Army Garrison, next July 26, Granma newspaper reported. In a front page editorial, the daily said that the Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau selected Villa Clara, some 180 miles east of Havana, for its outstanding achievements in the fields of the economy, health, education, sports and sciences. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/7/04)

July 10: Omni-Zona Franca represents one of the more extreme examples of Cuba's fast-growing counterculture movement. Seven men, some wearing nothing but bikini underwear, spent time rolling around on the floor, chanting, running in circles and literally banging out tunes using old Soviet typewriters as instruments. Artists, street performers, rappers, reggae singers and others are carving out precious new space in the traditionally rigid socialist society. Some openly criticize the government, complaining about 50-cent-per-day wages, racial discrimination, economic inequality and police abuse. "When you're young, you go against your parents, your teachers. You're against everything," said Ariel Fernández, editor of *Movimiento* (Movement), a state-funded magazine about Cuban hip-hop. "You want to change society. But no one's suggesting the government be overthrown," he added. (*The Dallas Morning News*, 10/7/04)

July 11: Cuban scientists have discovered two new breeds of orchids, considered exclusive of the westernmost Cuban province of Pinar del Rio, hidden among the vegetation in Sierra del Rosario and Guanahacabibes Peninsula. The announcement was made by Pedro Pablo Rivero, director of the Orchid Garden of Soroa, who added that the discovery took place while exploring the reservation in search for new species. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/7/04)

July 12: Cuba's first wax museum is opening in the eastern city of Bayamo and will include life-sized models of Cuban stars, including musical legend Compay Segundo. The museum will be called Cerarte and will house 70 wax models all created by the master sculptor Rafael Barrios Madrigal and his sons Rafael and Leander Barrios Milán. All three artists have spent the last ten years making wax sculptures. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/7/04)

July 12: The number of political prisoners held in Cuba remained nearly constant over the past six months, according to a report released by a rights group. The Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation reported that at mid year there were 317 political prisoners held in Cuba, slightly up from the 315 reported at the end of 2003. "The fact that the total number of prisoners in this category has not significantly dropped shows the government's position of immobility," wrote Elizardo Sanchez, the head of the Havana-based commission. The commission said it did not remove from its list the names of six dissidents paroled for medical reasons in recent weeks because they were not released unconditionally and could be returned to custody if they violate parole. (*AP*, 12/7/04)

July 13: Cuba's government is reasserting central control of the tourism industry, whose spectacular growth symbolized the communist-run island's market reforms of the 1990s, industry sources said. As part of the move, the

government is removing dozens of executives who presided over a boom that turned the industry into Cuba's most-important economic sector and generator of hard currency. The Tourism Ministry has begun merging operations of four big state-owned tourism companies that control 30,000 hotel rooms, industry sources said. One executive of a foreign firm in a joint tourism venture with Cuba expressed displeasure, but said business remained strong. "We are not happy, but have adopted a wait-and-see attitude. We are being kept completely in the dark," said the executive, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The restructuring comes amid a drive by the ruling Communist Party to reverse modest market-oriented reforms that Fidel Castro's government adopted after the collapse of the Soviet Union plunged Cuba into economic crisis more than a decade ago. (*Reuters*, 13/7/04)

July 14: An electrical plant breakdown left the Cuban capital without electricity for at least three hours, said the state-run electric company. The blackout occurred after the shutdown of the Guiteras, Havana and Carlos Manuel de Cespedes thermoelectric plants in the province of Cienfuegos, an electric company source told the press. The blackout "could be extended until 7:00 p.m.," added the source, but there was no word as to whether that had occurred. Days before, the Electric Union sent a message alerting the population of possible electric service interruptions due to the breakdown in the Cienfuegos plant, which caused blackouts on the communist island. "This situation will continue until the end of this week when repairs to this plant are completed, reinstating electrical energy in the country and reducing inconveniences to the population," the announcement said. (*EFE*, 14/7/04)

July 15: Two water company employees, a Cuban Interior Ministry official and two firemen died in a sewer accident in this capital, the NTV television news service reported. The two workers were employed by the Havana Water Company (Aguas de La Habana).

Witnesses said that the accident occurred in Havana's Vedado neighborhood when water company and sewer workers were cleaning inside a collector that leads to a portion of the city's aqueduct. The serious drought affecting the country has forced the government to take "special measures" and institute cutbacks in water supply. The weekly *Tribuna de La Habana* reported several weeks ago that a number of the surface and underground sources of the capital's water had been reduced and, in some cases, exhausted. (*EFE*, 15/7/04)

July 16: A new documentary chronicling the life of Cuban-Argentinean guerilla fighter Ernesto "Ché" Guevara was released in Cuba. According to the local press, the film shows previously unreleased documents, photos, and footage from the archives of the State's Council and the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC). The documentary, entitled "*Donde nunca jamás se lo imaginan*" (Where They Least Expect It), is part of a seven-installment Cuba-Spain co-production series. (*Europa Press*, 16/7/04)

July 18: Political prisoner Santiago Cutín Aguilera, who is serving a nine-year sentence in the prison Combinado de Guantánamo for an alleged crime of trying to leave the country using illegal means, was brutally beaten by prison guards. Cutín Aguilera protested the poor dietary condition, as well as the abuses perpetrated against the political prisoners at the Guantánamo prison, where three guards brutally punched him on his jaw and his mouth, removing all of his teeth in the brutal beating. (*Puente Informativo*, 26/7/04)

July 18: A recent book, *On the Brink*, says that Fidel and Raul Castro have been locked in a power struggle since Fidel Castro fainted during a speech on a sweltering June 2001 day, touching off questions about the socialist regime's future. Ricardo Pascoe, the former Mexican ambassador to Cuba, writes that Fidel Castro decided against turning power over to his brother after the fainting episode because an internal government poll found that most Cubans were against that. So the Cuban president began to delegate much of the day-to-day operation of the government to Vice President Carlos Lage, Mr. Pascoe writes, infuriating Raul Castro and leading him to hide information from his brother. Cuban officials speaking on condition of anonymity disputed the book's findings. (*The Dallas Morning News*, 18/7/04)

July 19: Relatives of imprisoned dissident Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello have denounced her poor health situation. Roque Cabello has been kept hospitalized at Havana's military hospital "Carlos J. Finlay", but her situation has become

worse. Roque Cabello suffers from a severe condition of the parotid glands. After paying a visit to her aunt, her niece, María de los Ángeles Falcón Cabello, complained about the bad medical treatment Roque Cabello is receiving at this Havana hospital. (*Cubanet*, 19/7/04)

July 20: Upon his return from Spain, Cuban oppositionist Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo said in Havana he is confident that his status in Cuba will soon be legalized and did not hesitate to "give thanks" to Fidel Castro's government for allowing him to exit the country and return "without trouble." (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/7/04)

July 21: Dolia Leal Francisco, wife of Cuban political prisoner Nelson Aguiar Ramirez, denounced the Cuban government's attempts to keep her and other wives and mothers of political prisoners, called "Ladies in White", away from campaigning for the liberation of their loved ones. "After 16 months without any telephone communication, the military command at the Provincial Prison of Guantanamo decided that the call with my husband would be every Sunday at 10 a.m., but every Sunday at that time I go to the Church of St. Rita. It is my obligation and my duty to go and to walk down Fifth Avenue with the wives dressed in white and call for the liberation of all political prisoners, because they are innocent," said Leal. Laura Pollan, wife of political prisoner Hector Maseda Gutierrez, also said that she was called from the prison La Pendiente in Villa Clara, where her husband is being kept, about changing their phonecalls to Sunday mornings. (*Netfor Cuba*, 22/7/04)

July 21: According to information provided by political prisoner Randy Cabrera Mayor, from the prison Combinado de Guantánamo, there are over 200 prisoners in isolation suffering from tuberculosis. Cabrera Mayor said that these prisoners are not receiving proper food or medical attention to combat this disease. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/7/04)

July 21: Political prisoner Fabio Prieto Llorente, incarcerated in Kilo 8 prison, in Camagüey province, joined a hunger strike initiated by criminal prisoners. The prison population at Kilo 8 was demanding full respect of their rights and the fulfillment of benefits under the prison's internal regulations. (*Cubanet*, 21/7/04)

July 22: Cuban scientists have produced the world's first effective human chemically-synthesized vaccine, intended to protect children from the type B Haemophilus influenza. According to an article by researchers from the Center for Synthetic Antigens and appearing in the prestigious magazine "Science," obtaining the vaccine has proved that a synthetic antigen can be produced under good conditions. The article notes that the immunization rate of Quimi-Hib is as good as that of conventional vaccines obtained from bacteria. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 23/7/04)

July 22: Osvaldo Payá, dissident leader of Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL) and promoter of the Varela Project, denounced that Daniel Pereira García, MCL's delegate in Palma Soriano, Oriente, was arrested, after being a victim of a home invasion that lasted three hours. At the time of his arrest, Pereira García was actively participating in a non-stop campaign of recollection of signatures in support of the Varela Project. (*Puente Informativo*, 22/7/04)

July 22: Fidel Castro said the current evolution and changes shaping the local educational system allow the island to occupy an exceptional and privileged place worldwide. Addressing a graduation ceremony for 1,880 students from Havana City and Havana province Pedagogical Institutes, Fidel Castro noted that these educational achievements are the result of a privatization-free socialist system. "I am totally confident in the future of our revolution," Castro said. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/7/04)

July 22: Human rights activist in Isla de la Juventud, Rafael Millet Leiva, has been kept in prison for over 18 months without charges. "In spite that he has been in prison all this time, the prosecutor has not presented charges", his wife, María de los Angeles Cruz Batista, said. "Nobody knows why he is supposed to be judged", she added. (*Cubanet*, 22/7/04)

July 22: Cuba freed dissident economist Martha Beatriz Roque, the only woman among 75 people arrested 16 months ago in a crackdown on dissent. Roque, the most prominent dissident to be released this year by Fidel Castro's government, was surprised. "I didn't expect to be let out. I will continue my opposition work. They can't change my ideas," she told reporters at the home of a relative in central Havana. The 58-year-old dissident said she had spent the last year in a military hospital suffering from diabetes, hypertension and heart problems and was released on health grounds. "The government must free all the political prisoners," she said. "This is the government's way of saying it will be more flexible. But until all 75 are in the street we cannot call it a gesture," said Roque, who thanked international efforts to press Cuba to free its dissidents. (*Reuters*, 22/7/04)

July 22: A coalition of dissidents in Cuba is proposing an alternative "transition to democracy" that would be gradual, smooth, and "without the influence of foreign powers." "For us, Cuba's sovereignty and independence is as important as democratisation," Manuel Cuesta Morúa, spokesman for Arco Progresista (Progressive Arc), said in an interview. The coalition is made up of the Social Democratic Coordinator, the Democratic Socialist Current, Women of the Democratic Left, the Democratic Socialist Youth Movement, the People's Party, and the 'Diego Vicente Tejera' Centre for Studies of Democratic Socialism. Cuesta Morúa said the positions taken by the European Union (EU) and the United States towards Cuba are quite different, even if there are similarities with respect to the question of human rights. "The EU has not broken off diplomatic relations, it does not finance the opposition, and it does not have a design to overthrow the Cuban government, even though it has raised the tone of its criticism as the possibility of dialogue has collapsed," said the activist. [[Seis pactos y seis pasos para una transición tranquila](#)] (*IPS*, 22/7/04)

