

FOCAL's Research Forum on Cuba

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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: A second Spanish priest is killed in the past five months in the island. Doctor dissident Darsi Ferrer is detained and sent to Valle Grande prison. The education system suffers a major restructure. Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez wins one of the Maria Moors Cabot awards. Seventy-two opposition organizations request a dialogue between the Cuban Government and representatives of the civil society. The Communist Party's first congress in 12 years is postponed again.

Economy: The Cuban government fails on three occasions to pay the installments of a credit signed with Russia. Official media criticizes the process of distribution of idle land. Cuba is cutting estimates of imports by billions of dollars and projecting a decline in export revenues. President Raul Castro announces the second "adjustment to expenditures" this year. The 2009 economic growth forecast is lowered again, to 1.7 percent.

Exile Community: Exile organizations issue controversial opinions on migration talks between the US and Cuba. The Cuban American National Foundation denounces the intervention of Cuba and Venezuela in the Honduras crisis.

Foreign Affairs: President Raul Castro meets with Brazilian Minister for Industry, Trade and Development. The Honduran crisis is widely analyzed in Cuba's official media and in Fidel Castro's Reflections. President Raul Castro visits Namibia, Angola, Egypt and Algeria. Cuba passes the presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement to Egypt. The European Union's commissioner of external relations visits the island. The Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Cuba's President sign important agreements.

US-Cuba Relations: Fidel Castro and Cuba's official media accuse the US of intervening in Honduras coup. Migration talks between Cuba and the US take place in New York. US and Cuban troops work side by side across a minefield in Guantanamo. The Obama administration turns off an electronic billboard at the US diplomatic mission in Havana. The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy holds its 19th annual conference in Miami.

Lo más relevante

Asuntos domésticos: Un segundo sacerdote español en los últimos cinco meses es asesinado en la isla. El médico opositor Darsi Ferrer es detenido e internado en la prisión de Valle Grande. El sistema educativo sufre una importante reestructuración. La bloguera cubana Yoani Sánchez gana uno de los premios Maria Moors Cabot. Setenta y dos organizaciones opositoras reclaman un diálogo entre el gobierno cubano y la sociedad civil. Se pospone la celebración del primer Congreso en doce años del Partido Comunista.

Economía: El gobierno de Cuba incumple los pagos de un crédito otorgado por Rusia. Medios oficiales critican el proceso de distribución de tierras ociosas. Cuba reduce en miles de millones los estimados de importaciones y proyecta un declive en ingresos por exportaciones. El presidente Raúl Castro anuncia el segundo “ajuste de gastos” de este año. El pronóstico de crecimiento económico se reduce de nuevo a un 1.7 por ciento.

Comunidad de exiliados: Organizaciones del exilio emiten opiniones controversiales acerca de las conversaciones migratorias entre EEUU y Cuba. La Fundación Nacional Cubano Americana denuncia la intervención de Cuba y Venezuela en la crisis de Honduras.

Asuntos exteriores: El presidente Raúl Castro se reúne con el ministro brasileño de Desarrollo, Industria y Comercio Exterior. Los medios oficiales y Fidel Castro en sus Reflexiones analizan ampliamente la crisis hondureña. El presidente Raúl Castro visita Namibia, Angola, Egipto y Argelia. Cuba entrega la presidencia del MNOAL a Egipto. La comisaria para relaciones exteriores de la Unión Europea visita la isla. El Viceprimer Ministro ruso y el Presidente cubano firman importantes acuerdos.

Relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos: Fidel Castro y los medios en Cuba acusan a EEUU de intervenir en el golpe de Estado en Honduras. Las conversaciones migratorias entre Cuba y EEUU tienen lugar en Nueva York. Tropas de EEUU y de Cuba trabajan de conjunto en un campo minado en Guantánamo. La administración Obama apaga la pizarra electrónica de la fachada de la misión diplomática en La Habana La Asociación para el Estudio de la Economía Cubana celebra su 19na Conferencia anual en Miami.

