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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Human rights organizations on the island say the number of Cubans in jail for political reasons dropped, but the rights situation has not improved. The 31st Ordinary Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) is held at Havana's Archdiocese. Cuba starts the first steps towards general elections slated for 2007. Fidel Castro dedicates some of his Reflections to domestic issues, the Pan American Games, and the defection of some Cuban athletes. In his 26 of July speech, Raul Castro raises hopes of reforms to relieve economic inefficiencies and food shortages.

Economy: Cuba and Russia renew cooperation in aviation services and training. Thousands of windmills are installed on the island. Carlos Lage tours warehousing facilities in Havana province. Cuba imports sugar to meet local demand. Cuba benefits from a line of credit granted by Iran. Cuba's actively serviced foreign debt jumped nearly \$2 billion in 2006.

Foreign Affairs: Mexico and Cuba initiate steps toward the improvement of bilateral relations. Cuba inaugurates the fifth of 20 hospitals donated to Bolivia by the island. South Africa and Cuba strengthen political and economic ties. The 11th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between Cuba and Panama takes place in Panama City. Cuban rafters arrive in Honduran, Colombian and Mexican shores. The OAS Secretary General reiterates the need to re-establish a dialogue about Cuba in the organization. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper expresses concerns about governance and human rights on the island.

Security: Military delegations from Angola and Venezuela visit Cuba. Raul Castro says that military operation "Caiguarán" will continue throughout 2007.

US-Cuba Relations: In several of his Reflections, Fidel Castro harshly criticizes US administrations and suggests that Washington has deliberately failed to stop terrorist attacks against Americans. The US won't meet its commitment to provide at least 20,000 visas for Cubans to migrate from the island. Raul Castro offers the US an invitation to a dialogue with Cuba. The US Commerce Department estimates Cuba will import \$300 million to \$350 million in goods from the US this year.



Domestic Affairs

July 1: Cuban prisoners don't need more culture in jail, they need better living conditions, dissident Marta Beatriz Roque said in response to a proposal by singer-songwriter and lawmaker Silvio Rodríguez to bring culture to prisons. "Inmates don't need culture, they need better living conditions," Roque, leader of the Assembly for Promoting Civil Society, said in a statement released in Havana, in which she also called for the release of political prisoners. Roque was responding to a proposal by Rodríguez, approved by the National Assembly, to invite artists and intellectuals to visit prisons as a way to aid prisoners in their rehabilitation process. The Cuban dissident called for an end to "overcrowding, bad food, the lack of medical attention and of medicines" and asked "very specifically that they stop immediately the beatings that can end in the inmates' death." Roque also demanded "that sentences not include the death penalty, which has men waiting until they end up mutilating themselves" and that political prisoners be released. "Those who suffer one of the world's most hostile prison environments will not have their problems solved by culture and sports. Let justice be done!" the communique said. (*EFE, 2/7/07*)

July 2: Official figures reflect a housing shortage of 500,000 units in Cuba, of 11.2 million inhabitants. But 15 percent of urban dwellings and 38 percent of rural housing units are in poor condition, according to the last national census, carried out in 2002. In 1993, after the so-called "storm of the century", the Taller de Transformación in Pogolotti drew up a project for building 25 houses for the residents of Isla del Polvo. "Many local residents did not want to take part, because they thought the project was not really going to bring results," said Noemí Reyes, the social worker who heads the Taller. So a construction brigade was created, made up mainly of women, who were trained at the Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría. With few resources, the Taller de Transformación set out to improve the material, social and cultural conditions in the neighbourhood in 1990. Based on an assessment of the problems and needs carried out with the participation of the community, the Taller designed a strategy that focused on issues like sanitation, environmental education, reforestation, urban planning, prevention of social problems, and culture. The Taller, whose members are all women, mainly social workers, also faced mistrust on the part of local organisations and institutions, which feared meddling in their traditional areas of activity. But "actually the Taller facilitates community labour; we don't replace any other institution," Reyes said. The Taller's funding comes from international non-governmental organisations like Oxfam Canada, Norwegian People's Aid and Bread for the World. They have also received support from the non-governmental Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Centre, a Cuban organisation based in Pogolotti that foments participative development work based on popular education. (*IPS, 2/7/07*)

July 2: Relatives and a Cuban human rights group called for an investigation into how a government critic died while in police custody last month. Manuel Acosta, a 47-year-old former boxer and member of a dissident group known as Democracy Movement, was arrested June 21 in the town of Aguada de Pasajeros on vague charges of criminality, according to a letter signed by his cousin, Pedro Larena. Police held Acosta at a municipal station where he was found dead three days later, according to the letter distributed to international journalists by a dissident human rights group. Authorities told Acosta's relatives that he hanged himself in his cell, and that an autopsy confirmed suicide. But Larena indicated he became suspicious after officials refused to turn over Acosta's remains, saying they needed at least 60 days to process them. Larena said he was afraid to provide further details, but spoke by telephone through an intermediary. He said a cleaning lady working at the station told family members that while in custody, Acosta yelled anti-government slogans and insults at police, provoking a fight with an officer. During the altercation, the witnesses said, the officer's watch was broken, prompting a group of police to swarm in from their nearby living quarters and beat Acosta. Copies of Larena's letter, addressed to Cuba's acting president Raul Castro, were sent to international journalists by Elizardo Sánchez, head of the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation. (*The Miami Herald, Pravda, AP, AFP, 2/7/07*)

July 3: The Cuban government has evaluated its systematic inspections of the legal aspects of the country's penitentiary centers. Hortensia Bonachea, a member of the Attorney General's Office, told Granma daily that inspections regarding the state of prisoners' rights are carried out systematically, established as a norm in the island's

penitentiary system. The attorney explained that in recent years, the number of visits by judges to the prisons and local detention centers has increased, a fact that confirms the Cuban State's concern about the issue. Bonachea said that while prisoners do not have the right to vote, they benefit in a reduction of their sentence for maintaining good conduct. They also have facilities to communicate with their families and can receive frequent visits by their husbands or wives. The prisoners work, receive a salary, study, and can be transferred from a strict regime to one that is less severe -- until achieving their total re-incorporation into society. Bonachea added that it is in the government's interest to favor the conditions inside the prisons and reward those who have maintained good conduct. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 3/7/07*)

July 3: Cuba will start an electoral process on July 10, which begins with the voting for municipal and provincial delegates and ends up with parliamentary or general elections in 2008. According to the President of the Cuban parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, at a meeting with members of the University Students Federation (FEU) in this capital, over 350,000 youngsters throughout the island will exercise their right to vote for the first time. Alarcon stressed the importance of the participation of new generations in the electoral process and noted that Cuban democracy has always promoted a close relationship between the delegates and their voters, Juventud Rebelde newspaper reported. Cuban municipal and provincial authorities are elected every two and a half years while parliamentary elections are held every five years. Every Cuban citizen over 16 years has full right to vote. (*ACN, AFP, 3/7/07*)

July 3: Two new pieces of nuclear magnetic resonance equipment are being manufactured in Cuba to support the diagnosis of patients who suffer from sickle cell anemia, local media reported. This technique, aimed at diagnosing the sickness by analysis of a blood sample, makes it possible to know when a patient is about to suffer a crisis, and makes implementation of the appropriate treatment to reduce pain easier. Manuel Lores, director of the Medical Biophysics Center in eastern Santiago de Cuba Province, told Granma daily the equipment is a new version of the Giromag 01 Universal Relaxometer. Resonance equipment will be installed at Santiago de Cuba's Hematology Center and at the Havana National Hematology Institute. (*Prensa Latina, 3/7/07*)

July 3: Renowned Cuban artists and intellectuals sent Fidel Castro a get-well message on the 46th anniversary of the Cuban leader's speech known as "Words to Intellectuals", that led to the creation of the Cuban Writers' Union and the "all for the Revolution, nothing against it" publishing policy. (*AIN, 3/7/07*)

July 4: Forty-six dissidents rejected the proposal made by songwriter and lawmaker Silvio Rodriguez during last sessions of the National Assembly to bring culture to prisons, according to a communiqué issued by Martha Beatriz Roque, president of the illegal Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. The dissidents adhered to a statement issued by Roque, which states that "prisoners don't need culture, but better life conditions in jail", better food, better health care, and calls for the release of all political prisoners. Among the signers are Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, president of the Cuban Comisión for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN); Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, Vladimiro Roca, leader of All United, and Laura Pollán, from the Ladies in White. (*AFP, 4/7/07*)

July 4: Dagoberto Valdés has published a book compiling all of "Vital" magazine's editorials since its foundation. A note signed in Pinar del Río by Valdés, ex-Editor in Chief of "Vital", and former members of the magazine's editorial staff, says the book "has been a long-awaited project that underwent several revisions." A new magazine director was appointed last June by the new Bishop for Pinar del Río. [[La libertad de la luz](#)] (*EER, 3/7/07*)

July 4: Students and professors from the Higher Institute of Industrial Design (ISDI) delivered a certificate of acknowledgment to Fidel Castro and First Vice President Raul Castro for their unconditional support in the remodelling of the school building. The ISDI was visited in 1984 by the leader of the Cuban Revolution, who noted the importance of that center for the future development of design on the island. On January 20, 2005, Fidel Castro suggested the restoration and extension of that institution. The remodelling has allowed the ISDI to increase its number of students to

more than 650. The project also included the opening of new laboratories with 250 modern computers connected to the Internet. (*RHC, 4/7/07*)

July 5: Eleven months after Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother, Cuba continues to trample on civil liberties, though the number of political prisoners has fallen, a rights group said. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said the number of Cubans in jail for political reasons dropped from 283 to 246 in the first half of the year. But the rights situation has not improved under acting President Raul Castro, the commission said in a biannual report. "The systematic and institutional violation of each and every civil, political and economic right listed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights persists," it said. The decline in the number of political prisoners continues a two-year trend, the report said. Many of those released had served their prison terms. The rights group said Cuba has 200 prisons and labor camps, and is the only country in the Western Hemisphere that does not allow the International Red Cross to visit its jails. Prison conditions are "subhuman and degrading" with bad food and inadequate medical and dental treatment, and brutal beatings of inmates, the report said. It cited the case of Manuel Acosta Larena, a dissident who was arrested last month and died in a police station in the province of Cienfuegos. It also added its voice to international criticism of the United States for the continued detention of some 375 suspected al Qaeda and Taliban members at the Guantanamo Bay prison, calling for its immediate closure. "The only prison on the island of Cuba that is permanently under international scrutiny is the prison camp set up by the United States in the naval base at Guantanamo," it said. The commission, led by veteran rights activist Elizardo Sanchez, is illegal but tolerated by Cuba's communist state. (*Reuters, 5/7/07*)

July 5: Cuba's International School of Physical Education and Sports celebrated its third graduation with 245 young people from 51 countries receiving their diplomas. Located in the Havana Province municipality of San Jose de las Lajas, the school welcomes visitors with the message: "You have arrived at a university that promotes health and environmental protection." The school, originally an idea of Fidel Castro, graduated 508 students from 48 countries in its first graduation, 297 from 54 nations in the second. With the 245 latest graduates the total is now 1,050. (*Granma, 5/7/07*)

July 5: Last June 29, Bernardo Arévalo Padrón, a peaceful opposition activist, received a death threat from a police officer in the municipality of Aguada de Pasajeros, Cienfuegos, following on-air denunciations of civil rights activist Manuel Acosta Larena's alleged murder. Arévalo Padrón, deputy delegate for the Democracy Movement in that municipality, was threatened by police captain Sergio García Borges as he exited a postal outlet. Arévalo had been there to mail a certified letter to interim President Raúl Castro in which Larena's relatives petition for his exhumation. (*Cubamet, 5/7/07*)

July 5: A bid by Pablo Silva Cabrera's Democratic Solidarity Party (PSD) to join the reporting committee All United was approved. All United is an umbrella organization that brings together a wide spectrum of political opposition institutions; its leader is Vladimiro Roca. (*Cubamet, 5/7/07*)

July 6: An enthusiastic and optimistic contingent of athletes dressed in red sports outfits drew everyone's attention at the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana. It was the first part of the Cuban Delegation leaving for Brazil to participate in the 15th Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro. The group of 200 included members of the teams for handball, fencing, artistic gymnastics, weightlifting, rowing, taekwondo and badminton. (*Granma, 7/7/07*)

July 8: Convalescing Fidel Castro said the man the United States and Mafia contracted to poison him in the early 1960s would not have been able to get close enough to him to be successful. Castro, in his latest and longest essay since taking up the pen in March as he recovers from intestinal surgery a year ago, charged the assassination plan was just one of many. The CIA declassified hundreds of pages of long secret records that detailed some of the agency's worst illegal abuses during about 25 years of overseas assassination attempts, domestic spying and kidnapping. According to the documents, six poison pills were provided in 1961 by the Mafia to Juan Orta, identified as a Cuban official who had

been receiving kickback payments from gambling interests and who still had access to Castro and was in a financial bind. Orta did not carry out the plan. Castro wrote in his essay that Orta was a link with US-based exiles and immigrants before the revolution, and after for a time had frequent access to him. "The traitor Orta (...) received money from organized crime supposedly to help them reopen Casinos. He had nothing to do with the matter," Castro wrote. "By the time they gave him the poison, unlike the earlier moments, there was little chance Orta would see me as by then I was completely occupied with other matters," Castro says, referring to preparations to thwart the failed US Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. [[La tiranía mundial](#)] (*Reuters*, 9/7/07)

July 8: A new documentary by a young Cuban filmmaker has cast a harsh spotlight on housing and other serious problems faced by the thousands of Cubans who move illegally from the provinces to Havana in search of better lives. The migrants, mostly from eastern Cuba and known as "Palestinians" because they lack legal residency in Havana, often are forced to live in shanty towns on the edges of the capital and expelled by police back to their hometowns. "The phenomenon of forcible return continues to exist, although the police proceed silently and with some secrecy," said Elizardo Sánchez, president of the illegal but tolerated Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation. Sánchez estimated that dozens of people are expelled from Havana every week by bus or train after being detained for failure to produce documents confirming their legal residence in Havana. Repeat violators are taken to court, although the sanctions consist only of fines and official "banishment" from the capital for several years. Cubans' jobs and ration cards are linked to their legal residences. But the economic crisis of the 1990s brought a rise in migration to Havana. A government statement at the time said 92,000 people had tried to legalize their residency in Havana in the first half of 1997. That same year a law made it extremely difficult to shift legal residency to the capital, a city of 2.1 million people. Havana residents estimate that about 20 shanty towns rose in the city's suburbs in the past decade, with shacks usually built out of metal sheets, scrap lumber and cardboard without government permission. [[Buscándote Havana](#)] (*The Miami Herald*, 8/7/07)

July 8: According to the Cuban Democratic Directorate, former political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez (Antúnez) has been on a hunger strike since July 3 in demand that the house he and his mother shared at the time of his arrest in 1990 be returned to him by the government. When the dissident's mother passed away while he served out his sentence, their home "was usurped by members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution." Antúnez was released on April 22 after serving 17 years in prison on charges of distribution of enemy propaganda, attempt of sabotage and political crimes. (*EER*, 9/7/07)

July 9: Renowned Cuban fencer Mireya Rodríguez, who made history at the Pan-American Games in 1963 in Brazil by becoming the first Cuban woman to win a gold medal in a hemispheric sports contest, died in Havana of a heart attack. She was 70. Rodríguez also was an Olympic finalist at the Tokyo games in 1964 but earned no medal. In 1962 she won the foils competition at the Central American Games in Kingston, Jamaica. Born in Havana to a poor family, Rodríguez made her living as a barber. She learned fencing at a neighbourhood sports complex. As a reward for her accomplishments, the Fidel Castro government gave her a house in Havana, where she resided until her death. But she became disenchanted with the political system and gave up fencing. In later years, she supported herself by selling custom jewelry in Havana. She is survived by an adopted son, Julio, and sister Coppelia, who live in the United States. Another sister, Carmita, lives in Cuba. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/7/07)

July 9: After spending nearly a week on a hunger strike, former Cuban political prisoner Jorge Luís García Pérez (Antúnez) prevailed in his effort to have a house returned to him by the government. The dissident decided to sit in protest outside the municipal office of the Housing Department of Placetetas, Villa Clara, to demand that the house he and his mother shared when he was arrested in March, 1990 be returned to him or replaced with another. (*EER*, 10/7/07)

July 9: According to the Cuban Catholic Church, the 31st Ordinary Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), held on July 9-14 at the Archdiocese of Havana, constituted "a major event." "I feel that it is also a

way of showing support for our Church in Cuba, of validating our efforts in Cuba, and that it will help make our situation known," declared Msgr. Juan de Dios Hernández, Secretary General of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba (COCC). (*EFE*, 8/7/07)