July 23: Havana's Revolution Square hosted a mammoth alfresco rendition of Orff's "Carmina Burana", played by 200 classical-trained musicians and over 150 choir singers. Cuban troubadour Silvio Rodríguez, and composer-conductor Leo Brouwer, brought together pop and classical worlds, to the delight of a highly heterogeneous audience, which included Fidel Castro, as well as by Culture Minister and writer Abel Prieto, among other officials. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/7/04)

July 23: A former political prisoner whose case was highlighted by President Bush urged Cuba's government to hold a referendum on whether to change the communist island's political system. In a 10-page report called "The Cuba We Want," Leonardo Bruzón Avila and fellow dissident Carlos Ríos Otero called for the referendum and laid out a plan for Cuba's transition to a multiparty, democratic system and free-market economy. The report was delivered to the offices of Cuban Justice Minister Roberto Díaz Sotolongo. There was no public reaction by Fidel Castro's government to the recommendations. (*AP*, 23/7/04)

July 25: Esther Germán Valdéz, wife of Cuban dissident René Montes de Oca Martija, leader of the Cuban Pro Human Rights Party, affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation, stated that her husband was arrested in their home. After Montes de Oca's was released from prison back in October of 2003, where he served a three-year sentence for public activities against the Castro regime, he wrote a public letter to Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, promoter of the Varela Project, where he publicly recognized the popularity the project had achieved amongst the general population, and openly announced collaboration with the Varela Project and with any other effort geared towards the democratization of the island. (*Lux Info Press*, 25/7/04)

July 26: Cuban authorities have embarked on yet another anti-gay campaign, this time around focusing their efforts on transvestites, who are arrested if found wearing female clothing. Cross-dressers are being taken into custody or summoned and warned by police about their attire, while private clubs featuring transvestite shows have been closed down. (*BBC*, 26/7/04)

July 26: Political prisoner, Jorge Luis García Pérez 'Antúnez', initiated a hunger strike after prison authorities took away from him all his belongings, including his clothes. He has been kept in an isolation cell, in the Ariza prison, since

last September. Last July, the prisoner was harshly beaten in front of his relatives by prison guards during a family visit. (EFE, 26/7/04)

July 28: More than 61,400 Cubans have graduated from the island's 300 Computer Clubs. The centers are equipped with 5200 computers and have Internet access. According to reports, enrollment in computer courses has increased considerably over the past several years. Over the summer vacations, the computer clubs host some 50,000 users, in two-week courses. (Radio Habana Cuba, 28/7/04)

July 28: Cuban dissident Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero, one of the 75 Fidel Castro opponents sentenced to lengthy prison terms a year ago, has spent more than two months in a confinement cell for demanding his "prisoner of conscience" status be respected, his wife said. Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva told the press that her husband, sentenced to 20 years, "has been punished for 64 days in a confined cell, without proper access to food, sun or water fit to drink." Garcia said that prison authorities in Pinar del Rio, west of Havana, told her that her husband will remain in the confinement cell if he refuses to get along with other prisoners. According to Garcia, Cuban penitentiary regulations stipulate that a prisoner can only be confined to these special cells for a maximum of 21 days and "my husband has served that three times over." "He does not wish to be with other prisoners, but rather treated as a prisoner of conscience," Garcia told the press in a telephone interview from her home in Matanzas, east of Havana. (EFE, 28/7/04)

July 30: Cuba's special municipality of the Isle of Youth, located south of Havana, has registered its lowest infant mortality rate on record -- 3.7 deaths for every 1000 live births. (Radio Habana Cuba, 30/7/04)

Economy

July 2: The installation of 50 new water pumps in the eastern Cuban province of Camagüey could help alleviate the effects of the severe drought that is currently afflicting much of the island. The pumps are being built by the Centre for Applied Technology (CITA). Principal CITA engineer Boris Manzanares told the press that the pumps were initially scheduled for installation in November, but technicians have been working around the clock to bring that date forward. (Radio Habana Cuba, 2/7/04)

July 3: Cuba and the People's Republic of China have agreed to jointly produce some 15 million plastic bags of parenteral sera a year. For this purpose, a plant is being built, as replacement to an older one operating for the last 15 years. As part of the investment, the Eastern Pharmaceutical Laboratory Enterprise is planning a second project to incorporate the production of plastic bags to substitute glass containers. (Prensa Latina, 3/7/04)

July 3: A tornado with winds up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour left 17 people injured and damaged some 200 homes as it roared through the eastern Cuban city of Manzanillo, local television reported. The high winds knocked down or partially damaged houses, roofs and walls while injuring residents of the port city located 906 kilometers (563 miles) east of Havana. (EFE, 3/7/04)

July 4: Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi underlined the need for expansion of trade and economic cooperation with the Latin American state of Cuba, it was reported. In a meeting in Havana with the Cuban Minister of Government, Ricardo Cabrisas, Kharrazi declared that the two countries' interests in further economic cooperation would prepare the ground for provision of more facilities, according to the Press and Information Department at Iran's Foreign Ministry. He also underlined the importance of mutual cooperation between Iran and Cuba in agricultural, industrial and scientific fields as well as participation of Iranian businessmen in Cuba's international exhibition in the current year. Regarding Iran's readiness to supply Cuba with consultation in the energy sector, Kharrazi stressed that Iranian firms enjoy outstanding capability in different fields of energy that could be used in the Caribbean. (IRNA, 5/7/04)

July 4: Between January and June, 412 forest fires broke out in Cuba, affecting natural forests covering nearly 6,048 ha, a man-made forest area of 5,398 ha, as well as 5,670 ha of marsh grass. According to Cuban Forest Ranger Corps (CGB) figures, the total economic loss is estimated at 16, 751, 306 pesos. (*Juventud Rebelde*, 4/7/04)

July 5: Brazil's largest oil company, and Cuba's national oil company, Cuba Petroleo, or Cupet, will together invest \$20 million to build a new lubricant plant in Cuba, a top director said. Nestor Cervero, the international director at Petrobras, as the federally-owned Brazilian group is known, said the plant is expected to go on-line in about two years. Its production will be sold on the Cuban market and exported to Central American countries. (*Dow Jones*, 5/7/04)

July 5: The city of Havana suffered a power outage for more than an hour, temporarily leaving at least 2 million people without electricity due to power line difficulties in central Cuba. Residents in the western provinces of Matanzas and Pinar del Rio were also affected by the outage, caused by malfunctioning high-voltage lines connecting the central cities of Santa Clara and Cienfuegos to Matanzas, according to Union Electrica, the country's power provider. (*AP*, 5/7/04)

July 5: Repsol's gamble in Cuba has attracted much attention. Last month, Spanish Repsol YPF hired a Norwegian drilling platform, the Eirik Raude, at a cost of around \$200,000 a day to search for oil in Cuban waters, in a narrow sector of the Gulf of Mexico off the northwestern coast. The venture, established with Cubapetróleo, the government-owned oil company, is being watched about as closely in Houston's executive suites as any in the energy industry. A significant find by Repsol would be a boon for Cuba, which imports most of its fuel, mainly from Venezuela, and often struggles to find the hard currency to pay the bills. More broadly, it could shake up the dynamics of oil production in the Gulf of Mexico, dominated for decades by the United States and Mexico. And a big oil discovery could change the political debate in the United States over the decades-old sanctions against Cuba, which now prohibits most commerce with the country. (*The New York Times*, 5/7/04)

July 6: Drought has dashed Cuba's plans to increase raw sugar output any time soon from the historic lows that followed the outdated industry's downsizing in 2002, though damage will depend on precipitation in the coming months, industry sources said this week. "The plan was to build on the 2003/2004 harvest of 2.52 million tonnes toward more than 3 million tonnes in 2006," a local economist and sugar expert said. "Now we are talking about holding the line, something that may prove impossible." Output in 2002/2003 was the lowest in more than 70 years at 2.2 million tonnes following the closure of 71 of 156 mills and a 50 percent cutback in the area dedicated to cane. Prolonged drought from the eastern to the central parts of Cuba has destroyed and stunted cane earmarked for the coming harvest, and slowed planting for 2006. (*Reuters*, 6/7/04)

July 7: The United Nations warned that thousands of people might be at risk due to a severe drought afflicting parts of western Cuba, and said it had approved an aid package for the affected provinces. The UN said it fears acute food shortages in the three western provinces of Holguin, Las Tunas and Camaguey "where the drought has been particularly intense." The UN has approved 161,000 dollars in aid for the drought-hit areas, much of which will be spent to help over one hundred thousand children under five years of age, the UN said in a statement. "The drought has had a wide impact (...) there is also the possibility that infectious diseases could spread," UN representative Bruno Moro told the press after visiting Holguín with over 50 foreign diplomats. (*AFP*, 7/7/04)

July 9: While acknowledging Cuba's achievements in providing social services, a regional United Nations economics commission has recommended in a new report that the communist nation allow more private enterprise. The recommendations by the UN Economics Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) come as Cuba is moving in the opposite direction. The report, "Social Policy and Structural Reforms: Cuba at the Beginning of the 21st Century," was presented at a Havana hotel with UN commission members and Cuban officials in attendance, including Economics Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez. "It would be pertinent in the coming years to redesign the parameters of competition in the public, private and cooperative sectors, to redefine the role of the state in the economy," the report

stated. It suggested that Cuba could continue to maintain control over economic strategy while opening up to "diversification in relations of property, the decentralization of business activity and the role of the market." "It also would be good to be more flexible in the regulations concerning private activities and self-employment," the report said. (*La Nueva Cuba*, 11/7/04) [[ECLAC Report. "Social Policy and Structural Reforms: Cuba at the Beginning of the 21st Century"](#)]

July 12: Camagüey, the traditional heartland of Cuban cattle farming, has been hit particularly hard by the lack of rain in the traditional May, June and July wet season. The average rainfall across the island reached only a mean 0.7 mm a day from November 2003 to May 2004, making the current drought one of the worst on record. Two thirds of the 52 reservoirs in the central province are now totally dry and emergency standpipes and new wells have been created to maintain domestic water supplies. 160, 000 Camagüey residents now have no access to running water. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/7/04)

July 13: Cuban airline Aviaimport is to purchase two Il-96-300 jets from Russia's Voronezh-based Ilyushin Finans Co in line with an agreement signed by the parties, *Gazeta.Ru* reports. The Cuban firm will pay \$100 million for the jets, of which \$85 million will be repaid within 9 years in the form of a loan guaranteed by the Russian and Cuban governments. Each plane will be furnished with a double cabin and a VIP-cabin for Fidel Castro. (*Mos News*, 13/7/04)

July 13: In the wake of the Mexican authorities' decision to close the Havana branch of the Foreign Trade Bank (Bancomext), Mexican entrepreneurs are negotiating with Cuba to establish a representation office on the island. "We wish to open a representation office for those companies willing to deal with Cuba," said Cuauhtemoc Martínez, president of the National Chamber of Transformation Industries (CANACINTRA). (*AP*, 13/7/04)