Domestic Affairs

Julio 1: El pasado 25 de junio fueron detenidos y trasladados hacia la quinta unidad de la policía del municipio Playa, en Ciudad de La Habana, varios activistas pacíficos pertenecientes a la agrupación de derechos humanos Unión por Cuba Libre. Los detenidos se nombran William Prior, Carlos Raico Pupo, Frank Díaz y Jorge Gaspar Mateo. El presidente de la organización, Carlos Manuel Pupo, fue detenido el día 26 en su centro laboral, en San Antonio de los Baños, provincia Habana. Según informaciones de la esposa de Manuel Pupo, las detenciones se produjeron cuando los activistas intentaban llevar a cabo una actividad para pedir la liberación de los presos políticos (*Cubanet*, 1/7/09).

Julio 1: El pitcher Aroldis Chapman, la mayor promesa entre los lanzadores de la isla, abandonó el equipo nacional de béisbol que participa en el tradicional Torneo de Róterdam, Holanda. "Estoy muy contento. Hasta ahora todo ha salido bien. Era un plan que yo tenía, fue una decisión que tomé. Quería probarme en ese béisbol", afirmó Chapman. Según relató el lanzador, tras arribar a Rotterdam, decidió abandonar el hotel con la ayuda de unos amigos. "Salí normal, por la puerta del hotel, y me monté en un carro. Fue fácil", añadió. Ahora sus planes son "firmar con algún equipo y jugar en Grandes Ligas". Roger Machado, director del equipo nacional, que Chapman había abandonado el hotel, pero que no podía confirmar "su deserción" (*Cubaencuentro*, 1/7/09).

Julio 2: A 50 años de una revolución que proclamó la "igualdad" en Cuba, manifestaciones de racismo no institucional preocupan a académicos y estudiosos que piden un debate abierto y acciones inmediatas para evitar que alcance proporciones mayores. "Hay que debatir públicamente el tema, alertar, enseñarles a los racistas conscientes e inconscientes la capacidad que tenemos de reeducarlos o aplastarlos, y utilizar esa capacidad o de lo contrario el racismo vuelve", dijo Esteban Morales, un académico socialista. El problema fue abordado recientemente en paneles de las revistas *Espacio Laical* y *Temas*, donde especialistas coincidieron en que al triunfar la revolución de Fidel Castro en 1959 eliminó el racismo institucional con acciones y leyes sobre igualdad de oportunidades para los cubanos, pero -señalan- sin tener en cuenta la diversidad. "Fue un error de idealismo y voluntarismo" y luego se creó "un ambiente de represión moral y política" sobre el tratamiento del tema, y "aún es posible encontrar dificultades para hacerlo", sostiene Morales, autor de un libro y varios artículos sobre el racismo en Cuba. En el debate de la revista *Espacio Laical*, el politólogo Jesús Guanche opinó que "se hicieron esfuerzos y se cometieron errores" y que "lo peor fue darlo por resuelto en poco tiempo". Los académicos destacan que para crear conciencia del problema, educar y propiciar oportunidades en favor de quienes sufren discriminación es urgente una discusión amplia y abierta, aprovechando el clima de debates sobre asuntos que antes se silenciaban al que convocó el presidente Raúl Castro (*AFP*, 2/7/09).

Julio 2: El gobierno cubano anunció un aumento medio de 93 a 166 pesos (de 4 a 7,2 dólares) de los salarios mensuales para los 545,000 docentes y empleados del sector educativo, junto con la obligación de que paguen un 5% de sus ingresos a la seguridad social. Un comunicado difundido por medios oficiales explica que el aumento regirá a partir del próximo curso escolar, en septiembre, y que se decidió "pese a la compleja situación económica y financiera que vive el país"; costará anualmente al Estado 820 millones de pesos cubanos (35,4 millones de dólares). La nota reconoce que es "una elevación modesta" y afirma que está destinada a "reconocer el abnegado esfuerzo que realizan los trabajadores del sector". Se establecen pagos mensuales de 90 a 120 pesos (de 3,9 a 5,2 dólares) para los "especialistas de la producción y los servicios" que impartan docencia a tiempo parcial en la enseñanza técnica profesional (*EFE*, 2/7/09).