July 9: The National Ballet of Cuba, under the direction of Alicia Alonso, is in France where it will participate in the "Les Etés de la danse de Paris" (Paris Summer Dance Festival) set for July 16 to August 3. For the third time in its history, the festival is dedicated this year to Cuba's leading dance troupe. For its performances in Paris, the Cuban troupe selected two of its most acclaimed classics: *Giselle*, version by Alicia Alonso based on the initial inspiration of Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, and *Don Quijote*, version by Marta Garcia, Maria Elena Llorente and Alonso from the original by Marius Petipa and the variations introduced by Alexander Gorski. (*Periódico 26*, 9/7/07)

July 9: Cuba called municipal elections for October 21, the start of a voting process that could clarify by early 2008 whether convalescing Fidel Castro will continue as head of state. A decree signed by acting President Raul Castro set the date for elections that will renew municipal and provincial assemblies and, in turn, the National Assembly, which picks the Council of State and the president of Cuba every five years. But, the call read on the official TV does not say when the election to renew delegates to the National Assembly will take place; it says instead that the date will be set later. Cuba starts the first steps towards general elections slated for this year in the country, announcing members of the National Electoral Commission (CNE). Presided over by Justice Minister Maria Ester Reus Gonzalez, the CNE was created and is due to be set up on July 10. The appointment, signed by First Vice President Raul Castro, also included Ruben Perez Rodriguez, as vice president, and Tomas Amaral Diaz, as CNE secretary. Other appointees were Juan Aizpurua Rodriguez, Miguel Perez Martin, Colonel Leonides Rodriguez Rojas, Manuel Rios Medina, Guido Urrutia Valdes, Gisela Bell Heredia, Arnel Medina Cuenca, Juan Mendoza Diaz and Jose Flores del Sol. The October 29, 1992 Electoral Law, in its article 21, establishes that once the call to polls is announced, the Council of State appoints the CNE, and this entity sets the terms in which the provincial, municipal and district electoral commissions must be constituted. The first round of the elections will be held October 21, and in places where candidates fail to get over 50 percent of votes, there will be a second round a week later. [[Convoca Consejo de Estado a Elecciones Generales](#)] (*Reuters. La Jornada, Prensa Latina*, 10/7/07)

July 9: Infestation of *Aedes aegypti*, the mosquito considered the primary vector for dengue fever, is on the rise in several regions of the island due to high summer temperatures and rains. According to the weekly "Trabajadores", since last June more than 60 health districts in the country have reported the presence of the vector and 1,320 breeding foci have been detected, 145 of them in workplaces. (*EFE*, 9/7/07)

July 10: Cuban wrestler Joel Romero, winner of the recent Grand Prix wrestling tournament in Leipzig, defected from his team to seek political asylum in Germany, the president of the Wrestling Federation of Saxony, Benedict Rehbein, announced. (*EFE*, 10/7/07)

July 10: The 5th International Meeting of Socio-Religious Studies got underway in Havana. Over 200 researchers, religious leaders and students of different beliefs from the Americas, Europe and Asia are attending the Conference. According to specialists from the Psychological and Sociological Research Institution of the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, Ramón Torreira, the event will be focused on "Religious movements faced with conflicts and challenges of a world in crisis." The agenda includes a workshop on religion, poverty and social justice in today's Latin American and Caribbean reality and a panel entitled "A Look at History in the Study of Religion." Also on the agenda are lectures on the history of Protestantism in Cuba. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Prensa Latina*, 10/7/07)

July 10: Top leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America gathered for the first time in Cuba, discussing the future of their faith in a globalized world against the backdrop of a closed Communist society. The Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) planned to elect a new president and meet with Cuban officials, although there were no

specific plans to see Fidel Castro. At a news conference, Chilean Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz, the outgoing conference president, ducked questions about how he would characterize the relationship between Havana and its Catholic Church. He said only that relationships between different governments and churches around the world occasionally are strained and that "we are immensely pleased when relations are good." Monsignor Carlos Aguiar, the conference's first vice president, said leaders are grappling with "where the Church needs to focus its energies to realize its mission." "Globalization, not only economic but cultural, will redefine the church's mission," said Aguiar, a bishop from Texcoco, Mexico. Asked about human rights, Bishop Andres Stanovnik, secretary-general of the conference, said officials "do not have a special or specific strategy for Cuba." "It's the same strategy for all countries where we have a presence, to defend human rights, the right to liberty, the right to truth, the right to life," said Stanovnik, a bishop from Reconquista, Argentina. In a rare interview with a Catholic priest, state-run television aired comments by Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, a Cuban key figure in the Church's dealings with the Castro government. "I believe the conflicts arose from misunderstandings on both sides. Fortunately, both sides made efforts to overcome difficulties and reach the situation we have today," he said. (*Reuters, AP, 11/7/07*)

July 10: Fidel Castro said that Cubans have to make the brain cells work if they want to build consciences, so necessary in today's complex world. "What the people in our country need most is knowledge, if what we want to do is to create conscience," said Castro in his article entitled "Cuba's Self-Criticism," published in the official media on July 11. Turning a more critical eye on Cuban life than he has since falling ill and giving up power almost a year ago, the 80-year-old Castro said in an essay "we are not a consumer society." But he bemoaned that some Cubans use foreign currency sent from relatives abroad or brought to the island by tourists to set up illegal sources of profit, while they continue to enjoy ration cards, free housing and health care and other social services. "Not everyone receives convertible currency from abroad, something which is not illegal but which at times creates irritating inequalities and privileges in a country that does its utmost to supply vital services free of charge to the entire population," Cuba's "Maximum Leader" wrote. "The real and visible lack of equality and the lack of pertinent information gives way to critical opinions, especially in the neediest sectors," Castro wrote. ([Autocrítica de Cuba](#)) (*Prensa Latina, AP, 11/7/07*)

July 11: The Liza Alfonso Ballet Troupe and their dance musical titled "Vida" (life) were highly acclaimed in a recent series of performances at Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theater during the Luminato Festival of Arts and Creativity 2007. The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, the Canadian Broadcasting Company and other Canadian media critiqued the group's performances with descriptions such as "spectacular", "outstanding", and "a radiant expression of the true Cuban spirit in songs from the soul with exuberant dances." Back home in Havana, Liza Alfonso highlighted the "fantastic" collaboration in "Vida" from Cuban music diva Omara Portuondo and Ele Valdes of the group Sintesis. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Granma, 11/7/07*)

July 11: Pope Benedict XVI's final approval for the publication of the final document of the Fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) was announced by the Vatican. The document is the summation of the teachings of the bishops from their recent meeting that the Pope inaugurated this past May. In his letter authorizing the publication of the document, the Holy Father noted that it contains, "many useful pastoral indications motivated with rich reflections in the light of the faith and of the current social situation. In a separate development, during the first session of the 31st Ordinary CELAM Assembly, which began on July 10 in Havana, Cuba, the new leaders of that institution for the next four-year period (2007-2011) were elected. The new president is Archbishop Raymundo Damasceno Assis of Aparecida, Brazil, the first vice-president is Baltazar Porras Cardozo of Merida, Venezuela, and the second vice president is Bishop Andres Stanovnik O.F.M. Cap. of Reconquista, Argentina. (*Catholic News Agency, 11/7/07*)

July 11: Vice Presidents Carlos Lage Davila and Esteban Lazo Hernandez and other government and Communist Party leaders held a meeting with a number of participants in the four-day 31st Ordinary Assembly of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) that took place in Cuba. The CELAM meeting, held in the San Juan Maria Vianney Sacerdotal House, was headed by Monsignor Raymundo Damasceno Assis, archbishop of Aparecida, Brazil and

president of CELAM and Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, archbishop of Havana. Bishop Emilio Aranguren, of the Cuban province of Holguin, said Cuban officials agreed to allow Catholic leaders to provide religious instruction in Cuba to foreign exchange students -- and discussed easing bans on Catholic and other religious schools. The church also asked the government to allow its leaders to play a more active role in prisons. But Aranguren said there was no discussion of alleged human rights abuses, such as the jailing of government critics, or of restrictions on access to information, free speech and travel for Cubans. The CELAM authorities and Episcopal Conferences thanked Cuba for the facilities provided to hold their General Assembly, which concluded with a mass in the Havana Cathedral. (*Cubaminrex, Prensa Latina, Granma, AP, 13/7/07*)

July 11: Fidel Castro's son said the convalescing Cuban leader is in "good health" and plans to follow closely the performance of Cuban athletes competing in the Pan American Games. "My father is recovering. He is in good health," Dr. Antonio Castro told the press. "He is a big sports fan for whom the results of the games are just as important as they are for the people of my country." A 37-year-old orthopedist, Antonio Castro is the official doctor for the Cuban baseball team competing at the games. Antonio Castro would not say when his father was expected to return to power, saying only that "he never left and he will never leave." (*AP, 11/7/07*)

July 12: The Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party Central Committee chose the Eastern province of Camagüey as the venue of main celebrations to mark National Rebelliousness Day. The national celebrations recall the attacks on the Moncada and the Carlos Manuel de Céspedes barracks in eastern Cuba by a group of Revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, July 26, 1953. According to a note published by Granma news daily, the decision to choose Camagüey as venue of main activities to mark National Rebelliousness Day, July 26, was based on the results achieved by this province in important sectors of the island's economy, such as agriculture and the basic industry, as well as its performance in fields like education, services and social management, reads the note. (*ACN, 12/7/07*)

July 12: The third festival Cayman Rock, the most important of its kind in Cuba, will be held July 17 to 21, intended to promote that genre in the recreational spaces of the island's summer. About 19 of Cuba's most relevant groups and foreign participants like Factor VIII (Panama) and Banda Crocell (Venezuela) will attend this biennial venue, informed Luis Morlote, president of the Hermanos Saiz Association (AHS) which patronizes the event. Cayman Rock includes theory sessions on rock promotion and its link to literature and audiovisual productions in Cuba, which will be presided over by experts on the subject like Carlos Fornes and Orlando Cruzata, among others. (*Prensa Latina, 12/7/07*)

July 12: Cuba had 318 political prisoners at the end of the first half of 2007, 35 of whom are gravely ill, a report warned on the human rights situation in the Americas' only one-party communist state. "Of the 318 prisoners, 105 are considered prisoners of conscience and the remaining 213 are cases mainly of false accusations or unproven charges," a report from the outlawed National Coordinator for Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners said. The ailing prisoners' "health conditions are not compatible with being imprisoned," the report added. The report's political prisoner figures were higher than those released by the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation; it put the current number at 246. (*AFP, 13/7/07*)

July 12: The first graduating class of Generalist Junior High Teachers received their diplomas. The ceremony took place at the Karl Marx Theater in Havana where 2,339 teachers of the Enrique Jose Varona and Hector Pineda Zaldivar Higher Pedagogical Institutes graduated in different specialties. Of those, 1,118 are Generalist Junior High Teachers (grades 7-9), noted Luis Ignacio Gomez, Cuba's minister of education. Gomez added that nationwide there are 23,464 new university grads this year including 4,827 Generalist Teachers. (*Granma, 13/7/07*)

July 12: Cuban opposition activist Martha Beatriz Roque called into question Fidel Castro's criticism of the social inequalities generated, in his opinion, by free circulation of the US dollar and other convertible currencies in Cuba. In a press release, the dissident laid the responsibility for that situation squarely at the government's doorstep. "Why is it

that not all workers have access to convertible "pesos"? Was it not the government itself that introduced that currency and, by extension, the social inequalities?" asked Roque. (*AFP*, 13/7/07)

July 13: The Latin American Bishops' Council (CELAM) met in Havana, Cuba for their 31st Ordinary Assembly. During the meeting the newly elected president, Archbishop Raymundo Damasceno Assis, said that the Church only seeks peace for Cuba and that "the people should decide about their future." Speaking to the press, the archbishop of Aparecida said, "What we desire for Cuba is that it always have peace, prosperity, that the people (...) can decide about their future, their path in the history of the Latin American continent, always seeking out integration." Although he avoided assessing the situation that is currently facing Cuba, Archbishop Damasceno said, "It's a problem that must be posed to the local Church, we can only accompany from the outside (...) We have a very superficial knowledge, at least I do as I am no expert in international politics," he said. "The Church is present in Cuba, she is working. The Church in Cuba is alive, her presence is felt in the dioceses and in the parish communities," and she works to carry out "her main objective, which is a spiritual religious objective but with much life." (*Catholic News Agency*, 13/7/07)

July 13: The Ladies in White, an organization made up of wives and relatives of dissidents imprisoned in the spring of 2003, sent a letter to the Latin American Catholic bishops (CELAM) assembled in Havana to inform them on the prisoners' situation in Cuban jails. Letters denouncing human rights violations in the island were also sent by the Christian Liberation Movement, led by Oswaldo Payá, and by the mother of neurosurgeon Hilda Molina, detailing difficulties found in her bid to emigrate from Cuba. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/7/07)

July 13: Caridad Diego, chief of the Religious Affairs Office at the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, said that several religions, among them, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Buddhist community or the "abacua" society have judiciary recognition in Cuba. At the closing of the Fifth International Meeting of Socio-Religious Studies held in Havana, Diego said that Cuban laws grant religious nature to the "Yoruba" cultural society and also recognizes several churches of the evangelical and protestant sector, and over 70 spiritualist centers, in addition to one hundred of them with legal status. Over 200 researchers and representatives from different creeds, among them 49 from America, Europa and Asia, attended the three-day event. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/7/07)

July 13: A member of the Cuban opposition, Rene Montes de Oca, was set free after two years behind bars since he had "served his sentence," the outlawed Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation said. Montes de Oca, leader of the banned Pro-Human Rights Party, had been in jail since July 13, 2005 after taking part in various events organized in Havana to commemorate the sinking of a tugboat full of would-be emigrants in 1994. Both he and the other members of the opposition arrested the same day - Lazaro Alonso Roman, Manuel Perez Soria, Emilio Leiva Perez and Roberto de Jesus Guerra - were not actually sentenced until last February, when they were given up to two years in prison for disorderly behavior in public. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/7/07)

July 14: Cuban youth organizations issued a declaration defending nature and sustainable development, faced with climate change, and rejecting environmental threats. The document denounces the production of bio-fuels from foods, which developed countries currently encourage to serve interests from transnational companies. Approved in the First Colloquium "Youth challenges faced with climate change," the text also states a group of activities by the Environmental Youth Network to favor the cleaning of rivers, beaches and coasts, reforestation and care of environment. As part of this network's actions on environment, there will be an international digital forum, supported by the country's Computer Club. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/7/07)

July 14: The remains of Che Guevara brought to Cuba from Bolivia 10 years ago provided "conclusive" forensic evidence they belonged to the revolutionary leader, Cuban state media said. In a lengthy article, the official Granma daily newspaper addressed claims made by an ex-CIA agent who earlier this year claimed to have buried Guevara in a secret grave after he was killed in 1967, offering a clump of his hair for a DNA test to prove it. Granma said several features of the remains of Guevara "left no room for doubt" they were authentic, including the pronounced bridge over

the eyes and prominent frontal lobe of the skull that "characterized" Guevara. "But the determining factors were a mold taken of his teeth for a masking job done for his protection when he left Cuba in the mid 1960s, which together with dental X-rays taken in the 1950s in Mexico (...) were conclusive," the daily said. (*AFP*, 14/7/07)

July 15: The whereabouts of Cuban handball player Rafael Dacosta Capote remain unknown since July 12. According to Brazilian TV network *O'Globo*, Dacosta, 19, defected to join the San Caetano Club of the Brazilian League. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 16/7/07)

July 17: A vigil for the victims of the "13 de Marzo" tugboat was held in Center Havana, at the headquarters of the opposition organization Cuban National Commission (CNC). The CNC president told the media that "the goal of this event was to remember those innocent souls and pray for God's intercession that there is no more spilling of Cuban blood." Last July 13 marked the 13th anniversary of the tugboat's sinking at the hands of Cuban coastguards. Forty-seven people died then, including 11 children. (*Cubanet*, 17/7/07)

July 17: Fidel Castro says he has become so glued to the television set watching the Pan-American Games unfolding in Brazil that he is forgetting to take his pills. In a column published by Cuba's Communist Party newspaper Granma on July 18, the convalescing Cuban leader said he was so engrossed with the sports that he was even forgetting to eat. "I don't miss a single event on television: weights, taekwondo, rowing, cycling, beach volleyball," he wrote. "I hardly take my eyes off the television set. Sometimes I forget when it is time to eat or take a pill," Castro said in the column he has written since March, called "Reflections of the Comandante." [[Reflections on the Pan American Games](#)] (*Reuters*, 18/7/07)