July 14: Signaling a recent move toward a re-centralization of the Cuban economy, clients of the Bank of Credit and Commerce, created as part of the national banking system overhaul undertaken in the 90s, have been informed that, as of last July 1, its Havana branches have been turned over to the Metropolitan Bank. Officials with the latter said that the decision includes the Havana branches of the People's Savings Bank. (*EFE*, 14/7/04)

July 15: As a Spanish firm enters the last stage of petroleum exploration off Cuba's coast, officials and economists are growing increasingly hopeful of news that could profoundly affect the communist country's struggling economy. "Supposing there is petroleum, it would really good news for the country," said Jorge Mattar, a specialist on the Cuban economy for the UN Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean. Battered by world oil prices and a foreign exchange deficit, Cuba's spends "a good percentage" on the purchase of foreign petroleum, Mattar said. The Spanish petrochemicals company Repsol-YPF is currently doing exploratory drilling about 30 kilometers (18 miles) north of the island's coast in Cuban waters, spending US\$195,000 a day to rent a Norwegian platform since early June. (*AP*, 15/7/04)

July 15: Tourism in Cuba has increased by a massive 12% in the first three months of 2004, according to statements given by the Cuban Deputy Minister of Tourism Oscar González. González spoke at the II National Congress of Conference, Event and Incentive Vacation Organizers that concluded in Havana, where he also noted that the tourist arrival per day rate had also increased significantly. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 15/7/04)

July 21: According to a newly-released economic report, Cuba has managed to maintain its social achievements despite the serious economic problems affecting the island since the late 1980s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe. The report was released by the Santiago de Chile-based Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), along with economist Jorge Máttar and representatives of the United Nations Development Program and Cuba's National Institute of Economic Research. The ECLAC, UNDP and INIE study underlines the importance of placing social welfare at the centre of development policy, which requires maintaining high growth rates and dealing with challenges such as infrastructure (especially transportation and

housing) needs, the ageing population, care for vulnerable groups, and dealing with the differentiated effects of the crisis in the early 1990s, apparent in the relative backwardness of some Oriente provinces and major differences in productive performance between the different economic sectors. [[Cuba Able to Maintain Social Progress](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba, ECLAC, 21/7/04*)

July 24: Drilling of an exploratory well in Cuba's virgin Gulf of Mexico waters has been completed, a senior official said. Work on the well by Spain's Repsol YPF (REP.MC) began in June and captured the attention of the industry and governments due to its potential economic and political consequences. "The drilling has ended and the Spanish company is assessing the results. We don't know if there is good quality oil yet. We expect to be informed in two weeks," the Cuban official, who spoke on the condition he was not identified, said. (*Reuters, 25/7/04*)

July 27: Canadian mining and energy company Sherritt International is analyzing 3D seismic work on four blocks offshore Cuba, the company's investor relations and corporate affairs VP Ernie Lalonde told the press. Sherritt acquired exploration rights to the N16, N23, N24 and N33 deepwater blocks, which span 2 million acres, in 2002. "We have shot the seismic and we are doing the analysis," Lalonde said, without saying when the analysis could be completed. Cuba's government opened up 51 blocks to foreign investors in 1999 for their subsequent development as a means of stimulating oil production in light of the 255,000 barrel a day deficit that in the past was provided by the Soviet Union. (*BNAmericas, 27/7/04*)

July 27: Guillermo Rivera, a spokesman for the Mexican Foreign Trade Bank (Bancomext), confirmed that Mexico will be making progress in the on-going negotiations to collect the nearly US\$ 400 million the island owes. The official added that, although the matter has been taken to court, it is expected that part of the debt can be paid off through diplomatic channels with temporarily "frozen" assets pertaining to ETECSA, a Cuban government-owned telecommunications company. According to Rivera, the "frozen" assets amount to between US\$ 40 and US\$ 50 million, currently deposited in Italian accounts and resulting from the business operations of Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A. (ETECSA) and Telefónica Antillana S.A. (TelAn). (*Notimex, 27/7/04*)

July 28: Brazil's federal oil company Petroleo Brasileiro SA (Petrobras) has delayed the signing of a contract for the construction of a lubricant plant in Cuba in partnership with local oil monopoly Cubapetroleo (Cupet). The project, worth \$20 millions was supposed to be officially signed by Petrobras and Cupet officials on August 2 when the Brazilian company's president, Jose Eduardo Dutra, will visit the country. According to Petrobras, there has been no agreement on some aspects of the contract that are still subject of negotiations. The company said there was no possible new date for the contract to be signed. (*Latin American News Digest, 28/7/04*)

July 28: A new marina has begun operations on the western tip of Cuba in the province of Pinar del Río. The Gaviota Los Morros de Piedra provides services for boats passing through the area of the Guanahacabibes Peninsula, known for the conservation of its landscape and the beauty of its seabeds. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 28/7/04*)

July 29: Spanish oil and gas company Repsol YPF said it had found high-quality oil in an exploratory well in Cuban waters but it had decided the well was not commercially viable. "The first well drilled in Cuba has partially met our initial expectations," Chief Operating Officer Ramon Blanco told an analysts' conference call, according to a text provided by Repsol. "The existence of a petroleum system has been confirmed. Also we have been able to prove the presence of high-quality reservoirs," he said. "Nevertheless, the well has been considered non-commercial and, at this stage, the group is defining future exploration activities in the area," Blanco added. A company official said Repsol had found no gas. Michael Rodgers, a senior director at PCF Energy, a Washington-based energy consulting firm, said it is not uncommon for oil companies to come up empty in early exploration efforts, especially in untested areas such as Cuba's Gulf of Mexico waters. He said it may take several more wells before Repsol or another company learns whether the vast area off Cuba's coast contains enough light crude oil to justify investing \$1 billion or more to develop a major oil field. "It's rare that the first well in a frontier basin finds a commercial discovery," Rodgers said. "This is a

puzzle, and this is the first piece in the puzzle. The fact that they have proven the existence of a petroleum system is good news." (*Reuters, Chicago Tribune, 29/7/04*)

July 30: Cuban state-owned record company Egrem is getting an international launch for the first time in its 60-year history. The label's catalog features major names in Cuban music, including members of the Grammy Award-winning Buena Vista Social Club: Compay Segundo, Ruben Gonzalez, Omara Portuondo and Ibrahim Ferrer. Egrem will enter the UK market with 10 CDs to be released through a deal with Beckenham, England-based Proper Music Distribution. Similar independent deals are set for other European territories in coming months. (*Reuters, 30/7/04*)

Exile Community

July 7: Under the slogan "For Democracy in Cuba" and over the course of several days, Spain-based Cuban exiles' associations will attempt to "educate" the Spanish public about crimes committed by Fidel Castro's regime. Outside the National Library, a series of posters have been set up, shaping the word "democracy" and bearing the names of over 10,000 Cubans shot by firing squad for their political convictions, or whose whereabouts are unknown. (*Europa Press, 7/7/04*)

July 7: With the goal to have Cuba join the Union, a political organization has been incorporated in Delaware, U.S., under the name "Statehood for Cuba Inc." According to a press release the organization seeks to "promote statehood as a political and economic option for Cuba, once democracy is restored." All five members of the board of directors are Cuban-born US citizens. (*EFE, 7/7/04*)

July 7: Miami's powerful Cuban exile community has welcomed a call from the most prominent member of the internal opposition on the communist-ruled island for an inclusive dialogue to chart a peaceful, vengeance-free transition to democracy in Cuba. Acceptance of the proposal from dissident Oswaldo Paya marks a change for some exile groups who earlier criticized him for his "Varela Project," a petition drive aimed at pushing the Fidel Castro regime to hold a referendum on political and economic reform. "That's the result of an arduous effort we've developed over months with organizations in Cuba - including Paya's - and in the exile community about a broad proposition that has been circulating for months in Cuba," Luis Zuñiga, director of the Cuban Liberty Council, told the press. "That's why Paya changed," he said. The CLC maintained that the Varela Project "validates the communist regime by not calling for free elections but ones under the communist constitution" and because "it excludes the exile community." "This time Paya's call is inclusive and seeks deeper changes than simply putting dissidents in the communist parliament," said Zuñiga. (*EFE, 8/7/04*)

July 9: US President George W. Bush has lost significant support in Florida's Cuban-American community which, if the 2000 elections are a guide, could play a decisive role in November's voting, according to a poll released in Miami. The survey of 812 Cuban-Americans in several key south Florida counties shows Bush still claiming the backing of two-thirds of the community. While unusually strong for any ethnic voting bloc, that support is down from the nearly 82 percent of the Florida Cuban-American vote he received in 2000. The survey, commissioned by the William C Velasquez Institute and conducted by MirRam Global, suggests Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry could make serious inroads into the community, particularly by directing his appeal to Cuban-Americans who arrived in the United States after 1980 and those who were born in the country. [[Florida Cuban American Survey](#)] (*IPS, 9/7/04*)

July 13: The Democracy Movement vessels joined a Memorial Flotilla, with a dozen planes, jets and helicopters, in a series of air, sea and land activities, to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the "13 de Marzo" tugboat massacre by the Cuban government. Jorge A. Garcia remembered the loss of 14 of his relatives that day. 41 civilians, among them 10 children, were sent to sea graves when three Cuban boats, chased, rammed and sank the "13 de Marzo", the old

wooden tugboat in which they were fleeing the island. "In speeches, the Cuban government always was saying how it protected women and children," Mr. Garcia says today. This massacre "laid bare the true nature of Cuba's government." (*Movimiento Democracia, The Miami Herald, 13/7/04*)

July 20: Cuban exile and Spanish organizations have called for a demonstration in front of the Cuban embassy in Madrid requesting the release of political prisoners in the island. The groups' spokesman, Miguel Angel García Puñales, made the call trying to summon Plataforma Cuba Democracia ¡Ya! to the protest. The wife of imprisoned dissident, Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet, warned one of the organizations involved in the call that her husband's health is at risk due to bad conditions in jail. (*Europa Press, 20/7/04*)

July 28: The organization Cuba Democracia Ya!, made up of Cuban exiles residing in Spain, has asked Spanish President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero to reconsider his decision to pursue a "constructive dialogue" with Havana. (*Europa Press, 28/7/04*)

Foreign Affairs

July 1: The first course in Canadian Studies was opened in the eastern university of Ciego de Ávila (UNICA). Second Secretary of the Canadian Embassy in Cuba Jeff Senior attended the ceremony, which was held on the 137th anniversary of Canada's independence, and praised the new course for promoting mutual awareness and respect between the two countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 1/7/04*)

July 1: In a 24-hour flying visit to Cuba, the Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi condemned the US blockade of the island and called on developing countries to join in solidarity for a multi-polar world. Kharrazi arrived in Havana, invited by his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque, to hold high level talks on the bilateral relations between the two countries. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 2/7/04*)

July 2: Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, leader of oppositionist group Cuban Change, declared that he expects that the 36 th Congress of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) will consider the issue of relations with Latin America as one of its "priorities". He does not think, however, that there will be any reference to the recently implemented US measures against Fidel Castro's regime. Menoyo pointed out that President Bush's actions against Cuba amount to "interference" and reminded that Spain and the European Union have been "traditionally opposed to the US embargo and foreign interference (in another nation's affairs)." (*Europa Press, 2/7/04*)