July 3: Since he swept into power 50 years ago, Cuba's Fidel Castro has been honored in poems, movies and paintings and now in reggaeton, a form of music widely popular among Cuban youth but not island leaders. Cuban musician Yoandys "Baby" Lores

presented in Havana his song "Creo" ("I Believe"), said to be the first reggaeton track dedicated to the ailing Castro, 82. "You do not betray your motherland for money, women or fame," sings Lores, 25. "I'm going forward with my commander in chief." In a video of the song, Lores sings Castro's praises while getting a tattoo of the revolutionary leader on his shoulder (*Reuters*, 6/7/09).

July 3: Fidel Castro was given the "Educator of Generations" special distinction, granted by the Enrique José Varona University of Pedagogical Sciences, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of its founding. The distinction was given during a solemn ceremony held at the theater of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, where the rector of the pedagogical university, Alfredo Díaz, pointed out that Castro is an example of an educator, a follower of the ideas of José Martí and Karl Marx. Díaz also thanked the government's decision of increasing the salary of workers in the education sector (*ACN*, 3/7/09).

Julio 5: Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, coordinador del Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL), denunció "una asonada represiva dirigida contra el Proyecto Varela y el Diálogo Nacional, que se extiende por todo el país", tras la detención del ex preso político Ezequiel Morales Carmentate. Morales Carmentate, uno de los líderes del MCL en las provincias orientales, fue detenido en Banes, provincia de Holguín. Según Payá Sardiñas, la policía y la Seguridad del Estado lo trasladaron a una unidad, a la que "se presentaron varios opositores". Un agente dijo que Morales Carmentate "había sido mandado a detener por una orden de captura de la ciudad de Las Tunas". El MCL informó que Morales fue abandonado por la policía en un camino solitario, a 70 kilómetros de la ciudad más cercana. "Tuvo que caminar toda la noche para poder comunicarse con su familia", agregó el comunicado. El Movimiento Cristiano Liberación denunció también el empeoramiento de las condiciones de salud del preso político Efrén Fernández Fernández, condenado a 12 años de cárcel desde 2003 y recluso en Guanajay (*Cubaencuentro*, 5/7/09).

July 7: Mariela Castro, director of the National Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX) and daughter of the Cuban president, in an interview by *BBC World* said that democracy is "an invention". *How long before a Gay Pride Parade is staged in Havana?* I don't know. We Cubans don't like to imitate formulas from other places. We like to learn from other experiences but prefer to create other strategies. We don't march for gay pride. We stage educational and artistic events to seek respect for free sexual orientation and gender identity. *Is there space [in Cuba] for the discussion of all kind of topics?* In Cuba there is space for discussion, but the communications media say something else. [...] *Cuban President Raúl Castro has opened a space for discussion or reflection in the country. What have they said about democracy?* Democracy is still an invention that is being experimented on everywhere, in line with the interests of the dominant class. I think that democracy is still an abstract word that we all have to fight to turn into reality (*The Miami Herald*, 7/7/09).

Julio 7: La reciente autorización del pluriempleo fue calificada como "positiva" por la prensa y analistas, si su aplicación es efectiva y como un paso en las reformas y cambios

estructurales que requiere de urgencia la economía de la isla. "No quisiera precipitarme en elogios hasta que no vea su aplicación", dijo un comentarista del diario oficial *Juventud Rebelde*. "Tampoco creo sea lo único que pide a gritos el panorama laboral de este país", agregó. "Se trata de una medida en el camino bueno", dijo el politólogo socialista Aurelio Alonso, "esta reforma abre un camino para la formalización", pues "el enfrentamiento de la economía informal no puede ser confundido con el enfrentamiento al delito: gran parte de ella está dada por actividades que debieran ser formalizadas y no perseguidas o castigadas". Hiram Marquetti, economista y académico, dijo que la medida "no constituye una reforma de gran alcance", aunque puede tener un impacto "positivo", pues "da posibilidad de legalizar un grupo de actividades que deben realizarse de forma informal". El economista Omar Everleny Pérez, quien se pronunció en un artículo por la "descentralización", en la cual "el Estado debe pasar de un rol de administrador general a uno de regulador general", dijo que "es necesario incluir, en una estrategia de este tipo, el diseño de formas de propiedad no estatal, no solo en la agricultura sino también en el sector manufacturero y de servicios" (*AFP*, 7/7/09).