July 19: Dissident activist Guillermo Fariñas, who conducted a lengthy hunger strike in 2006 in demand of free Internet access for all Cubans, announced that he will donate to the island's political prisoners the cash portion of the human rights award bestowed upon him by the German city of Weimar last year. The award includes cash in the amount of \$2,500 euros and a plastic work of art. (*EER*, 20/7/07)

July 19: Gymnastics coach Lázaro Lamelas Ramírez left the Cuban delegation's quarters at the Pan-American Village on July 17 and his whereabouts remain unknown. Lamelas, 33, was the head coach for the Cuban men's team. (*AFP*, 19/7/07)

July 19: Fidel Castro highlighted that Cuban athletes are ready to compete even in the mud, while in many countries athletes do not even compete for their own nation. In an article published on July 20, entitled "Another Reflection about the Pan-American Games," the Cuban leader referred to the number of athletes injured in many of the sports, with the exception of swimming, ping pong, tennis and a few others. [[Another Reflection About the Pan-American Games](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 20/7/07)

July 20: The Cuban baseball team retained the Pan American Games Championship title in baseball, defeating the United States 3-1 in the finals. Good pitching by lefthander Adiel Palma and the 10-hit attack gave Cuba its 10th consecutive Pan American Games title. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/7/07)

July 20: Cuban Deputy Health Minister Gonzalo Estevez said that Cuba has in place a reinforced security system to quickly detect avian flu, a disease that has hit several countries in Southeast Asia. Cuba relies on its highly qualified health personnel, who are trained to tackle a possible epidemic. The country has invested several million dollars in a program to detect and control the disease. This program also monitors the evolution of the pathology in the world. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/7/07)

July 21: The eastern city of Santiago de Cuba opened its annual carnival celebration, the island's largest and most popular festival, with musical performances and parades drawing visitors and residents alike. The organizing

committee said the eight-day carnival, which marks the founding of Cuba's second-largest city on July 25, 1515, would feature a number of groups, including Los Hoyos, La Placita, La Textilera, Paso Franco, Los Guayabitos and La Carabali, as well as dancers wearing colourful costumes and other attractions. The carnival in Santiago de Cuba, located more than 900 kilometers (559 miles) from Havana, draws thousands of Cubans and foreign tourists who want to enjoy the music and dancing. Havana, the island's capital, is preparing to hold its carnival celebration on August 4-12 on the Malecon seaside. (*Prensa Latina*, 21/7/07)

July 22: Cuba's two-time Olympic boxing champion Guillermo Rigondeaux and a teammate left the athletes village and did not show up for their scheduled fights at the Pan American Games. Rigondeaux failed to make the weigh-in for his quarterfinal bout against Mexico's Carlos Cuadras in the bantamweight division, while Erislandy Lara didn't appear for his fight against Jamaica's Ricardo Smith in the welterweight division. "They left the village and haven't returned," said Pedro Roque, coach and chief of Cuba's boxing delegation, stressing that it was all he knew. He learned about the boxer's absence Sunday morning, but would not comment on whether they had deserted. "Everything is possible in life," he said. (*AP*, 22/7/07)

July 23: Fidel Castro blamed American money for the disappearance of two top boxers from his nation's Pan American Games team. Castro said the boxers were "knocked down with a blow straight to the chin, paid up with US bills." He hinted the boxers left the games to accept lucrative deals from international promoters, saying "there is a mafia" that uses "refined psychological methods and many millions of dollars" to "select, buy up and promote Cuban boxers in the international sports competitions." "Those that applied for asylum in Brazil are doing it after the United States declared recently that it would not be fulfilling the exact quotas of the migratory agreements signed with our country," the article reads adding that "in Germany, there is a mafia devoted to selecting, buying and promoting Cuban boxers in international boxing matches. It uses sophisticated psychological methods and many millions of dollars." Earlier, the Pan American Sports Organization requested the National Security Secretariat, which is in charge of security at the games, investigate the disappearance of the two Cuban boxers, said Marcelo de Paiva, the secretariat's press spokesman. [[Is Brazil the United States' Substitute?](#)] (*AP, Radio Habana Cuba*, 24/7/07)

July 24: When Fidel Castro last appeared in public one year ago on July 26, he enthusiastically led about 100,000 Communist Party faithful in celebrating the audacious attack on an army barracks that launched his revolution. These days, the convalescing 80-year-old seems to be in vigilant semiretirement. Dissident Manuel Cuesta Morua said that "it has been a year of the greatest political calm" since Castro stepped aside last July 31, but the country's future remains clouded as long as the Castro brothers' future roles remain undefined. "We are waiting for the definitive transfer of power to Raul Castro so his actions can be measured," said Cuesta Morua, who like many Cubans believes the younger brother is more likely to undertake modest reforms in the centralized economy. (*AP*, 24/7/07)

July 24: Cuban Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer described the graduation of 2,470 new doctors from Cuba and a host of other nations as the practical expression of the ideas of Fidel Castro. The evening's graduation from the Higher Institute of Medical Sciences in Havana included the third graduating class of the Havana-based Latin American School of Medicine, with over 1,800 doctors including eight physicians from the United States receiving their diplomas. Nationwide, Cuba graduated a total of 8,884 medical professionals this year from various nations as doctors, dentists, nurses and health technicians, Balaguer said. The public health minister further noted that at present 53,000 young people from Cuba and 88 other countries are taking medical courses in Cuba, while Cuban specialists are training other students in their respective nations. (*ACN*, 24/7/07)

July 26: Interim President Raul Castro told tens of thousands celebrating Cuba's revolution that the nation suffered a serious blow when his brother, Fidel, fell ill a year ago, but the chaos the United States had long predicted never materialized. Cuba's 76-year-old acting president and defense minister took his brother's place at Revolution Day festivities in Camaguey, a provincial capital of narrow colonial streets southeast of Havana. "We could hardly have suspected what a hard blow was awaiting us," the younger Castro said of Fidel's illness. "These have truly been

difficult moments, although with a diametrically different impact than that expected by our enemies, who wished for chaos to take hold and for Cuban socialism to collapse." The one-hour speech came exactly a year after Fidel's last public appearances, when he celebrated the Revolution Day anniversary with speeches in the eastern cities of Bayamo and Holguin. [[Speech by Raul Castro](#)] (*AP*, 26/7/07)

July 26: Acting President Raul Castro asserted his leadership of Cuba with promises of economic improvement. "Raul, Raul, Raul!" some 100,000 government supporters chanted during a Revolution Day speech one year after taking over from his brother. He said salaries were too low -- a major complaint by Cubans-- and the country has to produce more food to feed its people. Deep reforms of its inefficient agriculture are on their way, he said. Communist Cuba is open to receiving more foreign investment as long as it brings capital, technology and markets, he said. "There won't be spectacular results. Time is needed," Raul Castro, who is 76 and considered to be more pragmatic than his ideologically-driven brother, told Cubans. [[Speech by Raul Castro](#)] (*Reuters*, 26/7/07)

July 26: Bernardo Benes, a former Miami banker who in 1978 led talks with Cuban officials that resulted in the release of 3,600 political prisoners, said the younger Castro should make bold economic changes. "The Cuban people are expecting no more promises, but deliveries," he said. Cuba watchers and some dissidents question whether Raúl Castro will be able to implement his reforms as long as his older brother is alive. Fidel Castro's presence would likely deter even modest economic reforms, they said. "The question is why hasn't there been more dramatic changes," said Manuel Cuesta Morua, a moderate opposition leader. "The answer is Fidel Castro continues to govern." "In a sense, the Raulista project, if you can call it that, has been placed on hold," said Frank Mora, a Cuba expert at the National War College in Washington, D.C. In Cuba, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, a state-trained economist who was one of 75 dissidents arrested in a roundup of government critics in 2003, was more succinct: "Raúl Castro gives the impression of a man trapped inside a corset and unable to move." (*Sun Sentinel, The New York Times*, 27/7/07)

July 27: A leading Cuban dissident has called on the island's acting President Raul Castro to free all political prisoners and allow multi-party elections. Responding to Mr Castro's Revolution Day speech, Oswaldo Paya and members of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) said the government punished enough people for holding different political opinions. The comments by Mr Paya, one of Cuba's best known political dissidents, are not surprising, given that the regime's few vocal opponents in Cuba have been making similar demands, such as calling for the release of political prisoners, for years. [[Response by Oswaldo Paya and MCL](#)](*BBC*, 27/7/07)

July 28: Cuban athletes made a hurried departure from the Pan-American games in Brazil, apparently amid fears of possible mass defections. The delegation was rushed at short notice to Rio de Janeiro's airport, leaving the men's volleyball team no time to collect their bronze medals. The athletes were said to have been ordered to leave the games before the finishing ceremony on July 29. At the 1999 Pan-American Games in Canada up to 13 athletes defected, and it seems Cuba was keen to avoid something on the same scale happening in Rio. (*BBC*, 29/7/07)

July 29: Cuba finished in the second spot of the medal standings at the 15th Pan American Games that concluded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The island's delegation accumulated 59 titles, 35 silver and 41 bronze medals and was closely followed by Brazil (54-40-67). The United States dominated the event with 97 gold, 88 silver and 52 bronze medals. For the first time since 1971 Canada was relegated to the fourth spot by Brazil, while 32 of the 42 participating countries walked away with at least a medal and 19 were represented at least once in the top spot of the podium. Leaders of the Party and government welcomed home the third group of Cuba's sports delegation to the 15th Pan-American Games. Those who were at José Martí International Airport to receive the group included Political Bureau members Ricardo Alarcón, Pedro Sáez, Ulises Rosales and Concepción Campa; Lázara Mercedes Acea, member of the Secretariat; and Roberto León Richard, first vice president of the Cuban Sports Institute, among others. (*Periódico 26, ACN*, 29,31/7/07)

July 29: Fidel Castro said that the brain drain has been the worst problem faced by poor countries from the technological and economic points of view. In an article entitled "The Revolting Commercialization of Athletes," published in *Juventud Rebelde*, the Cuban Revolution leader refers to sports talent theft and Cuba's honorable position about this issue. "Cuba, whose successes and efforts in the field of amateur sports no one can put in question, suffers these kinds of piranha bites more than any other country," Fidel Castro noted. [[The Revolting Commercialization of Athletes](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 29/7/07)

July 29: Cuban First Vice President Raul Castro paid tribute in Santiago de Cuba to Frank Pais, on occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death, and that of his comrade Raul Pujols, commemorated on July 30. Pianist Frank Fernandez played pieces by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and from his own, among them "El Mambi," to honor recently deceased Vilma Espin, one of Frank Pais' closest collaborators during the secret struggle against the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. The concert was a preliminary activity of that anniversary, slated in Santiago de Cuba with the attendance of over 100,000 people. Also a plaque was unveiled to honour those fallen defending the Homeland, from the beginning of the independence up to now, as well as those who died helping other nations. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/7/07)

July 30: Cuban First Vice President Raúl Castro lit an eternal flame at the Santa Efigenia Cemetery in Santiago de Cuba -- in memory of Frank País and all martyrs of the Cuban Revolution. Fifty years ago, Frank País -- one of Cuba's most notable revolutionary leaders -- was killed on the streets of Santiago de Cuba. During the 1950's, Frank -- who was only 22 years old at the time of his murder -- was the head of the clandestine movement which rose up against the Batista dictatorship islandwide. At the ceremony held at the Santa Efigenia Cemetery in Santiago de Cuba to honor Frank and other martyrs of the struggle against Batista's dictatorship, veterans of the 26th of July Movement spoke of the courage and valor of the young revolutionary fighter. Raúl Castro delivered the closing remarks at the ceremony. [[Palabras de Raúl Castro](#)] (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/7/07)

July 30: Fidel Castro has avoided any mention of handing over of power to his brother one year ago in his latest newspaper column, instead lauding his country's ability to endure a decades-long US embargo. "The most important success of the revolution is the capacity to put up with a blockade for nearly half a century and hardships of all kinds," Castro wrote in an article dedicated to the Pan American Games in Brazil, that was published in official media on July 31. Castro wrote in his commentary that the months of July and August were marked by "intense activity" with the commemoration of the assault to the Moncada Barracks in 1953. But Castro omitted that for the first time in 48 years, he did not make an appearance at the country's National Rebellion Day celebrations. Castro instead praised Cuba 's performance in the Pan American Games, which earned 59 gold medals compared to 97 won by United States . He said it was an impressive showing considering the US population was about 26 times larger than Cuba's. [[In Spite of Everything](#)] (*AFP*, 31/7/07)

July 31: One year after taking over from his ailing brother as Cuba's leader, Raul Castro is raising hopes of reforms to relieve economic inefficiencies and food shortages but he is not offering political change. Even dissidents welcomed Raul Castro's July 26 speech as a sign of realism brought to government by the 76-year-old defense minister. "Raul's speech creates expectations and hope, but we should be cautious. There are hard-liners who are putting obstacles in the way of reform," said dissident economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, adding that the country is bankrupt. Some Cubans are optimistic they will soon be able to buy cellular phones, and freely buy and sell their cars and even their homes one day. Others say any change will come slowly. "Raul has good intentions, but these problems have existed for so long," said one housewife on the dilapidated doorstep of her central Havana home. "It has always been politics first, second and third, and only then the economy. I'd have to see change to believe it." (*Reuters*, 31/7/07)

July 31: Fidel Castro said that Cuba is "marching ahead" without him at the helm and gave no indication that he intends to resume office after handing over power a year ago. "I am being bombarded with questions about when I will return to what some call power," he wrote in a column published on August 1 by the Communist Party newspaper *Granma*. "Raul, the Party, the Government and the mass and social organizations, led by the workers, are marching

ahead guided by the unbreakable principle of unity," he said. "What will I do? Fight on without rest like I did all my life," he wrote. [[The Eternal Flame](#)] (*Reuters*, 1/8/07)

Economy

July 4: A teaching laboratory on alternative energy is being built in Pinar del Rio, the director of investments for the Electronic Components Factory, Jesus Hernandez, stated. Hernandez told Prensa Latina that the aim is to seek less pollutant energy sources and with larger renovation capacity. "This concern," said the expert, "is a kind of open park, the first of this kind in the island, located outside the factory." According to Hernandez, systems for water pumping, semaphores, rotors, cooking, and air-generators, whose functioning depends on solar energy, are some productions to be exhibited in public after its starting-up in October. The initiative is part of a national policy undertaken by Cuba since 2005 and known as the "Energy Revolution," focused on saving and using renewable energies like solar, water and wind. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/7/07)

July 4: Cuba is considering bolstering the participation of foreign investors in sectors crucial to the island's economic development, members of Havana's expatriate business community told the press. They said that the Cuban government would seek to increase foreign investment selectively and in industries that can contribute to economic growth and reduce the country's excessive dependence on imports. Those "strategic" areas include tourism, oil and mining and construction, the sources said. In recent months, the island's Communist government has instructed its economists to prepare reports on activities that can be developed with the help of foreign investment, the business leaders said. Cuba "has looked closely after its relations with Venezuela and neglected its relations with other countries and now it seems it wants to recover them, diversify its risks and, at the same time, increase its liquidity," said a European business leader who spoke on condition of anonymity. (*EFE*, 4/7/07)

July 4: The Cuban Deputy-Minister for Science, Technology and the Environment (CITMA), José Antonio Díaz-Duque, indicated that the wildfire at the Ciénaga de Zapata natural reserve caused "major damage" to the local flora and fauna. The deputy-minister estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 hectares "may have been" affected and that it will take "no less than two years" for the area to recover. (*EFE*, 4/7/07)

July 4: Cuba has solved crippling energy shortages that plagued the island as recently as 2004 without sacrificing a long-term commitment to promoting environmentally friendly fuels, the head of the UN Environment Program said. The electric grid still relies too heavily on wasteful gas-flare reactors and heavy polluting diesel generators, but the communist government has taken important steps toward developing wind and solar power, as well as ethanol from sugar cane, said Achim Steiner, the program's executive director. "Cuba a few years ago was facing a real energy crisis, 16 hours of (...) electricity cuts and therefore a realization that the economy was going to collapse under this system," said Steiner, in Havana for a conference on the environment and development. "In terms of a short term response, it is quite remarkable how Cuba, under its economic conditions, managed to solve that crisis," he said. Steiner praised the energy revolution, but noted that things were far from ideal. A gas reactor throws a plume of dark smoke over Havana's otherwise idyllic bay and most vehicles here use leaded gasoline and diesel that fill the air with pollutants. (*The New York Times*, 4/7/07)