July 4: Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerit says three Dominican students jailed in Cuba on drug-related charges will return home soon. "I'm happy to inform the country that the three students have left the Cuban jail and are now with the immigration authorities of Cuba and will return to Dominica in a few days," Skerit said. Skerit had obtained a presidential pardon for the students during his official visit to Havana earlier in April. The Dominican students had been found guilty of drug trafficking and cultivation and faced prison terms ranging from 10 to 18 years. (*Caribbean Media Corporation, 4/7/04*)

July 7: During the visit of President of the Mexican Council for Culture and the Arts to Cuba, Minister Sari Bermúdez said she expects an increased cultural exchange between her country and the island. Bermudez, invited by Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto, attended a meeting with Cuban artists at Havana's Wifredo Lam Contemporary Art Center. (*Prensa Latina, 8/7/04*)

July 8: The city of Santiago de Cuba was confirmed as the Caribbean capital of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Director of the Regional UNESCO Office Francisco Lacayo said

that there was no doubt of the importance of the eastern Cuban city in the culture of the Caribbean region. Lacayo was speaking at the end of a conference during the 24th Caribbean Festival, also known as the "Fire Festival". (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Cuban and Venezuelan Culture Ministers exchanged views on cultural policies in both countries with participants at the 24th Caribbean "Fire Festival" in Santiago de Cuba. The Cuban minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, and his Venezuelan counterpart Francisco Sesto, together with Venezuelan Ambassador to Cuba, Adán Chávez, met with foreign and local scholars and artists. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/04)

July 9: The Spanish Council of Ministers has appointed Carlos Alonso Zaldívar as the country's new ambassador to Cuba. Zaldívar, 58, a former secretary of the Spanish embassy in Washington and ambassador to Korea, also held different positions at the Spanish embassy in Israel. Since 2001 he had been posted to the Spanish Embassy in Rome in a Political Counselor capacity. Zaldívar was a member of the Communist Party's Executive Committee during the Franco Era and joined the PSOE when it rose to power, holding different posts within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency. (*Europa Press*, 9/7/04)

July 9: According to a Cuban government press release, Fidel Castro declared an official mourning period for Austrian President Thomas Klestil. Vienna and Havana have maintained diplomatic relations since July 1946 and, in 1999 and 2000, both nations' Deputy Foreign Ministers exchanged visits. (*AFP*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Madagascar Parliament's Speaker, Jean Lahiniriko, is meeting with Cuban top government officials, as part of his two-day visit to Cuba. Lahiniriko's agenda includes talks with Cuban Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Cuba, a member of the Montevideo-based Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), was excluded from the regulations-prescribed rotation of that regional body's Committee of Representatives' Chairman and Vice-chairman duties. Although, according to ALADI regulations, the Chairman and Vice-chairman posts are to be held on a rotational basis and in alphabetical fashion, when Colombian Ambassador Claudia Turbay took over as Chairman, the remaining Permanent Representatives passed over Cuba, and unanimously nominated the Ecuadorian ambassador as Turbay's replacement in 6 months from now. (*Europa Press*, 9/7/04)

July 9: The Japanese government has donated a state-of-the-art colonoscope to the Institute of Gastroenterology in Havana, with an aim to help further improve the Cuban national health system. The device is Video Colonoscope Olympus Exera 160, which was presented to the Cuban medical institution through the International Cooperation Agency of Japan (JICA). (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/04)

July 10: Cuba's Foreign Ministry said that it was holding one of Colombia's top drug kingpins, Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante. Bustamante, alias Rasguno, was captured when he entered the country on a false passport. The top figure in the Northern Valle drug cartel was being held at an Interior Ministry center for crimes against state security, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. [[Información del MINREX](#)] (*CNN*, 10/7/04)

July 10: Colombian officials seeking the extradition of a reputed drug lord who was being held in Cuba met with diplomats at their nation's embassy. Three men and a woman in civilian clothes were seen leaving the Colombian Embassy. They declined to give their names or answer questions about the arrest of Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante. The men did, however, confirm they had just flown in from Bogota, Colombia. "It's in the hands of Cuban authorities," Colombian Army Colonel Eleuterio Mora, who is attached to the embassy, said of the case. "They know more than anyone." (*CNN*, 10/7/04)

July 10: Police are still looking into an incident at the Cuban embassy in Puerto España that resulted in Ambassador Félix Raúl Rojas being physically assaulted and robbed of US\$ 6,000. Having just made the bank withdrawal, Rojas was at home when he was held up at gunpoint by three individuals who had climbed the property perimeter wall, said the police. Both the ambassador and a visitor were beaten up. (*AFP*, 11/7/04)

July 13: Cuba's anti-narcotics agency is actively working with Colombian authorities in their investigation of a major Colombian drug lord arrested in Havana, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. But Perez Roque said it was too soon to say if Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante would be sent back to Colombia. The foreign minister said Colombian officials had not yet presented a formal extradition request. If returned to his homeland, the Colombian government would likely arrange for his extradition to the United States, where he and two other kingpins were indicted earlier this year by a federal grand jury in New York on charges of conspiracy, money laundering and drug charges. [For more on this, see US-Cuba Relations] (*AP*, 13/7/04)

July 13: The Foreign Affairs Minister of Mozambique Leonardo Santos arrived in Cuba on a four-day official visit that will include talks with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. Santos, who is accompanied by Mozambique's Ambassador to Cuba Jeronimo Joao Chivavi and the National Human Resources Director Jorge Tomo, will also meet other top Cuban officials including the Public Health Minister and the Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/7/04)

July 13: The Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque, met with the Minister of Foreign and Political Affairs, Economic Planning and Justice of the Republic of San Marino, Fabio Berardi. Berardi arrived for his first official visit to the Caribbean nation and will discuss issues of Cuba-San Marino bilateral cooperation at regional and international levels. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 13/7/04)

July 13: Mexico is prepared to normalize its troubled diplomatic relations with Cuba, but the Caribbean island will have some explaining to do first about recent disagreements, a top Mexican official said. "Once these explanations have been given, Mexico is ready to normalize relations" by sending its ambassador back to Cuba, said Miguel Hakim, Mexico's assistant secretary for Latin American affairs. (*AP*, 13/7/04)

July 14: The Cuban Catholic Bishop's Conference informed that a Mexican Episcopal Conference (CEM) delegation, led by its president, Monsignor José Guadalupe Martín Rábago, arrived in Cuba for a religious visit. The Mexican clergymen will meet with the local bishops, until the arrival of Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez, who will attempt to mend diplomatic fences between the two nations with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Pérez Roque. (*AFP*, 14/7/04)

July 15: Cuban Ambassador to Belize Regla Díaz Hernández has confirmed that a Cuban diplomat posted to her embassy defected early this month and his whereabouts are as yet unknown. Isaac Abreu Fajardo, the embassy's Commercial Attaché for a year, defected with his wife and two children. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 15/7/04)

July 15: Jorge Moragas, Foreign Relations Secretary of Spain's Popular Party (PP), completed his visit to Cuba, where he met with oppositionists to Fidel Castro's regime. Among those he spoke to were Varela Project leader Oswaldo Payá and incarcerated journalist Raúl Rivero's wife, Blanca Guerra. However, Moragas has said that some PSOE members advocate searching for a "more active communications channel with the regime." (*Europa Press*, 15/7/04)

July 15: Cuba offered to build training centers for nurses to handle AIDS patients in Caribbean nations and provide antiretroviral drugs to fight the pandemic. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque made the offer at a one-day meeting with counterparts from the Caribbean Community (Caricom). "From the social standpoint, the major challenge ahead of us is the fight against HIV/AIDS," Perez Roque said. He added that economic ties between Cuba and the 15-member regional Caricom bloc, whose members include Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad, had not developed sufficiently,

despite a trade agreement signed four years ago. The meeting is the first between Caricom and Cuban foreign ministers and comes in the wake of an agreement made during a 2002 Caricom summit to establish closer ties. At that summit it was agreed that Caricom countries and Cuba would meet every three years. (*AFP, Reuters, 15/7/04*)

July 15: CARICOM members rejected the recent tightening of the US embargo against Cuba and expressed concern over the impact of Washington's measures on "stability and security" throughout the Caribbean region. Foreign ministers from thirteen member countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) attended the 1st CARICOM-Cuba Ministerial Meeting in Havana. (*EFE, 15/7/04*)

July 15: The European Union welcomed the recent release of some dissidents in Cuba, but said the gesture was not enough. A statement made in Brussels by the EU presidency and distributed in Havana called the freeing of six of the 75 dissidents sentenced last year to jail terms of up to 28 years a "positive gesture." But it added that "the aim continues to be the immediate release of all political prisoners." [[Declaration by the Presidency Concerning the Release of Political Prisoners](#)] (*Reuters, 15/7/04*)

July 15: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said in Havana that Cuba and Mozambique are faced with the enormous challenges of a globalized world, according to Granma newspaper. The Mozambican official voiced his country's willingness to continue bilateral cooperation in the fields of health and education and to broaden other sectors to the benefit of both countries. The Mozambican delegation held talks with Cuba's Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer, Education Minister Luis Ignacio Gomez and Higher Education Minister Fernando Vecino Alegret. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 15/7/04*)

July 16: Latin American scientists in Bangkok warned that the AIDS epidemic in Cuba, where nearly every HIV subtype has been detected, has turned the Caribbean island into a powder keg. "Cuba is a ticking time bomb," said Dr. Gloria Echevarría, Immunology Professor at the University of Venezuela's Medical School and member of the International AIDS Society's governing body. The same concern was shared by Prof. Luis Enrique Soto, head of Molecular Virology Research at the department of Communicable Diseases of the Mexican National Institute of Medical Sciences and Nutrition, as well as Ivette Lorenzana de Rivera, a microbiologist with the National University of Honduras. (*EFE, 16/7/04*)

July 16: Two Cuban dissidents who arrived in Paris on a flight from Havana are being held at Charles de Gaulle airport, following their request for political asylum in France. "We surrendered to the French police and asked for political asylum," said Mario Osvaldo Ruiz Fleites, 48, a former army officer and member of the anti-Castro group "Todos Unidos" (All United). Ruiz Fleites traveled with fellow Cuban Raúl Rolando Ruiz Fernández, 46. (*El Nuevo Herald, 17/7/04*)

July 17: The Mexican and Cuban foreign ministers have announced they will reinstate ambassadors to each other's countries on July 26, normalizing official relations after a diplomatic spat several months ago. The two countries still had issues to work out, but they were back on the road to reconciliation, the ministers told a press conference after their meeting. "July 26th the ambassadors will be back in their respective posts," Perez Roque said. The date marks the start of Castro's revolution and is an important Cuban holiday. "We've made progress, and agreed on the importance of working in favor of bilateral relations," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Luis Ernesto Derbez, Mexico's foreign minister, called the move "positive" and said the two countries would continue "resolving issue by issue." "Not everything has been resolved by these conversations, but we believe it is a first step," Perez Roque said. [[Press Conference](#)] (*CNN, Reuters, EFE, 17/7/04*)