July 9: About 29 thousands Cubans are members of more than 300 Masonic lodges in various cities of the country and at the same time are actively involved in public work, humanitarian and charitable projects. Majority of "Freemasons" - over 9 thousand people - live in Havana. Masons act freely, each person can confess that he is a Mason of his own free will, the *Tribuna* paper has cited Grand Secretary of Cuban Masons Alberto William Rojas Aguilar as saying. Masonic lodges crept over all Cuban provinces in the late 18th century, representatives of elite mostly joint them. Role of Masons was especially significant in the Cuban liberation movement. Before socialism, Masons actively participated in the government, though according to the Grand Secretary, today there is no masons in executive power of Cuba (*Interfax*, 9/7/09).

Julio 11: Miles de evangélicos cubanos se dieron cita para realizar un inusual culto en un estadio deportivo administrado por el Estado. "Que esta celebración nos comprometa a seguir trabajando por la unidad de nuestra iglesia" dijo el reverendo Raúl Suárez, uno de los varios pastores de las distintas denominaciones evangélicas que tomaron la palabra durante el evento. Canciones, gritos de alabanzas a Dios, banderas cubanas y carteles con loas a Cristo le dieron ambiente de fiesta al Estadio Pedro Marrero de la capital, habitualmente repleto de seguidores de fútbol. El culto fue organizado por el Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba (CIC) con el objetivo de recordar el décimo aniversario de la Celebración Evangélica Cubana realizada en 1999 en la Plaza de la Revolución y el inicio de una etapa de mejora notable entre estas religiones y el Estado. El reverendo Ismael Laborde, de la Iglesia Evangélica Unida, realizó una oración para el ex mandatario Fidel Castro, de 82 años, y quien padece una enfermedad que lo alejó del poder; y su hermano, Raúl Castro, actual presidente. Se estima que unas 3,000 personas participaron de la celebración. Entre las autoridades estuvieron presentes varios miembros de la dirección del Partido Comunista, como la encargada de asuntos religiosos Caridad Diego (*AP*, 11/7/09).

Julio 12: El creador del Instituto Cubano de Cine (ICAIC), Alfredo Guevara, abogó por "renovar" el discurso y estudiar los problemas que aquejan a la juventud cubana, parte de la cual está "entre vacía y banalizada" y la otra "plena de inquietudes e insatisfacciones". "Las palabras se hacen viejas y no hay que retocarlas con afeites, hay que renovarlas con acciones" y "no se puede hablar de los problemas actuales con elementos referenciales" cuando se pueden "encontrar otras formas de expresión", dijo Guevara en una entrevista divulgada por la televisión cubana. Guevara, de 83 años y amigo de Fidel Castro, destacó que "lo primero que tendríamos que hacer" para entender mejor a los jóvenes cubanos "es estudiar cuáles son las inquietudes, los problemas" y "las interrogantes que se plantean". El intelectual cubano subrayó además que que "una parte de la juventud", aunque "cultivada", "no se ha refinado suficientemente" en el plano espiritual y "está entre vacía y banalizada". "Otra parte de la juventud, está plena de inquietudes y de insatisfacciones, pero en el fondo de todo está la búsqueda de respuestas espirituales", añadió Guevara, uno de los teóricos del denominado Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (*AFP*, 13/7/09).

Julio 13: La cifra de casos de Gripe A confirmados en la isla llegó a 144, según el Ministerio de Salud Pública, informó el diario oficial *Granma*. De esa cantidad, 93 son adultos y 51 niños; 84 de los infectados llegaron a Cuba con la gripe (40 son extranjeros, 34 cubanos residentes en el exterior y 10 cubanos que regresaron de una estancia en diversos países), indicó el reporte. Otros 36 casos fueron "introducidos", dijo *Granma* para referirse a los infectados por enfermos procedentes del exterior. Hasta el momento, sólo 24 son "autóctonos", es decir, contagiados a partir de casos "introducidos". Del total de los 144 casos, 112 han recibido el alta. No se han registrado fallecidos (*Cubaencuentro*, 13/7/09).