July 4: Cuba and South Africa signed an agreement in Havana which provides the country with the technical assistance of the island's specialists in the field of construction. The document was inked by South African Minister of Public Works, Angela Thoko Didiza, and Cuban Minister of Construction, Fidel Figueroa de la Paz. The signing ceremony was also attended by Thoko Didiza's accompanying delegation and by South African ambassador to Cuba, Thenjiwe Mtintso. (*ACN*, 4/7/07)

July 6: As Cuba strives to regain momentum in its stumbling tourism industry, the communist-run nation aims to build 50 more boutique hotels in historic areas and city centers to diversify from larger hotels common on the island's beachfronts, mainly all-inclusive resorts in tourist enclaves. Many employees of small hotels back the boutique push. They say smaller properties allow more personal exchanges with guests, more like family. "You can really feel like it's your own house," said Marcela Morales, 43, a veteran employee at Hotel Santa Isabel, who rattles off the building's century-plus history from its days as home to the Count of Santovenia to its recent hosting of such guests as former U.S. President Carter, singer Sting and actor Jack Nicholson. "I'm proud to work here." Tourism experts see promise in the small hotels, a push that will spur more visitors to spread around the island. But they caution that 50 boutique properties won't be enough to energize Cuba's tourism industry, beset with woes from rising prices to weak service. (*Sun Sentinel*, 6/7/07)

July 8: Longtime aviation partners Cuba and Russia have renewed their alliance in a deal promising increased cooperation in services and training, the Cuban official daily Granma reported. Civil Aeronautics Institute President Rogelio Acevedo and visiting Russian Transport Minister Igor Yevgenyevich Levitin signed the deal, which will cover tourism, cargo, and passenger services. "We have increased relations in the delivery of Russian aircraft and the training and testing of pilots, with an eye toward the 20 percent annual increase in Russian tourists to this continent," Levitin told Granma. Cuba purchased five new Russian aircraft in 2006, two Ilyuchin 96 and three Tupolev to serve the two million visitors to Cuba annually. (*Tehran Times*, 8/7/07)

July 9: Cuban Deputy Minister of Sciences, Technology and Environment (CITMA), Fernando Gonzalez, arrived in the Dominican Republic to sign an environmental cooperation agreement between the two nations and Haiti. Gonzalez, who traveled accompanied by CITMA director of International Relations, Jorge L. Chavero, will sign an accord on the creation of the first Caribbean Environmental Corridor to mitigate the decline of biological diversity in that region. The document will also be inked by Dominican and Haitian ministers of Environment, Max Puig and Jean Marie, respectively. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 9/7/07)

July 9: Cuba opened a commercial mission in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, since trade between the two Caribbean countries has increased considerably in the last months. While the two countries compete in the tourism market, Cuba offers services in the healthcare industry that it hopes to attract Dominican investment. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 12/7/07)

July 9: More than six thousand windmills have already been installed in Cuba as part of the country's efforts to develop the use of renewable sources of energy. Among the beneficiaries of these mills are several hundreds of facilities of the Agriculture Ministry related to cattle-raising. According to Conrado Moreno, director of the Technical University of Renewable Energy, the first windmills arrived in Cuba early in the 20th century and, at first, they were used in the province of Camagüey. Moreno added that Camagüey also witnessed the construction of the first Cuban-made windmills although today they are only made in the provinces of Pinar del Río and Granma. (*Ahora*, 9/7/07)

July 10: Brazil might start exports of fresh beef to Cuba, Brazilian Agricultural Defence (SDA) secretary linked to the country's Agriculture Ministry, Inacio Kroetz, said. Inacio Kroetz returned from a two-day visit to Cuba. He was invited by Cuba's Government and participated in a workshop for animal health sanitary control in Brazil. The workshop was organised by the Cuban Agriculture Ministry's Veterinary Institute and was attended by a number of Cuban meat suppliers and distributors. (*Latin America News Digest*, 10/7/07)

July 11: The UN Development Programme (UNDP) will support Cuba's energy sector, stated Susan McDade, resident representative of that institution in Cuba. Mc Dade said one of the UNDP cooperation programs for 2008-2012 period will support the rational and efficient use of energy in Cuba. She added that other areas of cooperation on environmental issues contained in the 1987 Montreal Protocol will include protected areas, community development, soil management and the elimination of substances that deplete the ozone layer. The UN coordinator explained that

funds will be spent on equipment, supplies, training, and studies. She also praised the scientific rigor of Cuban experts in cooperation programs undertaken in Cuba by the UNDP for three decades now. (*ACN, Radio Habana Cuba, 12/7/07*)

July 12: A partnership between the Cuban government and South African companies may see pharmaceutical products used to treat infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis being developed locally. Cuban embassy counsellor Enrique Orta said the country sought to develop further partnerships with local companies that would result in the transfer of knowledge to benefit South African citizens. Cuba, which has several state-owned research and development institutions, sought to build relationships to develop vaccines for infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, said economic and trade counsellor Maylem Rivero. Rivero was addressing delegates from the South African pharmaceutical industry at a seminar hosted by the International Trade Bureau, which was launched in February with the intention of fostering trade between countries. (*Business Day, 13/7/07*)

July 12: Cuba is sending a technical team to Trinidad as the Patrick Manning led government initiates plans to develop agricultural farms across the country. Agriculture Minister, Jarette Narine, speaking at the end of the weekly Cabinet meeting, said invitations for the development of these farms would soon be placed in the local, regional and international media. He said Cabinet had given approval for the establishment of 15 large farms in the country as well as the intervention of the Cubans in the project. (*Radio Jamaica, 13/7/07*)

July 14: A national program to optimize the organization and work performance of the warehousing companies, and to achieve a better distribution from them that better fits the needs of distribution of goods and the requirements for the saving of fuel, is now taking place throughout the country. This was stated by Carlos Lage Davila, Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers during a tour of warehousing facilities in Havana province. The main effort should be done this year, and practically ended by next year, Lage explained. The purpose of these efforts is to create better conditions for the distribution of food supplies that form part of the basic basket, and in general, of all social consumption, as well as the preservation of food that forms part of the nation's emergency reserves. Lage also visited the Baracoa poultry farm, one of the worst damaged by Hurricane Charlie. Lage said that now it has not only fully recovered from the damage caused by the storm, but also has better conditions, with new investments and its facilities are much better prepared to face the path of future adverse weather. (*Granma, 14/7/07*)

July 15: China will mass-produce a Cuban pesticide effective against dengue-carrying mosquitos, Cuba's foreign ministry said. Cuban scientists developed and patented Bactivec, a biolarvicide which kills larvae of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the dengue vector, the ministry statement said. According to the agreement, China will defray the cost of building the factory in China, and Cuban Labiofam scientists will provide the technology and know-how to build it. Cuba will purchase six million units annually of the insecticide, and China will donate another half million to Cuba, the statement said. (*AFP, 15/7/07*)

July 16: TACA airlines announced that due to popular demand, it is adding new flights from Juan Santamaría International Airport, just outside San José, to Guatemala, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. These new flights were inaugurated to “strengthen ties between Central America and the Caribbean ” and “expand the list of services” offered to clients. (*Daily News, 17/7/07*)

July 16: The largest wooded area in the country, with 39.7 percent of the territory covered with trees, exists in the westernmost province of Cuba, thanks to a reforestation project underway. The adopted reforestation strategy consists of planting two hectares of trees per each hectare of forest that is harvested. (*Prensa Latina, 17/7/07*)

July 17: Belarus will ship 100 urban buses to Cuba by late 2007. The two parties have been discussing the project since April 2006, when Belarus Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky visited Cuba. The project aims to renew Havana's bus fleet. Igor Poluyan, Belarusian Ambassador to Havana, stressed that Cuba has shown great interest in Belarusian products

such as tractors, trucks for various applications and spare parts. In 2006 Belarus shipped almost 200 MTZ tractors to Cuba. The signed contracts are expected to at least double the figure this year, said the Ambassador. (*Belta*, 17/7/07)

July 17: Cuba and Venezuela are working to form joint metal working companies as part of the projects derived from the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) Cuban minister Marta Lomas announced. The head of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation for the island told the press that these companies would work on the production of stainless steel and iron-nickel. Lomas heads the delegation to the first meeting of ALBA technical commissions and the People's Trade Treaty inaugurated in the Venezuelan capital. Sixteen workshops set up with the participation of 200 specialists from Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, will debate the objectives of the projects approved by the ALBA Council of Ministers in June. Lomas announced that the next meeting of ministers will be in Havana on September 3 and 4 and it will analyze the agreements of the technical commissions that will start their work in Caracas. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/7/07)

July 19: Cuba will import a minimum 250,000 tonnes of sugar in 2007 to meet local demand after the harvest fell short by around 400,000 tonnes, industry and trade sources said. According to Reuters estimates, Cuba produced more than 1 million tonnes of raw sugar, but less than the 1.2 million tonnes milled in 2006 which was termed the worst harvest in a century. No official figures were released for the second year in a row. Cuba imported just over 250,000 tonnes of low-grade whites from Brazil and Colombia in 2006, according to the International Sugar Organization. (*Reuters*, 19/7/07)

July 20: Cuban Basic Industry Minister Yadira García Vera said that the overhaul of an oil refinery built in 1991 "is making fast progress." According to the official newspaper Granma, the facility will be operated by a joint venture between Cuba and Venezuela beginning next December. The government official announced that "in the coming months all upgrades to distillation and vapor fume-processing equipment as well as boilers should be completed and we should be in a position to refine approximately 65,000 barrels daily." (*El Universal*, 20/7/07)

July 22: Vice President Carlos Lage said during a visit to an energy facility outside the capital that Cuba was currently producing nearly half of the oil and gas it consumed. Lage, who is also secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, visited the installations of Empresa de Perforacion y Extraccion de Petroleo y Gas de Occidente in the Havana suburb of Santa Cruz del Norte to mark the oil company's reaching 1 million tons of crude production. The company, whose goal is to produce 1.8 million tons of oil this year, is one of the island's largest energy firms, state television and the AIN news agency reported. Lage said new exploratory wells were being drilled and established wells had allowed Cuba to expand its oil reserves, with production in 2008 expected to match this year's level. Cuba "has been acquiring the capacity to service producing wells. Today, the country has 12 machines to drill wells, five machines to repair wells and two for the process of cementation," Lage said. "Up until now, we depended on foreign firms, and we had to contract the machines to drill, repair and cement the wells," the Cuban official said. (*EFE*, 22/7/07)

July 23: A contract for the delivery of Tupolev Tu-204 passenger jets to the Cuban airlines is pending, General Designer of Tupolev corporation Igor Shevchuk said. "A contract for the delivery of several more Tu-204 to Cuba is under work," he said in an interview published in Aviapanorama magazine. He said Cuban representatives are receiving the first of two aircraft built in Russia. It is a cargo version of the plane. "The first passenger airliner will be delivered later for operation on Cuban airlines," Shevchuk said. (*Interfax*, 23/7/07)

July 23: Iranian Trade Minister Sayed Masoud Mirkasemi started official talks in Cuba, to ink an accord with priorities in establishing taxes. Kasemi and his accompanying delegation arrived in the island the day before and his agenda includes meetings with Cuban Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez, Government Minister Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz, Foreign Trade and Economic Collaboration Minister Marta Lomas, and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Also on the list is to visit the Center for Genetics Engineering and Biotechnology in the western part of Havana and the Old Havana historical quarter and its System of Colonial Fortifications. Iran has plans to export 88 types of products to

Cuba and import 44 different products from the same country, according to a preferential trade agreement between Iran and Cuba, Mehdi Ghazanfari, the Iranian leader of the Trade Promotion Organization, said. Iranian Commerce Minister Massud Mirkazemi is expected to sign the agreement with Cuban Foreign Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez in an attempt to strengthen their countries' relations. (*Escambray, Stratfor, 23/7/07*)

July 24: The governments of Iran and Cuba signed in Havana a trade agreement that allows for preferential tariff treatment covering more than 140 products. The Minister of Commerce of Iran, Sayed Masoud Mir Kasemi, and of Cuba, Raúl de la Nuez, signed the document. A source with the Cuban Foreign Trade Ministry said that Cuba will benefit from a line of credit for approximately 264 million USD, granted by Iran. (*EER, 24/7/07*)

July 24: A Lagos-based non-governmental agency, has urged stakeholders in the manufacturing sector to take advantage of the pledge by Cuba to transfer ethanol production technology to Nigeria. In a chat recently, Cuban Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Elio Olivia, said his sugar producing country was ready to share its expertise in the production of varieties of sugar cane, and alternative sources of energy with Nigeria. According to Mr. Ben Adighibe, Executive Secretary of the New Ethnic organization, "the offer by Cuba would help localize ethanol production technology and also boost trade relations between the two countries" (*Vanguard, 24/7/07*)

July 26: Doctors of Kuala Lumpur Hospital's Cancer Research Center are testing in this country a therapeutical vaccine to treat malignant tumors, developed by scientists of the Cuban Molecular Immunology Center (CIM). The vaccine EGF-P64K, against cancer, is not prophylactic, but therapeutic, to fight the growing carcinogenic cells, doctors Gisela Gonzalez, the project's manager and Carmen Barroso, oncologist of the CIM clinic research board of directors, explained after starting the testing stage. "Relations between Cuba and Malaysia began many years ago, and we will maintain our support to this project against cancer," Malaysian Health Vice-minister Abdul Latiff Ahmad said. (*Prensa Latina, 26/7/07*)

July 27: Cuba's actively serviced foreign debt jumped nearly \$2 billion in 2006 to \$7.794 billion as foreign suppliers more than doubled their credits to the country, according to figures posted on the Web site of the National Statistics Office. Most of Cuba's new debt was believed by local analysts to be due to fresh credits from China and Venezuela. In 2005, Cuba's "active" debt, or debt on which Cuba pays interest and principal, stood at \$5,898 billion. The so-called active debt was borrowed since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. Debt owed to suppliers jumped to 36.2 percent of the total last year, more than double the 16 percent share in 2005 as trade with China nearly doubled. Foreign supplier debt usually refers to financing extended with the shipments of goods to a country. Venezuela extends up to 60 percent credit on its oil supplies to Cuba, though it was not clear if all the loans were classified as being related to suppliers. Cuba last reported its "inactive" debt, or the debt it is not paying interest on and which was built up after Cuba defaulted on its obligations in the 1980s, as \$8 billion in 2004. (*Reuters, 27/7/07*)

July 27: Cuba's trade deficit widened 21 per cent last year to \$6.335 billion, but the export of its services, such as medical treatments, curbed the deficit in its current account balance of payments to \$239.7 million, official statistics showed. The data, posted on the website of the National Statistics Office, showed the account deficit in 2006 reversed a \$140.2 million surplus in 2005, a year when the trade deficit was a smaller \$5.234.6 billion. The data did not provide a reason for the current account going into deficit. Service exports rose, according to the data. Also favouring Cuban accounts, there was a decline in the net outflow in the "income" category that includes profit repatriation by foreign companies. The current account balance of payments is considered the broadest measure of any country's external transactions. It includes trade, services such as tourism and financial transfers. (*Calgary Herald, 28/7/07*)

July 31: Jose Luis Machinea, executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), highlighted in Santiago de Chile Cuba's economic results and its 12.5 percent growth in 2006. Cuba is growing more, partly because of the investments in human resources it has carried out as a nation, the official told Prensa Latina at the presentation of the 2006-2007 Economic Study on Latin America and the Caribbean, at the

regional entity's headquarters in Santiago. The Caribbean island "is exporting many more services than it did in the past, and takes advantage of international prosperity in a context where it has qualified exportable labor force," he said. [[ECLAC's Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2006-2007: Cuba,](#)] (*Prensa Latina*, 31/7/07)

July 31: The governments of Venezuela and Cuba signed agreements for the creation of five joint agricultural enterprises, in the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). The deals were penned in Caracas by Agriculture Ministers Elias Jaua, Venezuela, and Maria del Carmen Perez, Cuba. The joint ventures will include leguminous plants, rice, poultry and dairy products, among others, and can be linked to other members of the integrating mechanism. The new entities in Venezuela will be in charge of producing basic foodstuffs to guarantee food security for the two countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/7/07)

Exile Community

July 10: Cuban singer and actress Xiomara Laugart is the one selected to play the late salsa queen Celia Cruz in the musical about her life that will hit the New York stage in September. It was also confirmed that Puerto Rican choreographer and actor Modesto Lacen will play Pedro Knight, the inseparable "cotton-head," as Cruz called him lovingly, to whom she was married for 41 years, the Creative Link public relations agency announced. Considered a living legend in her native Cuba, where she has filmed more than 15 musical productions, Laugart for several years was the main vocalist in the New York group Yerba Buena, which distinguished itself with its mix of rhythms arising from its African and Caribbean heritage. (*EFE*, 10/7/07)