July 19: Just back from a trip to Cuba designed to patch up strained relations, Mexico's foreign minister said that the issue of respect for human rights continues "to separate" the two nations. Interviewed over Mexican radio, Derbez said the arrangement he had hammered out with Perez Roque had not been arrived at "by force," but by virtue of the two

governments' shared understanding "that it would be important to clarify" their differences and restore trust in each other. The two friends can move forward while holding differing views on human rights, Derbez told W-Radio. "We both understand clearly that the issue that separates us" is human rights, in which Mexico is not focusing on just one country but on "the idea of improving human rights" in general, Derbez said. (*EFE*, 19/7/04)

July 19: The regional director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Alfredo Missair, has praised Cuba's achievements in education. The UN official, who recently attended an educational meeting in the Cuban capital, said that such achievements in a Latin American country are extraordinary. During a visit to an institution developing the preschool teaching program in Cuba, Missair said participants to the meeting agreed to maintain contact with the center. He said that this would favor a dialogue supporting policies aimed to develop intelligence as a child's right. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 19/7/04)

July 20: One of the most prestigious Spanish artists in contemporary dance, Antonio Gades, died of cancer in Madrid at the age of 67. The Cuban press lamented the loss of a dancer who was a supporter of the Cuban Revolution. In the 70's, Gades collaborated with the Cuban National Ballet choreographing and dancing "Ad Libitum", with Alicia Alonso, and Blood Weddings (*Bodas de Sangre*), a ballet based on Federico García Lorca's play. Following his expressed wishes, a simple, private funeral was held in Madrid and the dancer's ashes were to be taken to Cuba. (*Europa Press, Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/7/04)

July 20: After returning from Spain, Cuban oppositionist Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo said that he held talks in Madrid with Spanish government's president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and other authorities. Menoyo considers that Rodríguez Zapatero has the will to "improve relations with Cuba", in spite of "Cuba's problems with political prisoners". "Spain should follow the European Union's position in this regard," he said. "It would be very good if Cuba makes a gesture, releases political prisoners, and allows an independent opposition in the island", he said. "That would be a positive move, and would help change Cuba's image and position in the world", Menoyo said to the foreign press. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 20/7/04)

July 20: Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) has decorated Fidel Castro with the Order and Medal Always Towards the Light, Towards the Truth, 25 Years of Sandinista Revolution. The decision was announced to a crowd of some 400,000 Nicaraguans who participated in the main event on the Revolution's anniversary, held in Managua's John Paul II Square. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/7/04)

July 20: Cuba emphasized at the United Nations that respect and protection of human rights must transcend all borders and not acquiesce to political considerations of any description. The declaration was made by the Vice Director of the Cuban Foreign Ministry Roberto Reyes as part of a resolution project that seeks to protect human rights within the context of military campaigns in the so called "war on terror" presented to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/7/04)

July 21: Uruguayan Foreign Minister Didier Operti said Cuba has not met the conditions, including accepting human rights inspections by the United Nations, to restore diplomatic relations. The foreign minister responded to statements by the South American nation's leading presidential candidates, who said they would restore relations with the island if they won the October elections. "Diplomatic relations are neither established forever, nor broken forever," Operti said, adding that "if the conditions for re-establishing links with Cuba were present today, they would be restored today." To restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, "it would first be necessary" for Havana to allow the United Nations to "verify the situation of human rights" on the island, Operti said. (*EFE*, 21/7/04)

July 22: German police and Prosecutor's Office sources informed that the lifeless body of a 20-year-old Cuban stowaway was found in the wheel-well of an airplane when it landed in Düsseldorf. The aircraft had stopped in Cuba and had since been flying between the Dominican Republic and Düsseldorf. According to a passport he was carrying,

the young man, who died from hypothermia, was Cuban, said Johannes Mocken, a spokesman with the North-Rhine-Wesphalia Prosecutor's Office. (*AFP*, 22/7/04)

July 22: According to Col. Oscar Naranjo, head of the Colombian Judicial Police Directorate, Hernando Gómez Bustamante, a.k.a. "Rasguño" (Scratch), a Colombian drug kingpin high on the FBI's most-wanted list who was apprehended in Cuba in early July, will not be handed over to Colombia any time soon. Cuban authorities informed that Gómez would remain in their custody while his possible activities on the island are further investigated. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 23/7/04)

July 25: The ambassadors for Cuba and Mexico returned to their posts, marking the end of a three-month diplomatic spat between Cuba and the country that used to be its strongest ally in Latin America. Cuban Ambassador Jorge Bolaños and Mexican Ambassador Roberta Lajous Vargas returned to their posts on the 51st anniversary of a failed rebel attack that gave a name to Castro's cause — the July 26 Movement — and laid the groundwork for the Cuban leader's victory over the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. "I am supremely happy to return to Mexico, after a brief and involuntary absence," Bolaños said. "Cuba and Mexico are two nations that geography made neighbors, and that our histories and heroes, both Cuban and Mexican, have united forever." Mexican Ambassador Roberta Lajous Vargas returned to Havana "with the aim of working toward a new vision of the future," Mexico's Foreign Relations Department said in a press statement. (*The Globe and Mail, Det New.Com*, 25/7/04)

July 25: Panamanian Ambassador to Cuba, Abraham Bárcenas, has confirmed that Consul Oscar Alarcón and himself are being investigated in Panama on charges of alleged involvement in document forgery and corruption while issuing Panamanian visas to Cubans. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 25/7/04)

July 26: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez commended Cuban aid in helping his country develop educational and health care programs for the benefit of long-excluded social groups, Cuba's Granma newspaper published. Chavez acknowledged the Cuban medical staff's substantial cooperation, saying they have already assisted over 64 million cases for free in little more than a year, as part of the "Misión Barrio Adentro" (In the Neighborhood Mission), a campaign sponsored by the president himself. (*Prensa Latina*, 26/7/04)

July 30: Cuba's Acting Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez de Estenoz held talks with the president of the 58th Session of the UN General Assembly, Julian Robert Hunte. The UN official is also the foreign minister of Cuba's Caribbean neighbor, Saint Lucia. Hunte told reporters that discussion with Cuban officials concerned viewpoints on the revitalization of the United Nations General Assembly and the transformation of the UN Security Council. The UN official said that they also touched on topics related to the Caribbean, specifically regarding the possibility of establishing associations in different fields of common interest and the relationship between CARICOM and Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/7/04)

July 30: The first eight South African doctors graduated in Cuban schools of medicine have received their certificates in an official ceremony in their country. Following additional studies in South Africa, they recently passed the state examination at the University of Transkai School of Medicine in Eastern Cape province. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/7/04)

July 30: Six Cuban balseros are missing after they left for Honduras in a raft. Jorge Luis Eguiguren Rodriguez, and 11 other men left Havana in the late-night darkness on July 6. They planned to go to Honduras, using a channel where the currents and winds were in their favor. Some days later, four of the men drowned. Six wanted to keep going, but the two remaining survivors fought to return to Cuba. They argued. Finally, they cut off a piece of the raft and split into two parties. When the two men got back to Cuba, they recounted what happened. From the six, there has been no word. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/7/04)

July 30: Sources of the 11th Latin American Brigade of Solidarity and Voluntary Work informed that one hundred Colombians volunteers would arrive in Cuba. As in previous years, the Camilo Cienfuegos Corporation of Solidarity with Cuba (CORSOLCUBA), chaired by John Jaime Posada, will have the largest representation with 74 people, while the rest belongs to the Jose Marti y Perez Friendship and Solidarity Corporation. Posada said that CORSOLCUBA would comprise citizens from Cali and the provinces of Antioquia, Norte de Santander and Meta, representing various sectors of the social and political life in Colombia. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/7/04)

Terrorism

July 6: A Panamanian court has upheld rulings against Luis Posada Carriles and other three Cubans on charges of illegal possession of explosives, association to commit delinquent acts and crimes against public safety. The Second Higher Court of Justice denied a petition for a writ of *habeas corpus* filed by Posada Carriles's attorney. (*AFP*, 6/7/04)

July 14: A video of US forces quelling disturbances at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, facility were shown to members of the Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, the office of Senator Patrick Leahy said. Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the committee, had requested in May to see the videos after a British newspaper reported on the existence of such material at the US naval facility where suspected al Qaeda and Taliban members or collaborators are being held. According to Leahy's office, General Jay Hood -- the commander of the Guantanamo facility -- brought DVDs to a meeting with Leahy and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. (*CNN*, 14/7/04)

July 15: Appeals by defense attorneys for convicted terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to have him and several accomplices released from prison into house arrest could be the first stage of a possible escape plan, the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry warned. The Cuban Foreign Ministry warned against providing any conditions that could favor a jailbreak, especially considering that Posada Carriles and Jiménez Escobedo had previously escaped from prisons in Venezuela and Mexico. [[Nota de Prensa](#)] (*AFP*, 15/7/04)

July 15: Panamanian authorities responded to the Cuban warning on a potential jailbreak by Posada Carriles with assurances that security would remain tight around the convicted terrorist. The Panamanian Foreign Affairs Ministry issued an official statement calling the Cuban warning as "unfounded". (*AP*, 15/7/04)

US-Cuba Relations

July 1: Cuba's parliament speaker, Ricardo Alarcon, painted a bleak picture of what the communist nation would be like if a US plan for a "Free Cuba" ever became reality. Speaking at a general meeting of Cuba's National Assembly attended by Fidel Castro and Defense Minister Raul Castro, Alarcon said that under such a plan Cubans would have their property taken away, lose free access to education and health care and pensions for the elderly would disappear. The United States wants to "convert our country into an American territory, and subject our people to slavery," said Alarcon, the president of the assembly. (*AP*, 1/7/04)

July 1: The Cuban National Assembly issued a strong statement condemning Washington's anti-Cuba measures and the objective of destroying the Cuban nation. The island's parliament passed the document during a session that was attended by both Fidel Castro and Raul Castro. The statement passed by the Cuban parliament says the US measures seek to intensify Washington's economic war against Cuba, encourage internal subversion, step up anti-Cuba

propaganda and pressure other countries to join in isolating Cuba - all with the aim of creating conditions for a direct military aggression against the island. [[Statement by the National Assembly](#)] (AIN, 1/7/04)

July 1: The US Congress TV station expressed interest in the TV broadcast of the Cuban parliamentary session dealing with the impact of the new batch of measures against Cuba implemented by Washington, said Fidel Castro following the debates and the approval of a declaration on that issue. (AFP, 1/7/04)

July 1: The US Coast Guard returned to Cuba 23 migrants who were found at sea in the past week, officials said. Two groups of Cubans were spotted on rafts by a Coast Guard jet on June 27, about 25 miles southwest of Key West. A cutter took 10 migrants from the first raft and 12 from the second, the Coast Guard said. (AP, 1/7/04)

July 1: Citing the US Supreme Court ruling that gave suspected terrorists at Guantánamo the right to challenge their captivity in federal court, advocates for Cuban and Haitian refugees at the US Navy base said that they too should be allowed to come to the United States to press their case for asylum. The 38 Cubans and 14 Haitians -- including at least four children -- have already cleared an initial hurdle: proving credible fear of political persecution if returned to their countries. But US policy prevents them from entering this country, even though many of them have relatives in South Florida. The State Department has been unable to find a third country to take these refugees -- some of whom have languished at Guantánamo for three years. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/7/04)