July 10: Sting, the front man of the legendary rock band The Police, was reminded by Bloggers United for Cuban Liberty of his previous humanitarianism with a banner hired to fly over Dolphin Stadium during the opening act of the group's July 10th Miami concert. The banner read "S.O.S. They Dance Alone in Cuba Too", a reference to Sting's song about human rights abuses in Pinochet's Chile. Sting, who worked with Amnesty International in the 1980s and that group's efforts in denouncing human rights abuses in South Africa and Chile, is reported to have accepted an invitation from the Castro regime for The Police to play a concert in Havana, Cuba in December. (*Business Wire*, 11/7/07)

July 14: Cuban-born actor and film director Andy García received the Order "Heroes of Freedom" for his support to the struggle for a "Cuba with democracy." The Order was bestowed upon him by the Cuban exiles' organization Council for the Freedom of Cuba (CLC), with headquarters in Miami. The CLC awards the order annually in recognition of those who have served the cause of "freedom and democracy" and have carried out outstanding "efforts in defense of human dignity." (*EER*, 16/7/07)

July 31: One year ago, an illness forced Cuban leader Fidel Castro to hand over power to his brother, Raul, ending his 47-year hold on the presidency. For pro-democracy activists, like Ramon Saul Sanchez of the Miami-based Democracy Movement, the status quo in Cuba is a disappointment. He says Raul Castro has shown no signs of reform or the will to open a national dialogue about the country's problems. Sanchez adds that repression against dissidents has worsened under Raul. Sanchez says that while Cuba's government remains intact, he has noted changes in US rhetoric toward the island. A US State Department spokesman rejected a call from Raul Castro for possible dialogue between the two nations, and said Cuba first must open talks with opposition groups on the island. Sanchez said the comment marks a change from the past, when US officials sought to lead the debate with Cuba's government, and he says the move is a boost to democracy efforts on the island. He said hearing the United States tell Castro that he should hold talks with his own people and not with Washington is the start of a new era of mutual respect between the two nations. (*VOA News*, 31/7/07)

Foreign Affairs

July 1: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez ended his two-day visit to Teheran, the third leg of a three-nations tour that began in Russia and stopped over in Belarus. Iran plans to join a Latin American initiative designed to counter US-led efforts for free trade in the region, the official Web site of Iran's president office reported. The report said visiting Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez welcomed Iran 's observer membership in the Cuban-Venezuelan-backed alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, known by its Spanish acronym ALBA. "The pillars of world arrogance have been shaky. Victory will be realized by resorting resistance and steadiness," Iran 's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said during his meeting with Chavez. (*Arab Monitor, AP, 2/7/07*)

July 1: The president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, said that he trusts any "instructions" that Fidel Castro may provide regarding how to tackle issues like the boom in the use of biofuels. In an interview with the newspaper "Folha de Sao Paulo", Morales cited a recent meeting with Castro in Havana: "I was anxious, eager to step in (to Castro's room)," he said. "When we talked and I heard him speak of his principles of solidarity, of his concerns regarding the environment and energy production, of his views on the use of ethanol and other biofuels, I got so emotional I felt like crying." (*AFP, 2/7/07*)

July 2: Climate change, the environmental challenge of the 21st century, is to be the focus of debates at the 6th International Convention on the Environment and Development, which began in Havana. More than 200 experts are expected at the event, including Achim Steiner, executive director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), who will give a master lecture. The event continues through July 6 at the International Convention Center, and seeks to join in science's mission of finding alternatives for sustainable development, said Gisela Alonso, chairwoman of the Cuban Environmental Agency. (*Granma Internacional, 2/7/07*)

July 3: Miguel Figueroa, general secretary of the Canadian Communist Party, defined his country's current foreign policy as "greater alignment with the United States," but with "contradictions between the big Canadian corporations and those of its neighbor." In an interview with daily Granma, Figueroa said his party considers the situation a sort of antagonism among associates; a unity and contradiction at the same time. Relations with Cuba have been guided by a foreign policy different from that of the United States, he said. Currently, some 600,000 Canadians visit the island each year and there is business and other sectors that function well, he added. (*Granma, 3/7/07*)

July 3: Zoila Miriam Hernández, a Guatemalan citizen residing in Cuba claimed that the local Guatemalan Embassy is selling visas for \$6,000 USD to Cuban citizens who want to leave the island. Hernández reported the shady goings-on to the Guatemalan Foreign Affairs Ministry and to the Migration Department but, according to her, "the officials showed no interest in the case." (*Prensa Libre, 3/7/07*)

July 3: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque welcomed Indian Parliamentarian Rahul Gandhi, grandson of former Prime Minister Indira Ghandi, during his visit to the island. The legislator and the Cuban diplomat discussed the relations between both nations and the work accomplished by the Indian delegation during its stay in Cuba. The parliamentarian was interested in the programs implemented in Cuba to treat and prevent AIDS, and explained that he would visit institutions devoted to this purpose. Indian Ambassador to Cuba Mitra Vasisht and Foreign Ministry Asia Department Director Alberto Blanco attended the meeting. (*Prensa Latina, RHC, 3/7/07*)

July 3: UN Under Secretary General Achim Steiner arrived in Cuba to participate in the 6th International Convention on the Environment and Development that began at Havana's Convention Center with the participation of nearly 700 national and foreign specialists from 30 countries. Steiner, who is also the Executive Director of the UN Environment Program (UNEP), was welcomed at Havana's José Martí International airport by the First Vice-Minister of the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, Fernando González. (*ACN, 3/7/07*)

July 4: The Ladies in White, wives and relatives of 75 dissidents imprisoned in the spring of 2003, expressed their appreciation to the Chilean Senate for its solidarity with the Cuban political prisoners. In a letter released to the media

in Havana, the Ladies in White express their belief that "it is no interference to show concern over the lack of freedom and democracy endured by a sister nation." Last June 6, the Chilean Senate passed a resolution asking the Chilean government to reject all forms of politically or ideologically motivated imprisonment in Cuba, and urged the leaders of the island to put an end to this practice. (*EFE, 5/7/07*)

July 4: The federal government wants "to build a new understanding" with Cuba and, to that end, it sought to depoliticise the issue of human rights, said the Foreign Undersecretary for Latin America, Gerónimo Gutiérrez, to members of the Mexican delegation attending the 9th Inter-Parliamentary meeting between both nations. Mexican congress representatives concurred that the inter-parliamentary meeting should focus on trying to resolve the issue of the Cuban debt to the National Foreign Trade Bank, currently before the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce. The Mexican ambassador to the Organization of American States, Gustavo Albin Santos, claimed that President Felipe Calderón wishes that Cuba were restored to its rightful place in the inter-American system. However, he observed that it will be a long-term process because "it takes two to tango." (*La Jornada, 4/7/07*)

July 4: In Berlin, the representative of the Latin American Federation of Rural Women FLAMUR-CUBA, Magdelivia Hidalgo, called upon the EU and Germany to assist in the protection of the rights of Cuban civil society. Hidalgo is an economist and founder of FLAMUR-CUBA, an NGO established in 1996 to improve the living conditions of women, strengthen individual initiative and eradicate gender-based violence. FLAMUR-CUBA brings together 1006 women from across the island, all currently involved in a signature campaign called "With the same currency," demanding the right to pay for everything in national currency throughout the country. (*EFE, 5/7/07*)

July 4: Cuba and Iran are considering sending doctors to South Africa. South Africa is recruiting some 1,000 doctors from Tunisia and luring back medical professionals from Britain and elsewhere to reverse a brain drain that has hit its public health system, its health minister said. (*Reuters, 4/7/07*)

July 5: The first results of Cuban Venezuelan cooperation in the field of environmental conservation was exposed by a panel of experts from both countries during the 6th Convention on Environment and Development. The representative of Cuba's Environment Agency, Juan M. Martinez informed that the group discussed integration in the prevention and mitigation of the world's environmental problems as well as those of both nations. The agenda includes joint work in integral coastal management, strengthening specific legislation and the protected natural areas as well as training human resources. (*Radio Habana Cuba, 5/7/07*)

July 6: The 9th Cuba-Mexico Inter-Parliamentary Conference continued with analysis of bilateral relations existing between the two countries and legislative bodies. Also on the list is education, culture and health, as well as possible joint actions in the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Latin and Central American Parliaments. The meeting, officially opened on July 5 by the island's Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon, is attended by senators and deputies from all parties represented in the Mexican congress and a deputy delegation from the Cuban Peoples' Power National Assembly. Alarcon highlighted the current position of Mexican senators and deputies to build from solid foundations of historic relations and guaranteed the Cuban Assembly's support. (*Prensa Latina, 6/7/07*)

July 6: Mexican Senate leader Manlio Fabio Beltrones advocated strengthening the historic links between Cuba and his country, in the framework of the Ninth bilateral Inter-Parliamentary Conference taking place in Havana. Beltrones said the event is an ideal opportunity to confer on bilateral relations the value they deserve. Mexican Senator Carlos Navarrete also called to end any cooling of diplomatic relations, and stressed that he hopes the conference paves the way for a new stage in Cuba-Mexico ties. Navarrete sustained the parliamentary talks will help increase commercial, diplomatic, cultural, and educational cooperation. (*Prensa Latina, 6/7/07*)

July 6: The 9th Cuba-Mexico Inter-Parliamentary Conference was closed one day before scheduled. Delegations from both countries agreed on condemning the construction of the wall in the Mexican border with the US, and the US

embargo against the island. Also, Cuban and Mexican parliamentarians agreed on developing better cooperation on issues like illegal trafficking of persons and human rights. On this last subject, both parties agreed that the conclusions of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva allow better conditions for addressing “an open, respectful, frank, unprejudiced and unconditional parliamentary dialogue on this matter”. (*El Universal*, 7/7/07)

July 6: A group of 13 illegal Cuban immigrants –nine men and four women— arrived at the coast of Honduras. Some 93 illegal Cubans have arrived in Honduras this year, while some 400 made it in 2006, and 171 in 2005. (*AP*, 6/7/07)

July 8: Cuba's Council of State Vice President Esteban Lazo carried out a visit to Haiti, to analyze the island's collaboration to that Caribbean nation, the national television reported. During his stay there, Lazo held talks with Haitian President Rene Preval, mayors, power officials, and a Venezuelan delegation presided over by Deputy Foreign Minister Rodolfo Sanz. His official agenda also included the opening of one of the two ophthalmologic centers donated by Cuba to freely help out people from that country. In the act, Lazo said that Cuba will continue supporting Haiti not only in public health, but also in other important economic and social sectors. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/7/07)

July 8: Former Chilean president and UN Special Envoy for Climate Change Ricardo Lagos believes that it is the Cubans who are "responsible" for the future of their country, regardless of those from abroad who offer to collaborate. "It is they who must define their own future. The world often wants to assist but, in the end, the road to that future is built independently by each country," he indicated. He said that "working with those in charge of the situation there" helps more than "speaking publicly" about it. (*Europa Press*, 8/7/07)

July 9: Bolivian President Evo Morales praised the unconditional solidarity of the Cuban people and Fidel Castro thanks to which nearly 100,000 Bolivians have recovered their sight through the Operation Miracle free-eye surgery program. During the inauguration of the fifth of 20 hospitals that Cuba will donate to the Andean nation this year, in the locality of Aiquile, in the central department of Cochabamba, the Bolivian leader said that Cuba and Fidel Castro have allowed the Bolivian people to have high-quality health professionals at their service and also state-of-the-art technology in 25 hospitals. For his part, Cuba's ambassador to La Paz, Rafael Dausá, ratified the commitment of the Cuban health personnel to continue giving a high-quality solidarity service to the Bolivian people. (*ACN*, 10/7/07)

July 10: A group of 120 Haitians who suffered in May a shipwreck close to the Eastern coast of Cuba, on their way to the US, was voluntarily deported to their country, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported. The IOM said the group, who stayed in a camp in Punta de Maisi, in the Eastern most part of the island, received support from Cuban authorities. (*EFE*, 10/7/07)

July 10: After serving as Cuban Ambassador for six years, Jorge Bolaños said goodbye to Mexico. During the farewell function, Emma Castro, sister of Fidel Castro, said that the time is right for reconciliation between Mexico and Cuba, since both governments have shown their willingness to end the feud. The Undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Gerónimo Gutiérrez, informed that the Foreign Department had already received a request for an agreement from the Cuban government for Manuel Aguilera, who will replace Bolaños as the new Cuban Ambassador to Mexico. (*Reforma*, 11/7/07)

July 10: Honduran President Manuel Zelaya said that his country will soon sign a maritime boundary agreement with Cuba, a country that appears on his trip schedule for 2007. The leader did not say when he will visit the island, although an official source revealed that the signature of the maritime boundary agreement has already been delayed because Honduras did not agree with Havana's attempt to lay claim to a strip of 10 nautical miles. (*EFE*, 10/7/07)

July 10: Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Aziz Pahad and Deputy Finance Minister Jabu Moleketi are currently in Cuba to strengthen South Africa's already existing bilateral ties with the Latin American country. Deputy Ministers Pahad and Moleketi are visiting Cuba as part of their four-nation tour which also includes Panama, Mexico and Spain.

The visit is aimed at consolidating South Africa's commitment to political, economic and trade relations with Cuba, the Foreign Affairs Department said. "Cuba is one of South Africa's most important political partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, with whom South Africa has the strongest bilateral exchanges in a variety of fields of socio-economic activity," the department said. (*BuaNews*, 10/7/07)

July 11: The President of Cuba's National Assembly (Parliament) Ricardo Alarcon and his Panamanian counterpart Elias Castillo opened in Panama City the 11th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between both countries. The island's delegation, which arrived in Panama on July 10, is expected to start a two-day meeting with Panamanian deputies at the National Congress. The aim of the encounter is to analyze issues of bilateral and international interest. The Cuban parliament leader's agenda includes meeting with First Vice president and Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis and also with members of the Pro-Cuba Five Committee. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/7/07)

July 11: The president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, ruled out a restoration of diplomatic ties with Cuba during his term in power. "I belong to a whole generation of Latin Americans that always protested against US interference in Latin American politics and I raised my voice for the peoples' right to self-determination," he said. "I have supported for many years the right of the Cuban people to raise its voice as well so that some day the Cuban regime asks of its people what it is they wish for," he added. (*EFE*, 11/7/07)

July 12: Cuba granted its agreement to the appointment of the new Mexican ambassador in Havana, Gabriel Jiménez Remus, former leader of the National Action Party (PAN), and requested the same for its newly appointed representative in Mexico city, Manuel Aguilera de la Paz. (*La Jornada*, 12/7/07)

July 12: Panama and Cuba parliaments' top representatives inked a joint declaration, aimed at enhancing bilateral cooperation in several spheres. The President of Cuba's National Assembly (Parliament) Ricardo Alarcon and his Panamanian counterpart Elias Castillo signed the document after concluding two-day sessions of the 11th Bilateral Inter-Parliamentary Group Meeting. The Cuban delegation expressed gratitude for the Panamanian historic position of "supporting the island in the struggle for the unconditional lighting of the US-imposed economic, trade and financial blockade." The Cuban parliamentary group recognized the Panamanian National Assembly support in the international drive for the release of five Cubans imprisoned in the US. Both representatives also denounced that the release in the US of Luis Posada Carriles sets a dangerous precedent. They termed as "excellent" the course of the Operation Miracle free eye surgery program. The document says that its results have been much more effective since the opening of the "Omar Torrijos" Ophthalmologic Center in Veraguas. Surgeries done under this program have surpassed 8,000 and research of low-income patients over 10,000. The inter-parliamentary commission agreed to meet again in 2008 in Cuba. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/7/07)

July 12: The authenticity of the Cuban rumba group Los Muñequitos de Matanzas received raving audience reviews at the recently concluded 2007 Montreal Jazz Festival. The legendary group from the north-western Cuban province of Matanzas performed before thousands of people, giving the best of their traditional repertoire while showing that rumba is alive in today's Cuban music. The Muñequitos de Matanzas traveled west to British Colombia, where they will play a concert in the city of Harrison. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 12/7/07)

July 12: Fifteen Cuban rafters who lost course on their way to the United States are in Colombia. Oscar Galvis, spokesman for the Colombian Security Administrative Department said that the Cubans -- 14 men and a woman, between 25-42 years old—arrived in the port of Cartagena after been rescued in international waters close to Mexico. (*AP*, 13/7/07)

July 16: A transfer of power in Cuba to acting President Raul Castro could pave the way for a debate on its return to the Organization of American States, the head of the hemispheric forum said. "There has been some change (...) that leads us to think that there is a transition, a certain shift in the balance of power in Cuba," Jose Miguel Insulza told

reporters when asked if Cuba was drawing closer to the rest of the Americas. "I would not dare forecast anything, or say how deep these changes are or where are they are leading to. But I do think it is going to be possible to re-establish a long overdue dialogue about Cuba in our organization," Insulza said. The OAS Secretary General said he does not want "to reopen old wounds" and that a discussion about the return of Cuba to the OAS would only take place if all member states agreed. "If any member country does not think that it's the right time to change our stance toward Cuba, I'm sorry but I won't impose that," Insulza said. (*Reuters, La Nación, 16/7/07*)

July 17: In Cancún, Mexican State Judicial Police officers arrested eight Cubans who had in their possession weapons and vehicles stolen in the United States and Mexico. Two of the detainees, unable to produce any form of valid ID, are considered to be illegal immigrants. (*Notimex, 17/7/07*)

July 17: Cuba has expressed confidence in relations with Zimbabwe and pledged to continue supporting the country in the health, social security, education and energy sectors to improve the lives of the people. Visiting Cuban Communist Party Secretary for International Relations Fernando Ramirez de Estenez made this statement in an address to journalists soon after paying a courtesy call on Vice President Joice Mujuru. "There is need to strengthen links between the two political parties and co-operation, especially on health, education, social security and energy sectors so that we improve the lives of our people," said Ramirez de Estenez, who is leading a delegation of the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party on a week-long working visit. The delegation is on a social responsibility tour programme and has already visited Angola and South Africa. The Cuban official said Zimbabwe and Cuba "have been working together since the days of the liberation struggle and after independence we continued to support the Zimbabwean people". He added that he had discussed with Mujuru on how best the two countries, which are both under Western sanctions, could further strengthen the relations. (*The Herald, 17/7/07*)

July 17: Deputies of eight countries, members of the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), debated in Havana different problems that are affecting indigenous people and other ethnicities in the region. In the first session at the Hotel Nacional, participants tackled indigenous rights and legislation, territorial security, and promotion of public policies, oriented to these populations. Ramses Torres, president of the PARLATINO Committee for Indigenous People and Ethnicities, told the press this meeting will transmit proposals to the regional countries so they can be put into practice and make possible constitutional reforms in favor of multicultural societies. Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon called to create inclusive societies in this region, integrating all its nations. "To achieve that, we need to make many changes, work hard, and contribute from the theoretical and normative point of view," Alarcon said when opening the sixth meeting of the Latin American Parliament Ethnicities Committee. Particularly, he referred to the problems of the indigenous people on the continent, and urged to regain the original values of those civilizations, such as their ethics, human spirit, fraternity, and solidarity. (*Prensa Latina, 17/7/07*)

July 19: Mexican fishermen rescued a group of 10 Cuban immigrants who lost course in the Gulf of Mexico, 370 kilometers northwest of Puerto Progreso, Yucatan Peninsula, a spokesman for the Mexican Marine Secretariat reported. (*EFE, 19/7/07*)

July 19: Prime Minister Stephen Harper waded into the sticky topic of relations with Cuba for the first time, putting him slightly out of step with his Barbadian host. Harper is in the Caribbean region pushing his hemispheric prescription of democracy, open markets and free trade, and said Canada is ready to start talks on a pact with the 15-member countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). But when asked if he had plans to visit Cuba, the largest country in the region and one of the biggest economies, Harper said he had no such plans. He said Canadian governments have often, "expressed concerns about certain aspects of governance and human rights in Cuba." Barbadian Prime Minister Owen Arthur responded by underlining Cuba's right to choose its own path. He said "civilized relationships" between civilized countries were not based on teaching lessons but on "respect for people's sovereignty and non-interference and the right for people to pursue alternative paths to their development." (*Canadian Press, 19/7/07*)

July 22: The Sao Paulo Forum reiterated in Managua its support to Cuba. "We back the Caribbean island's people (...) faced with the US blockade, and declare our solidarity and immediate freedom of these five Cuban heroes," the resolution said in reference to the five Cubans imprisoned in the US. The support to the island's people and government was the first agreement inked by representatives from 19 political organizations of 13 countries, who concluded a two-day working meeting in Managua. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/7/07)

July 26: Hugo Chávez promised his close friend and ally Fidel Castro that he would continue the Cuban leader's decades-long fight against U.S. imperialism once the aging revolutionary icon has passed away. "Fidel, I assume the commitment of continuing your struggle, your endless battle. I assume it. We, your children, assume it," said Chávez, a former paratroop commander who is steering Venezuela toward socialism. During his televised speech, he praised his mentor for living life to the fullest despite his age. "There's Fidel, soon he's going to turn 81 years old, fighting, living each day of his fruitful life intensely," Chávez said. "I know you are not going to leave yet. No, I know it." (*AP*, 27/7/07)

July 30: Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto extolled the solidarity of Chileans with the Cuban Revolution and its struggle for the liberation of the five anti-terrorists unjustly imprisoned in the US. At the commemoration of the 54th anniversary of the Assault on the Moncada Garrison, Prieto said actions of solidarity such as these are important in a selfish world where persons die because medical care became a capitalist business. Before hundreds of Chilean friends, at the capital's Convention Center Diego Portales, the Cuban official said in many parts the dominant philosophy is "every man for himself." The Minister took part in the 10th Ibero American Conference of Ministries of Culture. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/7/07)

July 30: The Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Poetry Award, granted this year to Cuban poet and essayist Fina García Marruz, was handed over to the island's Minister of Culture Abel Prieto by Chilean President Michelle Bachelet. Bachelet said that the work of García Marruz "comes to us along with the echoes of so many essential writers: narrators, poets, essayists and playwrights who were born in Cuba and whose work has been praised in the Americas and around the world." The Chilean leader highlighted García Marruz's dedication to the study of the poetry of Cuban national hero José Martí and Chilean Gabriela Mistral. During a special ceremony, held on the occasion of the 10th Iberoamerican Conference of Culture Ministers in the Chilean city of Valparaíso, Bachelet highly praised the work of the Cuban poet, who could not attend the event due to health reasons. Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto received the Award on behalf of García Marruz. (*ACN*, 30/7/07)

July 30: The 14th Contingent of the Latin American and Caribbean Brigade of Voluntary Work was welcomed at Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, located at the Havana municipality of Caimito. The Vice President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples (ICAP), Enrique Roman, welcomed the 253 members of that group, coming from 10 countries of the area, who have visited the country in several occasions. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/7/07)

July 31: The body of a Cuban-American who was under investigation in a migrant smuggling case was found riddled with bullets along a road outside this Caribbean resort, authorities said. Luis Lazaro Lara Morejon, who was wearing only white Bermuda shorts, was found handcuffed and blindfolded with duct tape on July 30. He had been shot at least 10 times, said Didier Vazquez, the director of the judicial police in Quintana Roo state, where Cancun is located. Vazquez said Mexican police were investigating whether Lara was part of a Cuban-American group that smuggled Cubans from southern Mexico to the United States. He said Lara was from Miami and moved a year ago to nearby Merida, the capital of Yucatan state. He was reported missing July 20. Mexican authorities outside Cancun arrested eight people -- six of whom were Cuban-Americans or Cubans with US residency -- on suspicion of smuggling migrants. The US Embassy in Mexico City said American authorities traveled to Cancun to interview the detainees and confirm their nationalities, but refused to comment further. Mexico, whose Caribbean coast is about 120 miles southwest of Cuba, is increasingly used by smugglers as a route to get Cuban migrants into the United States. (*AP*, 31/7/07)

Security

July 2: A delegation of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA), headed by the General Staff chief, Francisco Pereira Furtado, concluded a visit to Cuba, which was aimed at reinforcing the co-operation between the two countries. The Angolan military delegation was in Cuba since last June 19, and held official talks with the deputy minister of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, Álvaro López Miera. (*Angop*, 2/7/07)

July 12: A visiting delegation from the Higher School of Air Combat of Venezuela (ESGA) toured the José Martí Military Technical Institute and the home base of the Playa Girón Air Force Brigade. The delegation, comprised of officers studying at ESGA as well as teaching personnel, was led by ESGA director Brigade General Wilsson Ricardo Marín Leal. The Higher School of Air Combat has played a pivotal role in the training of officers from the Air Force and from other components of the Bolivarian Armed Forces of Venezuela. Both tours were also attended by Brigade General Ramón Martínez Echevarría and other senior staff and officers of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). (*Granma*, 12/7/07)

July 26: In his 26 of July address to the nation, Raul Castro said that military operation "Caguairán" will continue throughout 2007. "Hundreds of thousands of militiamen and reservists" have carried out the military operation "Caguairán" since mid 2006 and "it shall continue", Raul emphasized. "We cannot fool around with defense!". "Operation Caguairán will carry on in the next months (...) and will have as its crowning glory the Bastion 2008 Strategic Exercise which will take place at the end of the year", he added. [[Speech by Raul Castro](#)] (*Granma*, 27/7/07)

Terrorism

July 9: According to Spanish newspaper "El Mundo", the Cuban government acted as a go-between between the Spanish authorities and the separatist organization Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA) during the recent process of Basque Country peace negotiations. The news outlet added that messages for ETA would be brought to Cuban officials by a Spanish government emissary. The Cubans would then pass them along to a leader of Batasuna, the political arm of ETA, who in turn would bring them over to the separatist organization. The recipient of the messages was the Batasuna Head of International Policy, Joseba Alvarez, who made several trips to Cuba to receive the notes written for him by Cuban officials following their meetings with the Spanish government emissary. (*El Mundo*, 9/7/07)

US-Cuba Relations

July 1: Fidel Castro said that the US government continues to be a "killing machine" after revelations that nearly 50 years ago it tried to use American mobsters to kill him with poison pills. "The empire has created a real killing machine made up not only of the CIA and its methods," the Cuban leader wrote in the latest of his nearly daily essays, published in the Communist Youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. President Bush "has constructed powerful and expensive superstructures of intelligence (...) that lead to war, injustice, hunger and death everywhere on the planet," Castro wrote. CIA documents made public last week described the agency's recruitment of a former FBI agent in August 1960 to use mobsters and poison pills to kill Castro. Information about the plot was among hundreds of pages of CIA internal reports, known as "the family jewels." Fidel Castro's essay is dated June 30. [[The Killing Machine](#)] (*Reuters, AP*, 2/7/07)

July 2: A convicted Cuban spy network leader admitted in a prison interview that he was an "agent" for Cuba's government, but that he infiltrated South Florida to defend his homeland against alleged attacks by Miami exile

``terrorists." Gerardo Hernandez, imprisoned for life in a federal penitentiary in California, said he was not guilty of conspiring with the Cuban air force to shoot down exile pilots over the Florida Straits in 1996 as part of his spy mission. "Absolutely not," Hernandez, 40, said in an interview with the BBC World Service program "Newshour". During the exclusive interview, Hernandez said the "worst part" of his imprisonment was not being able to see his wife of 19 years because the US government has rejected giving her a visa. Hernandez said he also spoke by phone two years ago with Fidel Castro, who said "he was confident that justice will prevail" in the spy case. Hernandez's attorney, Paul McKenna, said his client never denied at trial that he was working undercover for the Cuban government. "The question has always been why were they here and what were they doing," he said. ``We were trying to show the jury that they were here for their country's national security and to identify people who were trying to harm Cuba." In the BBC interview, Hernandez said he came to South Florida to spy on exile ``terrorist groups." (*The Miami Herald*, 2/7/07)

July 2: One of 14 buses carrying "friendshipments" to Cuba is slated to depart from Seattle. The Friendship Caravan program — in its 18th year — will make more than 120 stops throughout the US and Canada collecting medical supplies and journals before the goods are flown to Havana from Tampico, Mexico. Many people don't understand the shortages the U.S. embargo on Cuba has created, said Mark Koenig, director of Providence Health International. Koenig's organization collects medical supplies in Lacey for distribution, and has done so for years. "What I experienced was very well-trained people very committed to helping people and not being able to get what they needed to do it," Koenig said. (*Seattle Times*, 2/7/07)

July 4: Cuba marked the 231st anniversary of the US's Independence Day, July 4th, with a jazz concert that was led by renowned trumpet player José Miguel Crego, El Greco, who was accompanied by other renowned jazz players at the Amadeo Roldán Theater in Havana. Laura Vilar, director of the Center for Research and Development of Cuban Music, noted that the US independence, declared by the Congress of Philadelphia in 1776, was being celebrated by both the people of Abraham Lincoln and also by the people of José Martí and Fidel Castro. Vilar also mentioned the ties that have existed for centuries between the Cuban and American cultures, particularly in the field of music and stressed that the concert was dedicated to the jazz players of New Orleans. (*ACN*, 4/7/07)

July 5: The closest the CIA came to killing Cuba's Fidel Castro was a 1963 attempt with a poison pill delivered by American mobsters that was to be slipped into a chocolate milkshake, a former Cuban intelligence chief said. But the capsule stuck to the freezer where it was hidden in the cafeteria of the Havana Libre (ex Hilton) Hotel and ripped open when the would-be assassin waiter went to get the poison. "That moment was the closest the CIA got to assassinating Fidel," retired state security general Fabian Escalante told the press in an interview. Escalante, who detailed the poison pill plot in his book "The Secret War" published in 2005, said the agency was trying to "purify" itself but continues its skulduggery today. While there is no evidence that the CIA has plotted to kill Castro since the Ford Administration banned assassination plots against foreign leaders in 1976, Escalante sees the hand of the CIA in more recent attempts by anti-Castro militants trained by the agency for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. (*Reuters*, 5/7/07)

July 6: ING Groep NV, whose joint venture with Cuba was blacklisted by the United States last year, will close down its banking operations in Havana, a spokesman for the Dutch financial group said. ING, the first major Western bank to set up business in Communist Cuba in 1994, said the closure of its representative office was not due to political pressure from the United States. "It is a purely business decision (...) it comes as part of our assessment of the economic viability of our operations around the world," said spokesman Nanne Bos in Amsterdam. Business sources in Havana said the Dutch bank has lost business as Cuba increases its exports of nickel to China rather than European markets via Rotterdam. Last July, the US Treasury Department put the Netherlands Caribbean Bank, an ING joint venture with two Cuban state-owned financial entities chartered in Curacao, on a list of companies US companies and citizens cannot do business with. (*Reuters*, 6/7/07)

July 6: The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the 15-month prison sentence given to independent Cuban journalist Armando Betancourt Reina on charges of public disorder. Betancourt Reina had been held without charge in a prison in the central city of Camagüey since May 2006. A Camagüey court sentenced Betancourt Reina, a reporter for the independent news agency Nueva Prensa Cubana, after a five-hour trial, according to press reports. Mercedes Boudet Silva, the journalist's wife, said her husband was returned to the Cerámica Roja Prison in Camagüey, where he has been held for more than 13 months. Boudet Silva said the time the journalist already served would count toward the sentence. Betancourt Reina was detained on May 23, 2006, while covering the eviction of poor families from their homes, members of his family told CPJ. (*CPJ Press Release*, 6/7/07)

July 8: The US Coast Guard reported it had repatriated more than 100 Cuban migrants to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, within seven days and transferred two suspected smugglers to US Customs and Border Protection. The two suspected smugglers, whose names were not disclosed, were apprehended when Coast Guard officials interdicted a go-fast boat about 35 miles south of Dry Tortugas. Thirty migrants were aboard the vessel, according to Coast Guard officials. Coast Guard officials said they apprehended several groups of migrants attempting to reach US shore. Among them were four migrants on a rustic vessel 50 miles south of Key West; eight from two rustic vessels 59 miles south of Key West and 40 miles south of Marathon; and 10 from two makeshift vessels 35 miles south of Marathon and 52 miles southwest of Key West. Eighteen other Cubans were picked up off a rustic vessel 65 miles south of Key West. Coast Guard crews intercepted 45 migrants in five separate cases. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/7/07)

July 9: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the United States hopes that the "Cubans themselves" will decide their future and added that Washington will not tolerate the transition from one dictator to another in Havana. Rice made that statement during a press conference about Latin America with a small group of reporters. The secretary did not say what, if anything, Washington would do to stop the ailing Fidel Castro from passing on the mantle of leadership to younger brother Raul, who has been Cuba's acting president since the octogenarian Cuban leader underwent surgery last July. Rice said that Cubans "have the right to liberty" and that when the political transition takes place, Washington will support Cuba "as it holds free elections." (*EFE*, 9/7/07)