July 2: The island's coalition of writers and artists celebrated the anniversary of US independence by paying homage to the late writer Ernest Hemingway. The decision to focus their celebration on Hemingway, who made pre-revolutionary Cuba his home for many years, represents "the desire to approach the true values of the American culture, and demonstrate that there exists no animosity toward the American people," said Lisandro Otero, a Cuban writer. Otero spoke to about 100 members of the coalition attending a conference on Hemingway and his links to Cuba. The group also planned a gala concert in Havana to mark the Fourth of July celebration of the US Independence Day. (*The Globe and Mail*, 4/7/04)

July 4: New US restrictions towards Cuba have caused an outcry from Democrats and some Republicans. They are complaining that the Bush administration is causing suffering among the people it is wooing politically. "Why would we be promoting something that's so antifamily?" said Representative Jo Ann Emerson, Republican of Missouri, worrying aloud that the measures could turn some critical votes against President Bush in his reelection campaign. "I think it will alienate Cuban-Americans who would otherwise be inclined to support the president, because he has been so strong against the Cuban regime." The issue "very much" could affect the outcome of the Florida presidential race, said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican of Arizona. "I think we've been very close to the tipping point for awhile, and now we've crossed it," he said. (*The Boston Globe*, 4/7/04)

July 5: American medical students in Cuba have rushed back to the United States, missing their final exams, over fears that US authorities will jail them, fine them thousands of dollars, or revoke their citizenship for studying medicine on the island. "The majority of the students have left," said one student, of New York. James Cason, the top US diplomat in Cuba, said he wasn't aware the American students were cutting their education short. "It wasn't our intention," he said. "We'll have to get word to them somehow." (*Knight Ridder Tribune*, 5/7/04)

July 4: The 35th Contingent of the Venceremos (We Will Prevail) Brigade arrived in Santiago de Cuba, in open defiance of Washington's newly tightened restrictions on travel to the island. The group, made up of 81 US citizens from different backgrounds and states, flew to Cuba from Canada and plans to hold several meetings with the community and engage in agricultural and other activities. Venceremos was founded in the United States in 1969 and made its first visit a few months later, helping with that year's sugar harvest. (*Radio Habana Cuba, EFE*, 5/7/04)

July 4: The African Awareness Association arrived in Havana in rejection of the Bush administration's new measures aimed at strengthening Washington's economic blockade against the island. (*Radio Habana Cuba, EFE, 5/7/04*)

July 7: Days before tighter restrictions on travel to Cuba went into effect, Secretary of State Colin Powell quietly agreed to tweak the new rules to allow a small group of US students attending medical school on the island to continue to do so. Nearly 80 US students -- mostly black and Hispanic -- are enrolled in Cuba's Latin American Medical School. Located on the outskirts of Havana on the campus of the country's old naval academy, it has more than 3,000 students from Africa, Central and South America, plus the US contingent. The students are attending school in Cuba "because our constituents could not -- and still cannot -- afford the high cost of medical education in the United States," 28 black and Hispanic members of Congress said in a letter to Powell. They asked him to ensure that the students "be permitted to continue their studies uninterrupted." That's exactly what Powell has done. After reading their missive, he scribbled on the letter: "We ought to find a way to fix this," according to a State Department spokesman. (*USA Today, 7/7/04*)

July 7: If senator John Kerry wins US presidential elections, "he will change US politics towards Cuba the same way he will be changing politics towards other international issues", Jose Villareal, co-president of the Democratic national electoral campaign, said to the press. "The international community, especially those countries south of the US border, will be invited to build a strategy that could bring dictatorship in Cuba to an end", he added. Kerry "will not follow the same regulations decided by president Bush", Raul Grijalva, lawmaker from Arizona, said. Grijalva stated that strengthening the embargo is "a punishment to the Cuban community living in Florida, that are not allowed to provide aid to their relatives". "This Bush-style politics is something that will change under Kerry-Edwards presidency", the lawmaker from Arizona said. (*El Nuevo Herald, 8/7/04*)

July 7: In a dialogue between journalist Andres Oppenheimer and senator John Kerry, broadcast by the TV program "Oppenheimer introduces", the US Democratic presidential candidate was tough on Fidel Castro. Oppenheimer asked Kerry how he would manage to make that Lula, Kirchner, and all Latin American presidents close to Castro, be exerting more pressures on the Cuban dictator in order to open the island to democracy. "One of the reasons is that we [the US] have not been completely committed to that goal", Kerry answered. "The US hasn't shown the same commitment it demonstrated [towards Latin America] when the Alliance for Progress took place, nor when former president Bill Clinton organized the Americas Summit (...)" "I don't like the Castro government, and I say it clear". "Behind that romantic façade, built by some journalists and others, there is a man that kills those who oppose him". "I unconditionally support Cuban dissidents". "I want to give democracy and change in the island full power; and I think that if we extend our hands to those Latin American leaders in a respectful, considered and committed way, we will be able to get back their commitment and respect", Kerry added. (*El Tiempo, 8/7/04*)

July 7: The House dealt an election-season setback to President Bush by voting to overturn restrictions his administration has issued on the gift parcels that Americans can send to family members in Cuba. The 221-194 vote was won by a coalition in which Democrats were joined by nearly four dozen farm-state and free-trade Republicans to rebuff the president. The debate was an emotional one, as the debates over Cuba policy often are. "It's hard to think of an economic sanction that does more harm to the welfare of families in Cuba, or does more to make the US seem mean-spirited toward families who already have the misfortune to live under communism," said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, one of the sponsors. Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Republican-Florida, a Cuban-American, said the proposal was "dishonest" and "condescending," adding, "It seeks to undermine an entire policy President Bush has just implemented (...) to hasten the Democratic transition in Cuba." (*AP, 8/7/04*)

July 7: A caravan of vehicles carrying 100 tons of goods crossed into Mexico from Texas bound for Cuba in a show of civil disobedience toward the US embargo of the communist-run island. It is the 15th year the Pastors for Peace humanitarian organization has delivered food, medicine and equipment to Cuba, but this year's trip comes as the Bush administration has toughened travel restrictions to put pressure on Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Pastors for Peace is an

arm of the Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization, "whose mission is to help forward the struggles of oppressed people for justice and self-determination," according to a statement on its web site. (*Reuters*, 7/7/04)

July 7: The US Treasury Department has denied a license to a delegation of American designers to travel to Cuba to attend the 7th Design Meeting Havana 2004. Kristina Goodrich, President of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), sent a message to participants of some 10 nations who are on hand for the event expressing her regret for missing the opportunity of exchanging with her colleagues. (*AIN*, 7/7/04)

July 7: The United States repatriated 12 Cuban rafters detained in two separate operations by the Coast Guard off the coast of Florida. The Coast Guard in Miami said agents in a helicopter detected the first group, two Cubans on a raft, and they were intercepted 74 kilometers (50 miles) south of Key West by a Coast Guard vessel. Coast Guard agents rescued the second group, 10 Cubans on a raft, in international waters north of the communist-ruled island, providing them with life jackets, water, food and medical attention. (*EFE*, 7/7/04)

July 8: Despite a telephone call from the White House asking him not to do so, Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona, still persuaded his House colleagues to vote to overturn President Bush's new policies restricting the sending of gift parcels to Cuba. "The administration did ask Mr. Flake to withdraw the amendment," Flake spokesman Matthew Specht said. That telephone request came from the White House's Office of Legislative Affairs just before the House's 221-194 approval of Flake's measure, a vote won with a coalition of Democrats and 46 farm-state and free-trade Republicans. (*Republic Washington Bureau*, 9/7/04)

July 8: The Cuban government has confiscated the trademark for Havana Club rum and made an agreement with French liquor conglomerate Pernod Ricard to produce and market the product around the world. US Congress should take prompt action to strengthen protections for intellectual property and prevent foreign governments from profiting from confiscated trademarks, the U.S. Business and Industry Council said. The USBIC endorsed H.R. 4225 and its Senate counterpart S. 2373 -- legislation that would amend US trade law known as Section 211 (Department of Commerce and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1999). Both bills have substantial, bi-partisan support. "This legislation upholds the principle that stolen trademarks should not be recognized by the US government," said USBIC President Kevin L. Kearns. "Foreign regimes that confiscate private property should not find the United States to be a safe haven in which they can profit from their misdeeds." (*PRNewswire*, 8/7/04)

July 8: Elvira de la Vega Glen, now 95 and living in Miami, wants Club Med, the company that built a 337-room luxury hotel in her property, at Varadero Beach, Cuba, to pay her family for using their confiscated land. Glen's oceanfront property was confiscated after the family fled in 1959 by the Cuban government. "I don't see any reason why Club Med should be there," Glen said. "They didn't buy it from me. What would you think if someone just went ahead and built something on your land without asking? I'm furious." Glen and her son, now 60, filed a federal suit against French corporations Club Mediterranée and Club Mediterranée Group for "wrongful exploitation" of the family's property and "unjust enrichment." Club Med profited richly from the five-star resort, the suit claims, but refused to share any of the money with the Glens. The family wants compensation for the seven years the resort has been in business. The suit, to be filed in Miami, also seeks to show that by working with the Cuban government to develop the Varadero resort, Club Med violated the Trading with the Enemy Act. Club Med issued a statement from Paris on Wednesday saying it had not yet been served in the lawsuit and could not respond to specific allegations. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/7/04)

July 8: More than 75 members of the Juan Ruis Rivera Brigade left Puerto Rico on the first stage of an embargo-breaking solidarity mission to Cuba in open defiance of US authorities. The President of the Cuban Solidarity Committee in Puerto Rico, Milagros Rivera, told the press that the "brigadistas" would first cross over to the Dominican Republic from where they would catch a chartered flight to arrive in Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/7/04)

July 8: Biotechnology company Chiron Corp. (CHIR) admitted it illegally exported goods to Cuba and paid the US government \$168,500 in civil penalties, the US Treasury Department reported last month. The Emeryville, California-based company voluntarily disclosed to the department that a European subsidiary illegally shipped two vaccines for infants to Cuba between 1999 and 2002. "It was an inadvertent shipment on our part," said Chiron spokesman John Gallagher. He said Chiron is licensed to ship one type of pediatric vaccine through UNICEF to Cuba but inadvertently shipped two others not approved by the US government. (*AP*, 8/7/04)

July 8: The US Coast Guard unveiled new restrictions for US recreational vessels traveling to Cuba, changing its focus from preventing international incidents in Cuban waters to tightening the economic embargo against the island. The original restrictions were created by then-President Bill Clinton after two exile group planes were shot down over international waters in February 1996, hoping to avoid a similar situation. The new restrictions, part of the Bush administration's crackdown on travel to Cuba, prevent boaters from leaving any part of the United States without first getting a permit, not just from the Coast Guard, but also from the US Treasury and Commerce departments. It no longer matters whether boat operators intend to enter Cuban waters, Coast Guard Lt. Tony Russell said. Anyone who does so without a permit will be in violation of US policy, he said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/7/04)

July 9: The United States Treasury Department has denied a license to a delegation of US designers to travel to Cuba for the 7th Design Meeting Havana 2004. Kristina Goodrich, President of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), sent a message to participants of some ten nations who are on hand for the event, which opened in the Cuban capital. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/7/04)

July 9: US and Cuban artists have joined hands in Havana, displaying engravings and photographs inspired by the harrowing images of the 9/11 tragedy in New York, in an exhibition entitled "Date With Angels". Opening the exhibition at Havana's Jose Marti memorial, Speaker of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, recalled the violence of the 9/11 attacks, how they shocked everybody, and how images, repeatedly played on television, brought pain and concern to millions all over the world. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/7/04)

July 9: Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón said that the US House of Representatives delivered a setback to the George W. Bush administration by voting against restrictions on gift packages that Cuban-Americans can send to family members on the island. Cuba's top legislator told reporters that the 221 to 194 vote demonstrates that a majority in the US Congress are opposed to Bush's measures against Cuba. Alarcón spoke at the opening of a photo exhibit by US and Cuban artists, inspired by the tragic images of the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/7/04)

July 9: The United States is accusing Cuba of "blatant distortions" in claiming that Washington intends to invade the island and evict people from their homes as part of a post-Castro occupation plan. Responding to an official Cuban statement issued on July 9, the State Department registered its disagreement in a four-page note sent to the Cuban diplomatic mission in Washington. The Cuban position had been set forth in a statement by National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon the day after new US penalties against Cuba took effect. The State Department note said Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have said repeatedly that the United States has no intention of invading Cuba. It added that Cuban authorities have refused US offers to directly inform the Cuban people of American policy, including the goal of a peaceful transition in Cuba. President Bush's directives are partly designed to curb the flow of US dollars to Cuba. Visits by Cuban-Americans to the island can be made only at three-year intervals instead of annually, with no humanitarian exceptions allowed. (*AP*, 15/7/04)

July 9: An appeals court ruling means a high-profile Cuban migrant smuggler may have his sentence reduced from life in prison to 13 years or less. A US federal appeals court has thrown out the longest prison term ever meted out to a South Florida migrant smuggler -- life in prison plus five years -- and ordered that he be sentenced within guidelines that call for fewer than 13 years. Cuban migrant smuggler Jorge "Bombino" Aleman, 39, was handed the heavy

sentence in 2002 after pleading guilty in a massive, multi-count smuggling case that resulted in the 2001 death of a 48-year-old Cuban woman fleeing the island. But the Atlanta-based US 11th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that US District Judge James Lawrence King "improperly considered" what King characterized as Aleman's "total callous disregard for human life" in sentencing Aleman to a much harsher punishment than anticipated in a plea agreement. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/7/04)

July 9: A Cuban dance company billed to perform at Las Vegas's legendary Stardust Casino this month defied Cuban authorities and applied for US visas, in a rare case of overt disobedience in communist-run Cuba. Fifty-three dancers, musicians and singers with the Havana Night company went to the US Interest Section for visa application interviews even though Cuban officials told them they should not travel to the United States for the five-week show. The National Union of Writers and Artists, or UNEAC, which holds their passports, had summoned the company to a meeting the same morning, but the dancers stayed away -- something unheard of in Cuba. "The dream of any singer is to perform in Las Vegas. It is a dream that can come true," said 18-year-old Osmany, who sings in the music and dance extravaganza. He declined to give his last name. (*Reuters*, 9/7/04)

July 10: Cuba's Foreign Ministry said that it was holding one of Colombia's top drug kingpins, Luis Hernando Gomez Bustamante. The United States has been offering a \$5 million reward for information leading to Bustamante's arrest. He was indicted last May on charges of drug-trafficking, money-laundering and racketeering. If convicted on all counts, he could face life in prison. However, there is no extradition agreement between Cuba and the United States. Bustamante also is wanted in Colombia, but it was unclear whether Cuba would agree to turn him over to that country or try him in Cuba. There were reports that if Bustamante were deported to Colombia, Colombian authorities planned to extradite him to the United States for trial. [For more on this, see Foreign Relations] (*CNN*, 10/7/04)

July 10: Cubans will no longer have to find pirated copies of the controversial film "Fahrenheit 9/11" in the island's illegal private video libraries because the government has decided to debut Michael Moore's documentary across the country this month. The film, a harsh critique of US President George W. Bush, will be shown at all the island's premiere movie theaters, official Cuban television news reported. (*EFE*, 10/7/04)

July 10: A group of Americans openly challenged the Bush administration's tough new restrictions on Cuba by traveling to the Communist-run island to donate 126 tons of aid gathered in the United States. Wearing T-shirts that said "Regime change in the US, not in Cuba," the 120 members of the Pastors for Peace humanitarian organization arrived in Havana from Mexico before a shipment that includes school buses, medicines, medical equipment, computers and books. "We have one purpose: to challenge our government's blockade of Cuba," said the group's leader, Baptist Rev. Lucius Walker. (*Reuters*, 10/7/04)

July 11: Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (Republican -Florida) released a statement denouncing John Kerry's two-sided Cuba strategy: "Once again, John Kerry is trying to be on both sides of an issue. He says he supports the Cuba embargo, but then he wants to allow travel, which is 90 percent of what the embargo is. Either he does not know what he is talking about or he is blatantly lying. Either way, Kerry is clearly incapable of handling foreign policy". "Kerry may claim to be 'committed to seeing the end to the Castro regime,' but he has a long record in the Senate of supporting whatever the anti-American, terrorist dictator Castro wants. While he claims to support policies that would hasten the end of Castro's regime, Kerry actually supports Castro-friendly policies that would strip the United States of the only leverage we have to encourage a democratic transition. Kerry's policy would provide Castro the funding he needs and wants to continue oppressing the Cuban people and would allow him to once again spread anti-American terrorism around the world -- not just today but after his death as well." (*NetforCuba*, 11/7/04)

July 13: The US State Department said Cuba had informed it of the arrest of an alleged Colombian drug kingpin wanted in the United States, but his possible extradition from the island remains unclear. "The Cuban government has informed us by our interests section in Havana that they've arrested an individual who claims to be Luis Hernandez

Gomez," department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters. "At this point, we're looking at it as a law enforcement matter and our law enforcement agencies are studying the situation," he said. Boucher referred to the Department of Justice for any comment on his possible extradition to the United States. [For more on this, see Foreign Affairs] (*AFP*, 13/7/04)

July 13: Cuban Health officials have refused US offers to vaccinate all children on the island, at a time, they added, when Washington has failed to completely immunize its own underage population. Medical personnel have also joined the ranks of those slamming the White House's proposal, especially because it comes attached to a previous ousting of the current government in the island, as part of a US project to hasten a political transition in Cuba. Doctor Concepción Campa, general director of Carlos Finlay medical Institute, said at a TV appearance that "our children do not need to be vaccinated by anyone, especially by those unable to render equal protection to their own children, and have come to the extreme of fining (a US) pharmaceutical firm for supplying us with two vaccines for children from 1999 to 2002." (*Prensa Latina*, 13/7/04)

July 14: "It is outright injustice, shocking, I hope it is settled soon," said Perez Roque in speaking of the US youth studying at the Latin American Medical School in Havana, whose studies were cut short because of the measures that Washington recently enforced. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/7/04)

July 15: The federal government has permitted a California biotechnology company to license three experimental cancer drugs from Cuba, making an exception to the Bush administration's policy tightly restricting trade with that country. The company, CancerVax had said late last year that it was trying to license the drugs and had been awaiting needed permission from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. That permission has been granted. CancerVax officials said that it was the first time an American biotechnology company had obtained permission to license a drug from Cuba, a country that some industry executives and scientists say is surprisingly strong in biotechnology for a developing nation. (*The New York Times*, 15/7/04)

July 15: A Cuban dissident who was once a State Security agent has requested asylum in the European Union, complaining the United States revoked his visa even though he served a six-year prison sentence in the communist-ruled island. Bernardo Arevalo Padron, who worked as an independent journalist, told the press that in April he obtained a refugee visa at the US Interests Section in Havana to travel to the United States. Arevalo Padron said he received a telegram from the Interests Section telling him his visa had been revoked "without the right to appeal," and his flight had been canceled. "I need to get out of the island. I am requesting a visa from the European Union countries," said Arevalo Padron, who had planned to leave Cuba with his wife. "We were left without work, without money, marked by the regime, and the Americans turned their backs on us," he said. (*EFE*, 15/7/04)

July 16: The International Committee for Justice and Freedom for the Five organized a meeting in Havana, to review the campaign in support of the five Cuban prisoners in the United States and to make plans for future actions. The meeting was addressed by the coordinator of the host committee, Graciela Ramírez and Gloria La Riva, coordinator of the US national campaign to free the five. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/7/04)

July 16: President Bush accused Fidel Castro of taking advantage of US goodwill in the past to foster child prostitution in Cuba, turning the island nation into what the president called a "major destination" for visitors seeking sex. In Florida, US President George W. Bush addressed a meeting organized by the Justice Department, its first conference on human trafficking, including sexual servitude. He used the occasion to criticize Cuba and its leader, Fidel Castro. "The regime in Havana, already one of the worst violators of human rights in the world, is adding to its crimes," Mr. Bush said. "The dictator welcomes sex tourism." Cuba has "replaced Southeast Asia as a destination for pedophiles and sex tourists," the president said, quoting from a recent study by Johns Hopkins University. His administration, Mr. Bush said, "has put a strategy in place to hasten the day when no Cuban child is exploited to finance a failed revolution and every Cuban will live in freedom." While pledging that he would give no quarter to countries and individuals who

engage in trafficking, Mr. Bush laced his remarks with references to his administration's policy of compassion for victims. (*The New York Times, The Miami Herald, 17/7/04*)

July 19: An immigration judge has issued an order to deport Jorge de Cárdenas Agostini, a Cuban detained in Miami on suspicion of having supervised a team of torturers targeting dissidents in Cuba in the 1990s. Nina Pruneda, a spokeswoman for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Miami, said: "Mr. de Cárdenas will be removed from the United States at some point, based on the final order of removal issued by an immigration judge." But Linda Osberg-Braun, de Cárdenas Agostini's lawyer, said she was working to have her client released instead. She declined to discuss the removal order. (*The Miami Herald, 19/7/04*)

July 19: Two separate groups of American activists returned without incident to US soil after deliberately defying new rules increasing travel restrictions to Cuba. About 90 members of the Venceremos Brigade reentered the country on foot in groups of 15, carrying banners and pulling suitcases behind them. Meanwhile, in Texas, about 100 volunteers with Pastors for Peace crossed the US-Mexican border over the Hidalgo International Bridge without any incident or arrests. Officials with the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, a division of the US Department of Homeland Security, said both groups reentered the country without incident. (*The Miami Herald, 19/7/04*)

July 20: A Cuban dissident said the US government revoked his visa after granting him political refugee status, prompting other opponents of Fidel Castro's communist government to express concern they are losing support from the United States. Some dissidents said they have also been denied visas or suddenly lost permission to enter the US Interest Section in Havana and use computers there. "They didn't give me an explanation. The guards at the door simply took away my pass," said dissident Gradys Muñoz. Vladimiro Roca, a leading dissident with the opposition group United For All Movement, said officials at the American mission "have really changed their treatment of some dissidents lately." Elizardo Sanchez, an activist who heads the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation, said the US government appeared to suspect that dissidents were working as undercover agents for Castro. "I am very surprised and worried about the possibility that the United States' immigration service is adopting unjust measures in the midst of a certain paranoia," Sanchez said. (*AP, 20/7/04*)