July 10: California sports agent Gustavo "Gus" Dominguez was sentenced to five years in prison for smuggling Cuban baseball players to the US. The sentence was the mandatory minimum possible for Dominguez, 48, who was facing the possibility of more than 200 years in federal prison. A former pitcher at Cal State Northridge and co-founder of the Encino-based agency Total Sports International, Dominguez was found guilty in April of 21 felony counts of smuggling, conspiracy and harboring and transporting aliens for profit. (*Sun Sentinel*, 10/7/07)

July 10: The United States poked fun at Cuba's interim leader Raul Castro and termed the elections he had called for as a sham. Castro had scheduled the polls without making clear the role of his convalescing brother Fidel Castro. US State Department spokesman Tom Casey said based on past experiences, the elections would "not be giving the Cuban people the freedom they deserve." "If Castro-lite, meaning Raul Castro, wants to hold elections-lite, meaning the kind that they have held in the past -- single party elections that don't allow the people to have a choice and only allow them to ratify the rule of the current dictatorship -- whether its Fidel Castro's name that is on top of the ballot or Raul Castro's doesn't really matter much." Casey said that the United States wanted to see "free and fair" elections in which all Cubans participated and "anyone who wants to run for office and express their political opinion has an opportunity to do so." (*AFP*, 10/7/07)

July 10: Repression is increasing in Cuba under the control of Raul Castro, and the domination of the government by his brother, Fidel, is nearing an end, Bush administration officials said. "In Cuba, this year will mark the end of the long domination of that country by Fidel Castro," Mike McConnell, the nation's new spy chief, told Congress. McConnell, who did not explain his remark, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that significant positive change immediately after Fidel Castro's death was unlikely. He said Raul Castro has had the opportunity to solidify his control in the seven months since his brother's incapacitating illness last July. (*USA Today*, 13/7/07)

July 10: The Bush administration official who oversees a White House effort to promote transition to democracy in Cuba said he has seen no indication that the Cuban government is getting ready to make any changes. "What has increased is repression," Caleb Charles McCarry said at a seminar at the American Enterprise Institute. Security forces have stepped up harassment of dissidents and have kept closer track of reporters since Fidel Castro transferred control of Cuba's government to his brother after undergoing intestinal surgery, the US official said. McCarry said the White House Commission for Assistance for a Free Cuba does "what it can to hasten the day when they can enjoy freedom again." He spoke primarily of broadcasts to Cuba and expressions of support for human rights, and said only peaceful means are used by the United States. On the job since July 2005, McCarry dismissed any suggestion of U.S. dialogue with Cuba to prepare for transition to democracy. "The dialogue that needs to take place is between Cuban authorities and the Cuban people," he said. (*USA Today*, 13/7/07)

July 11: A burgeoning democratic partnership between the Americas and Africa must translate into better lives for people in those regions, says Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Speaking at the Organization of American States (OAS), Rice lamented the "great and tragic suffering" by too many people in the Americas and Africa who are excluded from opportunities for economic advancement and social justice. Such conditions, said Rice, are causing people in those regions to "wonder whether democracies really can deliver" on citizens' "rightfully high hopes for a better life." She pointed to Cuba, Zimbabwe and Burma as examples of nations where people still are being deprived of basic human rights. "We must support the great people of Cuba who still long for a future of freedom that their government denies to them", Rice said. [[Remarks at the OAS](#)] (*US Info*, 11/7/07)

July 11: The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, reported that 70 Cuban migrants interdicted in three events were repatriated by the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Drummond to Bahia de Cabanas, Cuba. (*US Fed News*, 11/7/07)

July 12: US Senator Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota) won Senate Appropriations Committee approval for provisions removing two road-blocks the Bush Administration put in place to block US farm product sales to Cuba. "This is a big victory for American farmers," Dorgan said. "It means US farmers will compete on an even field with farmers from other countries selling food to Cuba." American farmers have sold more than \$2 billion in farm products to Cuba since food sales were authorized in 2000 by legislation Dorgan authored ending the US embargo against food and medicine sales to Cuba. North Dakota farm sales have totalled more than \$20 million during that time. Both figures are a fraction of what US farmers could have been sold without the Bush Administration impediments. (*US Fed News*, 12/7/07)

July 14: US authorities are tending to 30 Cuban immigrants who were found on shore on Little Gasparilla Island in Charlotte County. The Cubans -- 20 men, six women and four children -- were spotted by an area resident who was walking the beach looking for nesting turtles. That person called the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, which alerted the Coast Guard and state marine patrol officers. All of the boat's occupants were reported "safe and sound," officials said. The Cubans were taken to Homestead to be processed by federal officials. The refugees told authorities that they came from Cuba in a raft. But no raft has been found, and authorities say it is unlikely the ocean currents would carry them to Little Gasparilla Island. (*Herald Tribune*, 14/7/07)

July 14: Fidel Castro suggested that Washington has deliberately failed to stop terrorist attacks against Americans because it needed "to deliver a bang" that would justify its war on terror. In the latest in a series of essays Castro, 80, has begun writing every few days, he seized on Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff's comments expressing a "gut feeling" that the United States faces an increased risk of attack this summer. "The government of the United States sees and hears all, with or without legal authority," Castro wrote. "They can prevent any attack on their people, unless there is some imperial need to deliver a bang so that they can carry on with and justify the brutal war which has been declared against the culture, religion, economy and independence of other peoples." The accusation was made at the end of an essay titled "Bush, Health and Education," published in the official daily "Juventud Rebelde" on July 15,

in which Castro claimed Cubans are better cared for than Americans, and that his poor island nation and its legions of doctors working around Latin America have done more for the region than the United States ever will. [[Bush, Health, and Education](#)] (AP, 16/7/07)

July 15: The close to 150 members of the US Cuba Friendship Caravan arrived to McAllen, Texas and will attempt to cross the border into Mexico on July 17 with 90 tons of humanitarian aid destined for the Cuban people. "Caravanistas" from the United States, Canada, Mexico and several European nations make up the group. "Anything can happen on the border," said Reverend Lucius Walker, Executive Director of the Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization, IFCO. He denounced the recent detention of the medical aid for Cuba at the Maine-Canada border, although immigration officials allowed the donations to pass through Vancouver and Winnipeg. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 17/7/07)

July 16: Michael Moore's new documentary film "SiCKO" has given Cuba's free health system its best publicity since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, a Cuban doctor who hosted the filmmaker's visit said. "Michael Moore spurred more interest in our health system than the 40-odd years we have spent providing health to our people," Dr. Jaime Davis, who provided free check-ups and treatment to Moore's group, told the press. Davis, a surgeon now working for the Health Ministry's international affairs office, said Moore's group left with "improved health," but gave no details. (*Reuters*, 17/7/07)

July 17: Members of the US Venceremos Brigade and the Puerto Rican Juan Rius Rivera Brigade in solidarity with Cuba visited a foster home in Havana and exchanged views about Cuban reality with adolescents. The 38th Contingent of the Venceremos Brigade and the 16th Juan Rius Rivera Brigade arrived in Cuba last July 13th and will stay in the island until July 31st. They are participating in voluntary works and visiting places of social, cultural and historic interest. (*ACN*, 17/7/07)

July 17: Cuba chided the US for issuing only about 10,700 visas to Cubans during the first nine months of the fiscal year, barely half of the 20,000 visas US authorities have promised to give those who want off the island every year. "It is evident a considerable delay exists," the Foreign Relations Ministry said in a statement published on the front page of the Communist Party newspaper Granma. "If this trend continues during the last three months of the annual period, the government of the United States would violate its fundamental obligation guaranteed by the Migration Accord of 1994." Under that agreement, Washington uses a lottery system to grant up to 20,000 Cubans each year permission to emigrate to America. But Cuba's government said that through June 30, only 10,724 Cubans had been granted visas - just 53.6% of the annual minimum. [[Declaración del MINREX](#)] (AP, 17/7/07)

July 17: The United States won't meet its commitment to provide at least 20,000 visas for Cubans to migrate from the island this year because the Havana government has put "unreasonable constraints" on its diplomatic mission there, the State Department said. The surprise admission that Washington would fail for the first time to meet a key obligation under a 1994 migration accord with Havana came after the Cuban Foreign Ministry accused the Bush administration of withholding immigration visas to try to destabilize the island. The accusation touches a raw nerve, as both sides often have traded allegations that the other uses migration for political ends. (*McClatchy Newspapers*, 18/7/07)

July 17: Fidel Castro accused the United States of siphoning off Cuba's best and brightest talents and accused Washington of "scientific apartheid" throughout the world. In an article appearing in Cuba's state-run press, on July 18, Castro said that America had skimmed off one in 20 Cuban professionals, including many of its highly-regarded doctors who he said are trained at great cost to the impoverished Communist state. "Between 1959 and 2004, Cuba graduated 805,903 professionals, including doctors," Castro said. "The unjust policies of the United States has deprived our country of 5.16 percent of the professionals trained by the revolution," he wrote. Castro blasted Washington's "internalization of scientific investigation (...) creating a kind of 'scientific apartheid' for the great majority of humanity." [[The Brain Drain](#)] (*Turkish Press*, 18/7/07)

July 17: The US President sent a letter to the members of the House and Senate Committees on Foreign Relations, Foreign Affairs, and Appropriations suspending the application of Title III of the Helms Burton Law. "I hereby determine and report to the Congress that suspension for 6 months beyond August 1, 2007, of the right to bring an action under title III of the Act is necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba", the letter said. (*US Fed News*, 17/7/07)

July 18: A top Cuban Foreign Ministry official rejected US charges that the island's government was to blame for Washington's inability to meet its annual 20,000-visa quota for Cubans seeking to leave the island. America's failure to meet the quota will likely encourage more illegal immigration to the United States, Josefina Vidal, director of the Foreign Ministry's North American Department, told the press. "The Foreign Ministry categorically rejects the affirmation by the US Interests Section that we are obstructing the work of that office," Vidal said in an interview. She dismissed complaints by the US Interests Section — the American mission in Havana — that Cuba had failed to authorize essential personnel and materials. Washington's failure to meet its annual quota of 20,000 visas by September 30 would be a "very grave violation" of migration accords between the two countries, she said. (*AP*, 19/7/07)

July 18: The 18th Cuba Solidarity Caravan crossed the border to Mexico under the harassment of US security officers and will be arriving at the port of Tampico, where they will embark to the island. In statements made to *Prensa Latina*, Ellen Bernstein, speaker of the religious organization Pastors for Peace, confirmed the US customs authorities confiscated a dozen computers, part of the humanitarian aid. "Goliath knows he is losing and has to take action in order to show he is doing something against David, who carries out the US blockade policy against Cuba," commented Bernstein by phone from the Mexican city of Reynosa. Before its arrival to the Mexican border, the group traveled through dozens of US cities and the south of Canada, where it collected donations and expressions of friendship with the Caribbean island. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/7/07)

July 18: A father who lives in Cuba, has been fighting to bring his daughter back to to the island. He has been in South Florida for some time to visit with his 4-year-old daughter. After a first hearing in the custody case, a local judge will decide whether the child will remain in the United States or be sent back to Cuba. The trial was under way at the Juvenile Justice Center in Miami. Several therapists testified about recent visits between the girl and her father. "Interaction continues to develop," Dr. Julio Vigil said. "She continues to have a degree of comfort with the parent." Other therapists testified that the process of reunification of the girl and her father was not going well. "It will take a huge number of people trying to help this process along, and the fact is that there seems to be no bond," Dr. Miguel Firpi said. The girl came from Cuba with her mother about two years ago. Courts in the US recently ruled the mother was not fit to care for her child. Family friends have been caring for the girl and the father came to take her back to Cuba. (*NBC8.Com*, 18/7/07)

July 18: Imperial Tobacco chief executive Gareth Davis is already planning a charm offensive in Cuba to show that Altadis's 50pc stake in Habanos, the state-owned manufacturer of some of the world's most famous cigars, is in safe hands. He brushed aside fears that a change of ownership clause in the joint venture would be invoked, predicting a bright future for Imps in the spiritual home of smoking. We're very hopeful Habanos will go from strength to strength under our stewardship," Mr Davis said. Although the maker of Montecristo and Romeo y Julieta cigars was not Imperial's main target, the part-ownership of a clutch of famous brands, such as Cohiba, that the Altadis takeover brings is a prestigious bonus for the life-long smoker and a potential money-spinner if the huge American market was to open up after the death of Fidel Castro. The ultimate luxury product, cigars attract much wider margins than cigarettes. "These are iconic cigar brands," Mr Davis said. "Emerging, inspirational markets are growing at a cracking pace and these sorts of products are highly sought after. We can do really well with them." (*The Daily Telegraph*, 19/7/07)

July 18: The United States accused Cuba of imposing "multiple roadblocks" that it said were stifling its ability to issue exit visas for Cubans, in a new row between the staunch enemies. The US Interest section in Cuba was "prevented"

from meeting its obligations under a bilateral accord by "multiple roadblocks" that had been "put in place by the Cuban government," department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters. As a result, he said, the United States would not be able to meet the minimum 20,000 travel documents for Cubans this fiscal year. His comments came a day after Cuba accused Washington of flouting a carefully-crafted deal on exit visas, alleging this was an effort by the United States to destabilize the communist island nation. (*AFP*, 19/7/07)

July 19: Heightened scrutiny of banking transactions by the United States since the September 11 attacks has led European and Canadian banks to curtail dealings with Cuba, bankers and businesses say. The USA Patriot Act allows US authorities to confiscate assets and penalize institutions that fail to report money laundering and terrorist financing. The result -- perhaps intended -- is that Western businessmen in Havana are having nightmares moving funds in dollars to and from Cuba because banks are increasingly refusing their business. HSBC, Barclays, Credit Suisse, Royal Bank of Canada and the Bank of Nova Scotia, also known as Scotiabank, have closed accounts of Cuban companies or reduced business tied to Cuba since last year to comply with US regulations. The moves were confirmed either by the banks themselves, by Cuban officials, or by people doing business in Cuba. (*Reuters*, 19/7/07)

July 19: A US humanitarian group delivered about 80 metric tons (90 tons) of aid to Cuba, defying Washington's 45-year-old trade embargo. Some 140 Pastors for Peace volunteers drove across the Texas border to Mexico, and then flew to Havana with computers and medical supplies, including X-ray machines, walkers and surgical gowns. The group, making its 18th annual pilgrimage to Cuba, said it was held up at two US border crossings while returning from Canada with donations, but completed the journey with "99.5 percent" of the aid it hoped to bring, said the Reverend Luis Barrios, pastor of San Romero de Las Americas, a non-denominational church in New York City. (*AP*, 19/7/07)

July 20: America's trade with communist-run Cuba could double if US financing rules on direct agricultural sales to the island were lifted, the US International Trade Commission said in a report. "All agricultural commodity sectors would likely benefit from the lifting of the financing restriction," said the 180-page report released in Washington. The report was requested by the Senate Finance Committee, the ITC said, which is chaired by Senator Max Baucus (Democrat-Montana). Baucus has introduced legislation that would lift most of the financing restrictions on US agriculture exports and eliminate limits on travel. "Common sense tells us that barring agricultural producers from doing business with the largest market in the Caribbean is hurting American interests," Baucus said in a written statement. "It's clearly time for Congress to curb the overzealous trade embargo on Cuba." (*AP*, 20/7/07)

July 20: A total of 69 Cubans who attempted a crossing to the United States but were intercepted at sea were taken back to Cuba, the US Coast Guard announced in a news release. The Coast Guard cutter Knight Island picked up a group of 17 immigrants on July 14, 40 miles south of Key West. On July 16, the Coast Guard cutter Diligence interdicted a group of 22 immigrants 75 miles southwest of Key West. The 39 Cubans were traveling on rustic vessels when they were caught. On July 17, 30 Cuban immigrants were sent back, also to Bahia De Cabanas, Cuba. They were from a total of four groups that had been intercepted over the previous week. (*Sun Sentinel*, 20/7/07)

July 23: Cuban inspectors are flying to North Dakota to look at seed potato fields in the Red River Valley. North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson, through a spokeswoman, confirmed the visit but said he could not provide details under conditions of the inspectors' visas. M. Marie Martin, a trade director with the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment. Duane Maatz, president of the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association, said the two Cuban inspectors were to arrive on July 24 and stay in the region until July 27, touring fields in eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota and possibly an ethanol plant in the region. "I think it will be the start of building some relationships," he said. "The point of this trip is to look at the growing crop. They may very well return in October" during harvest. Cuba announced in May that it would send experts to North Dakota this summer as the communist island closes in on a deal to buy about 100 tons of seed potatoes. It would be the first time Cuba has bought US seed potatoes, Maatz said. (*Forbes*, 23/7/07)

July 23: The president of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, reiterated that the almost fifty-year-old US policy of commercial, financial and economic blockade against Cuba is genocidal. The Cuban official made the statement during a meeting held in Havana with US organizations in solidarity with Cuba. Present in the meeting were members of the 18th Pastors for Peace U.S.-Cuba Friendship Caravan, the 38th contingent of the Venceremos Brigade, the Cuba Solidarity Network and the Association of US-Cuba Sister Cities. Alarcón denounced the aggressive anti-Cuba policy of the administration of George W. Bush, which openly expresses its intentions to topple the Cuban government and subjugate the country. (*ACN, 24/7/07*)

July 23: Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama suggested that he would meet with two leaders who top South Florida's most-hated list: Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez. During a nationally televised debate, Obama responded to a hypothetical question: "Would you be willing to meet separately, without precondition, during the first year of your administration, in Washington or anywhere else, with the leaders of Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba and North Korea, in order to bridge the gap that divides our countries? The senator from Illinois responded: "I would, and the reason is this: the notion that somehow not talking to countries is somehow punishing them, which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of this administration, is ridiculous." "Ronald Reagan and Democratic presidents like JFK constantly spoke to the Soviet Union at a time when Ronald Reagan called them an evil empire, and the reason is because they understood that we may not trust them, that they may pose an extraordinary danger to this country, but we have the obligation to find areas where we can potentially move forward." He added: "And I think it is a disgrace that we have not spoken to them." The Democratic frontrunner, Hillary Clinton, disagreed with her leading rival: "I will not promise to meet with the leaders of these countries during my first year (...) I don't want to be used for propaganda purposes and don't want to make a situation even worse, but I certainly agree that we need to get back to diplomacy, which has been turned into a bad word by this administration." (*The Miami Herald, 24/7/07*)

July 24: Eight Americans graduated from a Cuban medical school after six years of studies fully funded by Fidel Castro's government. They plan to return home, take board exams for licenses to practice and provide cheap health care in poor neighborhoods. "Cuba offered us full scholarships to study medicine here. In exchange, we commit ourselves to go back to our communities to provide health care to underserved people," said Carmen Landau, 30, of Oakland, California. The program is part of Castro's pet project to send thousands of Cuban doctors abroad to tend to the poor in developing countries, such as Venezuela and Bolivia, and train tens of thousands of medical students from developing countries in Cuba. Officials in Cuba's communist government relish the idea of training doctors for the United States, its arch-enemy since Castro took power in a leftist revolution in 1959. There are 88 Americans studying medicine in Cuba. The first to graduate two years ago was Cedric Edwards, who is now working at Montefiore Hospital in New York City's Bronx borough. (*Reuters, 24/7/07*)

July 25: Abel Gómez, a Cuban refugee showed up in June at a US-Mexico border crossing in Texas certain that immigration authorities would let him in, along with his wife and two children. As a Cuban refugee, Gómez, 30, was indeed paroled into the United States under the wet foot/dry foot policy. But his Venezuelan wife Ocdalis, 22, and their Venezuela-born children -- 2-year-old Abel and 6-year-old Winnelis -- were immediately put in deportation proceedings in Texas. Gomez is among the rising number of Cubans arriving via the Mexican border -- 84 percent of all Cuban migrants came through Mexico, according to figures released by Customs and Border Protection. Those numbers have been increasing year by year as a result of intensified Coast Guard interdictions in the Florida Straits. In fiscal year 2005, 8,994 Cuban migrants arrived in the United States -- but the majority, 7,267, came in through the Mexican border. In fiscal year 2006, arrivals reached 10,329, with 8,639 showing up at the border. The Gómez case illustrates the increasingly frequent detention of foreign families under tightened immigration rules post-9/11. Prior to the terrorist attacks in 2001, undocumented families were generally released pending resolution of their cases. (*The Miami Herald, 25/7/07*)

July 25: Representative Mark Udall (Democrat-Colorado) has introduced legislation that would let US oil and gas companies drill off the coast of Cuba. The bill, according to Udall's office, would "make an exception to all laws,

executive orders and regulations that now prohibit exports to or imports from Cuba or transactions in property in which a Cuban national has an interest." Udall said oil companies from countries including China and Venezuela have expressed interest in offshore development deals with Cuba. "But our trade embargo continues to prevent American companies from seeking similar opportunities. This does not make sense, and the bill I am introducing today would change that," Udall said in a prepared statement. The bill would require US companies engaging in exploration and production agreements with Cuba to adhere to environmental standards that apply to the US outer continental shelf, according to Udall's office. (*Rigzone.Com*, 26/7/07)

July 26: Acting President Raul Castro asserted his leadership of Cuba with promises of economic improvement and an offer of talks with the United States when the Bush administration is gone. Raul Castro said it has been a difficult year since his brother fell ill because Cuba's enemies in the United States had banked on the collapse of its socialist system. The administration of US President George W. Bush stepped up an "implacable war" to undermine Cuba with trade and financial sanctions that include denying Cuban access to international financial services, he said. But he said Cuba remains stable and Cubans united behind the ruling Communist Party. "Cuba is a dangerous example in a poor continent. They have not succeeded in bringing us to our knees," he said. The Bush administration has rejected what it calls a "succession from one dictator to another" in Cuba. Raul Castro last year twice made overtures to the United States offering to negotiate an end to the decades-old political rift on an equal footing. He is now looking past the next US presidential elections. "The new administration will have to decide whether it maintains this absurd, illegal and failed policy against Cuba or accepts the olive branch we extended," he said. "If the next U.S. government puts arrogance aside and decides to talk in a civilized fashion, that is welcome. If not, we are prepared to continue facing their hostile policy for another 50 years," he said. (*Reuters*, 26/7/07)

July 26: US State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack responded coolly to Raul Castro's invitation to a dialogue with Cuba. "The only real dialogue that's needed is with the Cuban people," McCormack said in Washington. "If the Cuban people were able to express their opinion on the question of whether or not they would like to freely choose their leaders, the answer would be yes". "Unfortunately that's not a dialogue that is taking place in Cuba at the moment." (*AP*, 26/7/07)

July 26: A Maine woman is suing Cuban leader Fidel Castro over the capture and death of her father, a pilot believed to have vanished over Cuba four decades ago, the clerk's office at a Maine court said. The suit filed by Sherry Sullivan in May and sent to Cuba names Fidel Castro, his brother and acting president Raul Castro, along with the Republic of Cuba for the wrongful death of Geoffrey Francis Sullivan. In court papers filed in Maine's Waldo County Superior Court, Sullivan said her father had been involved "in various anti-Castro covert operations in Central America and Cuba" before disappearing while flying over Cuba in 1963. It said he "was shot down over Cuba in the course of a covert mission against the Castro regime and was and had been imprisoned by the Castro regime in Cuba." Geoffrey Sullivan has been declared dead by US authorities, according to the suit, which seeks unspecified damages. (*New Zealand Herald*, 26/7/07)

July 26: The preteen brother of a 4-year-old girl at the center of an international custody dispute is emerging as a key player in the drama, which has pitted the girl's birth father, a Cuban national, against Florida child-welfare administrators and the boy's adoptive family. Alan Mishael, the attorney for the Coral Gables family that adopted the 12-year-old boy and wishes to adopt his sister, announced at a court hearing that he will ask a judge to make the boy a party to the dispute. If that is approved by Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Jeri B. Cohen, the boy would be allowed to help in trying to sway the judge's ruling. Regardless of the judge's decision, the boy's plight already is casting a large shadow over the dispute, which involves children born to the same woman, but who have two different birth fathers. The battle began in December 2005, when the children's mother was hospitalized following a suicide attempt. Both children were taken into custody by the DCF, and the children's birth mother later came to court and announced she did not wish to regain custody. The boy's father agreed to allow the foster parents, prominent Cuban exiles living in Coral

Gables, to raise him. But the girl's father, a fisherman and part-time office worker from Guayos, Cuba, insisted that she be returned to him -- setting in motion the emotional drama. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/7/07)

July 27: Ten months ago, the US government launched a new effort to beam TV broadcasts into Cuba via a Gulf Stream jet, an end-run around the communist government's close grip on the island's media. A US State Department draft report circulated in June called the jet "a best practice" to beat the Cubans' jamming efforts and said the \$10 million startup cost was "a big investment but appears to be paying off," with viewership on the rise. But more than two dozen Cubans immigrants who recently arrived in Florida paint a very different picture. They said while the US government's Radio Marti is heard throughout the island, TV Marti can rarely be seen. The TV operation costs US taxpayers more than \$20 million a year. "I saw it during a day with very good climatological conditions, but it still barely came through," said Efrain Ramos, 56, who arrived in Florida June 29 from Havana. Those outside of Havana couldn't see it at all. The station remains in sync with the views of Miami's most hardline, Cuban-American political leadership, and efforts by some members of Congress to put the 17-year-old station out of business have never gotten very far. (*AP*, 27/7/07)

July 27: The House rejected an initiative to ease restrictions on US agricultural exports to Cuba, virtually burying any chance that US policy toward the island could be relaxed by Congress this year. By a 245-182 margin, the House voted down an amendment presented by Representative Charles Rangel (Democrat-New York), that would have allowed Cuban officials to travel to the United States to inspect US export facilities and products and let Cubans make direct payments to US banks for any purchases. The initiative would have also allowed the Cubans to pay for the goods after they are shipped from a US port, rather than before as now required. Rangel's initiative was backed by a coalition of mostly Democratic opponents to US policies toward Cuba and farm-state Republicans, but opposed by Cuban-American lawmakers and others. Miami Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen argued the initiative would provide Cuba, deemed by the State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism, direct access to US banks, and that Havana would use the visas for its inspectors to infiltrate spies into the United States. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/7/07)

July 27: Immigration authorities abruptly released the Venezuelan-born wife and children of a Cuban refugee who was paroled into the country on the same day his family was put in deportation proceedings at the Texas-Mexico border. An emotional Ocdalis Gómez, 22, and her children Abel, 2, and Winnelis, 6, immediately boarded a plane in Austin, Texas, bound for Miami, where they rejoined Abel Gómez, 30 -- the Cuban migrant who for weeks desperately tried to gain freedom for his family. "I'm immensely happy," he said when he finally was able to speak, tears rolling down his cheeks. "Thanks to God, I am now next to my family again." (*The Miami Herald*, 27/7/07)

July 28: Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney criticized Democrat Barack Obama for saying that he would meet with the leaders of Iran, Venezuela, Syria and Cuba, telling a crowd that the next president should meet with friendly nations first. "Surely the next American president would want to reach out to our friends around the world, particular here in our own hemisphere," Romney said, specifically mentioning Colombia and Mexico. "And what's he going to do during his first year? He's going to meet with the world's worst tyrants," Romney said. "He's going to in his first year be meeting with (Fidel) Castro, (Venezuelan President Hugo) Chavez, (Iranian President Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad, (Syrian President Bashar) Assad. Think of that. Those are his priorities," Romney said. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/7/07)

July 28: American protesters walked across the border from Canada after a visit to Cuba that violated a US travel ban. About 60 members of pro-Cuba group Venceremos Brigade walked the Peace Bridge border crossing linking Canada and Buffalo, New York, on their return from Havana. US travelers to Cuba often fly through Canada, which has regular flights to the country. The protesters walked in groups of 15, hauling their luggage up a narrow sidewalk high above the Niagara River as trucks, buses and cars rumbled by on the three-lane span. US customs officials processed the first 15 members through in about 20 minutes, with minimal fuss. (*Reuters*, 28/7/07)

July 29: Over the past several years, Florida ranchers - some from famous old families - have toured ranches on the communist island and saddled up with their cowboy-hatted counterparts. They also have shipped heifers and breeding bulls to those Cuban "friends" to help replenish the island's depleted cattle supply. They have even hosted Cuban officials on their Florida ranches to select the animals. These ranchers are among a growing number of US business owners who want to trade with Cuba. Some of them favor an out-and-out end to the 45-year economic embargo and travel restrictions against the island so they can form closer business ties with Cuban cowpokes. And they don't see the Cuban government as a barrier. "When we go to Cuba, we don't talk politics," says Jim Strickland, 52, owner of the 6,000-acre Strickland Ranch in Manatee County, who has been to the island at least eight times. "We're just *vaqueros* and *ganaderos* - cowboys and cattle ranchers - talking about our animals and our ranches with cattle people down there," he says. "We speak the same language. Cattlemen historically have always looked for new markets, and that's what we're doing." (*Palm Beach Post*, 29/7/07)

July 29: After a lull following Fidel Castro's illness last year, Cubans once again are taking to homemade boats or powerful speedboats manned by smugglers on a trip to the United States that often includes a detour through Mexico. Since May, the US Coast Guard has been intercepting more boat people in precarious craft crossing the Straits of Florida in the calm summer waters. The US Border Patrol also has been processing rising numbers turning up at the US frontier with Mexico. So far this fiscal year, 2,819 Cubans have made it ashore in Florida, compared with 3,076 in all of last year, said US Customs and Border Protection spokesman Zachary Mann. The number of Cubans intercepted in the Florida Straits are still below -- but likely to exceed -- last year's 2,810, according to the US Coast Guard. That was the highest number since the 1994 exodus when the Coast Guard picked up more than 35,000 people floating off Cuba in all kinds of rafts when Castro opened the doors briefly. To avoid interception by the US Coast Guard and forced repatriation to Cuba, most boat people are now leaving through the Gulf of Mexico on speedboats that ferry them to Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. Some also go south to the Cayman Islands, and on to Central America. From there, they make their way north on well-trodden migrant routes to the US-Mexico border. US officials say 89 percent of the Cubans emigrating illegally from Cuba to the United States are entering by land border rather than coming ashore from a boat. This fiscal year up to July 26, 9,296 Cubans have entered the United States via land entry ports, compared to 8,677 for all of fiscal 2006 and 7,281 the previous year, said Jennifer Connors, a Customs and Border Protection spokeswoman. (*The New York Times*, 29/7/07)

July 30: The US Commerce Department estimates Cuba will import \$300 million to \$350 million in goods from the USA this year. Alabama will provide about a third of that, at \$100 million to \$120 million in goods, according to the state's Department of Agriculture and Industries. That's consistent with recent history. Alabama businesses exported \$100 million or more of goods to Cuba in each of the past three years, according to state figures. A 2005 Texas A&M study showed Arkansas leading the nation with exports to Cuba, with an estimated \$167 million in trade a year. Alabama was second at \$120 million, followed by California (\$98 million), Iowa (\$71 million) and Texas (\$54 million). Many Alabama farmers would like to see that business expand further. Last year, 66% of the wheat imported by Cuba came from the USA. Other staples imported included: corn, 71%; rice, 77%; poultry, 65%; pork, 42%; soybeans, 100%; and animal feed, 76%, according to a July US International Trade Commission report. (*USA Today*, 30/7/07)

July 31: Fidel Castro said Cubans should be under no illusions about his ideological enemy, the United States, negotiating peace with Cuba, qualifying a recent overture made by his brother. "The struggle must be implacable, against our own deficiencies and against the insolent enemy that tries to take hold of Cuba," he wrote in a column published on August 1 by the Communist Party newspaper Granma. Castro said the "Empire" was obsessed with turning Cuba into a multi-party democracy. Acting President Raul Castro extended an olive branch to the United States, saying he was open to negotiations when the Bush administration is gone, to end a feud that began after Castro's leftist revolution. [[The Eternal Flame](#)] (*Reuters*, 1/8/07)

July 31: Almost two dozen would-be Cuban migrants detained at the US Navy base in Guantanamo Bay have begun a hunger strike to protest their confinement, an exile group said. The 22 migrants who began their protest on Sunday are among 44 Cubans, including three children, who were intercepted by the US Coast Guard at sea but not repatriated because authorities deemed they had a credible fear of persecution, said Ramon Saul Sanchez, president of the Miami-based Democracy Movement. Some have been at Guantanamo Bay, a US base in southeast Cuba, for more than two years, he said. US authorities are seeking to settle the Cubans in another country but Sanchez said they should be released immediately and allowed to live in the United States, where they have relatives. "All of these people are dissidents," he said. "They were actively involved in the democracy movement in Cuba." The Cuban migrants are not confined with the approximately 360 men detained on suspicion of terrorism or links to al-Qaeda or the Taliban at Guantanamo — and their protest is not connected to the long-running hunger strike among the detainees held by the US military. (AP, 1/8/07)