July 21: Cubans are eagerly awaiting news of the outcome of oil exploration off Cuba by Spain's Repsol YPF that could turn cash-strapped Havana into an oil producer overnight and breathe life into Fidel Castro's communist regime. The possibility of striking major oil reserves off Cuba has prodded US oil lobbies close to US President George W. Bush's administration into action. John Gibson, president of the top US oil distributor Halliburton, came out against the US economic embargo on Havana which keeps US oil companies locked out of the potential for profit so close to home, *The New York Times* reported recently. (*AFP, 21/7/04*)

July 21: Puerto Rican lawyer Rafael Rodriguez, of the Rosenberg Fund for Children (RFC), is contemplating charges against the US Federal Government for violating the rights of six-year-old Cuban girl Ivette Gonzalez. The girl, younger daughter of Rene Gonzalez, one of the five Cubans prisoners currently in US jails, has been unable to visit her father in prison, because, as a minor, she should go with her mother, to whom the United States has repeatedly denied an entry visa. (*Prensa Latina, 21/7/04*)

July 21: The US Interests Section in Havana issued an official statement on migration agreements between the island and the US. The USIS' statement says that, "20,000 travel documents to Cubans" have been issued this fiscal year, "fulfilling the annual US obligation under the US-Cuba Migration Accords". "This achievement, the earliest ever in the fiscal year, underlines our continuing commitment to safe, legal and orderly migration", the statement adds. It also emphasizes, that "the Cuban government's repeated assertions about US designs to cause a mass migration crisis are patently false". "If the Cuban government would allow the US Interests Section access to Cuban official media equivalent to that which the Cuban Interests Section has to American media, we could inform the Cuban people that there is hope to seek a better life through legal means, not by taking to dangerous seas. Instead, Cubans are kept

uninformed about their options to emigrate". The statement says that the US government expects "that the Cuban government also would adhere to its commitments and issue exit permits to the almost 1,352 Cubans who have received US travel documents but have been denied exit permits by the Cuban government". "Meeting our obligation also is a reminder to ordinary Cubans that the 1998 special Cuban lottery, also known as "el bombo", is still functioning. We help keep alive the option of a safe, legal way for entire families who participated in the 1998 lottery to leave Cuba". The statement reiterates that, "US policy toward Cuba is a rapid, peaceful transition to a democratic, market-oriented Cuba. The US government has no intention to invade Cuba and does not support military action or a violent overthrow to change the Cuban police state". (*USIS Press Statement, 21/7/04*)

July 21: The US government expressed concern over the treatment of jailed Cuban dissident Oscar Elias Biscet, who has been placed in solitary confinement. Biscet was arrested on December 6, 2002, at his home, where - according to US officials - he was holding a discussion on human rights, and later convicted and sentenced to 25 years in prison. A communique released by the US State Department said Biscet, whose health has significantly deteriorated, "has been forced to live on handouts from fellow prisoners because regime authorities refuse to permit his wife to bring in the meager rations of food and medicine that are allowed other prisoners." [[Treatment of Oscar Elías Biscet](#)] (*EFE, 21/7/04*)

July 22: A US State Department press release revealed the results of its annual visa lottery, whose winners can apply for US visas and permanent resident status. In Latin America, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba emerged as the big winners, with 674 Cubans hitting the jackpot. (*EFE, 22/7/04*)

July 22: The United States welcomed the release from prison of Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque, one of 75 opponents of the Fidel Castro government jailed in a widely-criticized political crackdown last year. Her release, confirmed by family members in Havana, was welcomed by State Department spokesman Steven Pike, who said the 59-year-old Ms. Roque should never have been imprisoned in the first place. "Like many other prisoners of conscience held in Castro's Gulag, she suffered from inadequate medical care in prison," he said. "Typically, the Castro government has once again released an activist only when her deteriorating health became an inconvenience." (*VOA, 22/7/04*)

July 23: Nearly a month after the US government clamped down on travel to Cuba, local air charter companies say their businesses have been decimated, passengers have yet to receive new licenses required for travel and thousands have voiced their opinions to the Treasury Department about the proposed new rules. "Today is the 24th day of the [new] regulations, and not one Cuban-American has been able to travel because the Treasury Department has not issued any -- zero -- licenses," said Xael Charters owner Eddie Levy. Levy, who had already laid off 14 of his 16 full-time employees, says his business has been paralyzed. Treasury Department official Juan Zarate, in town this week to meet with local federal officials, said his office has received more than 2,000 comments about the new regulations. (*Sun Sentinel, 24/7/04*)

July 24: The Union des Banques Suisses, the largest banking group in Switzerland, rejected allegations of money laundering on Cuba's behalf. Three members of the US Congress Chamber of Representatives leveled the accusations at the UBS and called for an investigation. A UBS spokesperson said the bank had no knowledge of any on-going inquiry into its activities and denied involvement in any money laundering schemes. (*AFP, 25/7/04*)

July 24: Cuban media reported that the island would attempt to jam increased anti-Castro radio broadcasts from US-based radio stations, which currently stand at 2,247 hours per week. Quoted by the international edition of Granma, Ramón Linares, First Deputy Minister of Information Technology and Communications, said that "We will use the telecommunications technology at our disposal" to "respond to our adversaries' actions." (*Europa Press, 24/7/04*)

July 26: Fidel Castro vigorously denied recent charges by President Bush that he encourages sex-tourism in Cuba to attract US dollars to the impoverished island. Castro also became personal with Bush, bringing up old reports about his American nemesis' alleged past drinking habits. Speaking at the island's annual Revolution Day celebration in the central city of Santa Clara, Castro said the sex tourism allegations show that what the White House considers to be true about Cuba is ``that which the president makes up in his head, whether it corresponds to reality or not." Fidel Castro also said an attack on the island would be a "colossal mistake." [[Speech by Fidel Castro at the ceremony for the 51 st anniversary of the 26th of July](#)] (AP, EFE, 26/7/04)

July 27: US officials have refused to back down from President Bush's charge that Cuba promotes sex tourism - something Fidel Castro denies. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli says the issue of prostitution in Cuba is well documented. He referred to a 2002 human rights report that said Cuba had replaced Southeast Asia as one of the world's top sex tourism destinations. [[Department of State Daily Press Briefing](#) and [Trafficking in Persons Report. 2004](#)] (VOA, 27/7/04)

July 27: According to federal government figures, Florida-Cuba trade volumes have increased ten-fold in the last five years. The Foreign Trade Division of the US Census Bureau contrasted Florida's exports to the island in 2003 adding up to US\$ 13.4 million vs. only US\$ 1.6 million in 1998. This year, up until May, exports to Cuba through Florida ports have reached US\$ 5.5 million. (UPI, 27/7/04)

July 27: John Kerry's advisor on Latin America, Nelson Cunningham, said that if the democratic senator wins the US presidential elections the embargo against Cuba "will not be lifted". Cunningham said that Kerry will try to pressure Castro with a "multilateral approach". " Senador Kerry will not lift the embargo, but he believes that current US policy towards Cuba is wrong", Cunningham said during a closed meeting with Latin American diplomats. Kerry's strategy towards the island will have a multilateral approach that involves the whole hemisphere, he added. On the other hand, he said, tools to provoke changes will include "family contacts". (Notimex, 27/7/04)

July 28: Fidel Castro and US policy on Cuba has emerged as a critical topic in the Republican race for the US Senate, signaling the importance that the leading contenders place on support from South Florida's Cuban exile community. The issue escalated into a spat between GOP frontrunner Bill McCollum and his nearest rival, Mel Martinez, that culminated in McCollum filing a complaint with state Republican Party officials. McCollum, a former Orlando-area congressman, charged in a letter to state GOP Chairwoman Carole Jean Jordan that Martinez has attacked his integrity "in a manner that is quite simply deplorable." The complaint follows statements to reporters by Martinez and his aides suggesting that McCollum is "working in tandem" with Castro to keep Martinez out of office. Martinez's aides called McCollum's complaints a "silly campaign tactic." They said it comes on the heels of the distribution in South Florida of a McCollum campaign brochure touting McCollum's views on US policy with Cuba and Castro, and promoting endorsements he's received from two influential South Florida GOP congressmen, Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Mario Diaz-Balart. (Sun Sentinel, 29/7/04)

July 29: US director Michael Moore's anti-Bush documentary "Fahrenheit 9/11" was shown on prime time Cuban state-run television after playing to packed cinemas for a week. In a country with a deep-seated distrust of US governments, the film has generated widespread public interest and added to a recent barrage of official criticism of President Bush. Cuban dissidents who saw "Fahrenheit 9/11" praised the United States for its freedom of expression and lamented that such criticism of a president was not allowed in Cuba where the one-party state controls the media. (Reuters, 29/7/04)

July 30: A prominent human rights advocate in Cuba says the US immigration service has made a mistake in detaining two Cuban exiles in Miami over alleged past persecution of dissidents in Cuba. Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, president of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said one of the Cubans -- accused of raiding Sanchez's home more than 10 years ago -- did not participate in the raid, and that his office has no record linking the

second Cuban to persecution of dissidents. "It's very likely that injustices have been committed," Sánchez told the press. Jorge de Cárdenas Agostini was detained June 8 and Luis Enrique Daniel Rodríguez July 2. Both men live in Miami-Dade County. Both also once worked for Cuban state security. Their lawyers say their clients are defectors, not persecutors. Both men are in detention awaiting deportation or supervised release. Barbara González, a spokeswoman for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, declined comment on Sanchez's contention. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/7/04)

July 30: Cuban Parliament chairman, Ricardo Alarcon, warned of an election fraud in the making in the United States and supported the proposal to send in international observers to Florida State in particular. Alarcon told Granma International that, "the United Nations and Carter Center, that send out so many observer missions through out the world, must send observers to Florida to verify the elections "in the country that provoked the greatest scandal of the century at the last elections." Alarcon commented on some groups in Florida that already adopted measures "fearing they will do the same again" in a state where Jeb Bush, brother of the President, runs the arrangements for the up coming elections. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/7/04)

July 30: Half of the island's 6,700 species of plants are found nowhere else, even within the greater Caribbean region. Despite the four-decades-old US embargo, a cadre of American scientists has been working quietly for years with their Cuban colleagues, racing to protect as much as possible before the natural splendor butts heads with resorts and condominiums. But recent Bush administration restrictions on travel to Cuba are reducing the flow of information once more. Scientists no longer can go for a few days to collect plants or consult with colleagues -- they must stay for 10 weeks. They can't spend more than \$50 a day, so renting a car may prove impossible. And a separate, specific license must be obtained if a research scientist wants to collaborate with a Cuban counterpart. Molly Millerwise, a Treasury Department spokeswoman, said the new rules will allow a trickle of exchange. "An accredited university can apply to have 10 weeks in Cuba, and when licensed, it can engage in research," she said. "That includes having a scholar come up to the US and teach. Cuban nationals under this license -- they can teach, and the university can pay them for it." The rules make it "much more difficult for people to engage in legitimate scientific research," said John Croatsworth, director of Harvard University's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/8/04)