July 16: Cuban police have detained a suspect in the murder of a Spanish priest, the second to be killed in the island nation in the past five months, the Catholic Church said. The suspect has confessed to the murder of Father Mariano Arroyo Merino, 74, whose body was found in his Havana Bay parish building, the Church said in a statement. No details were given about the detainee or possible motive for the killing. The Church added that, despite rumors, the crime was not related to the murder in February of Father Eduardo de la Fuente Serrano, 61, who was found dead by the side of a road west of the capital. It said it could "firmly express its rejection of any intent to link one case to the other, or to give a religious or political shading" to the crimes. Police said "at least one person" has been detained and confessed to the murder of de la Fuente, the Church said ([Nota del Arzobispado](#); *Reuters*, 16/7/09).

Julio 17: Yuniesky Maya Mendizula, se encuentra detenido por intento de salida ilegal. Una fuente del Instituto Nacional de Deportes de Cuba (INDER) confirmó a *El Nuevo Herald* que el pitcher pinareño fue arrestado junto con algunos familiares al ser frustrada su posible fuga. "Ya nos habían comentado de este tema y nos da una tristeza enorme", comentó un agente con conocimiento de la situación. "Es otro caso más de un pelotero cubano al que se le tronchan los sueños, al menos por el momento". Según la fuente, el detonante que motivó la detención de Maya fue el hecho de que pretendía escaparse con su hijo, que es menor de edad, en contra de la voluntad de la madre. Todo parece indicar que la detención se produjo en algún punto de la costa sur pinareña, usada

frecuentemente para alcanzar México antes de llegar de manera definitiva a Estados Unidos. Maya ha sido uno de los pilares del cuerpo de lanzadores de la isla a nivel nacional e internacional desde el 2005, y había integrado las escuadras que tomaron parte en los dos Clásicos Mundiales de Béisbol en el 2006 y el 2008 (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/7/09).

July 17: Mourners packed the pews at Cuba's National Cathedral and wiped away tears as they honoured the Reverend Mariano Arroyo, the second Spanish priest killed on the island in five months. Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega spoke at the Mass of "torture that Father Mariano was subjected to, of the unmitigated cruelty of his killers." Church officials insist that Arroyo's slaying is not related to the case of Eduardo de la Fuente Serrano, a 59-year-old Madrid native whose stabbed body was found in his partially torched car on a highway in a remote area just outside Havana in February. Ortega said during the Mass that a suspect had been arrested, confessed and was being tried for de la Fuente's slaying. In that case, he said, the killer did not know the victim was a priest. De la Fuente had worked at the Santa Clara de Lawton Parish in Havana. Neither killing was mentioned in Cuba's state-controlled media, which generally ignores crime news. Ortega also again dismissed any connection between both crimes. "Some have dared search for anti-religious or anti-Spanish explanations, with political origins, for the killing of Father Arroyo. My God!" he told mourners. "It's not hate of priests or their circumstances, nor hate of the Spanish." Manuel Fernandez, a Regla resident who attended the funeral, said that "all of Cuba is angered by this." "These kinds of things do not happen frequently in Cuba," he said (*AP*, 17/7/09).

Julio 17: Las autoridades sanitarias han detectado "24 casos de dengue importado" en la isla en lo que va de año, según informa el diario oficial *Granma*. Al igual que con la pandemia de la gripe A, el gobierno relaciona los casos con "viajeros enfermos procedentes de otros países" y aseguró que "por las acciones de control clínico-sanitarias establecidas no han derivado en brotes locales". Según *Granma*, "el dengue es endémico en todos los países de la región (salvo Cuba y Uruguay)". No obstante, el gobierno cree que el riesgo se mantiene "latente" por el "flujo continuo de viajeros de todos los rincones del planeta", particularmente de Latinoamérica, y por "la presencia en nuestro medio del vector" (*Cubaencuentro*, 17/7/09).

Julio 17: La insalubridad del edificio sito en Desagüe # 212, entre Franco y Subirana, municipio Centro Habana, subió de tono este verano por la falta de un baño e instalaciones sanitarias donde realizar necesidades fisiológicas. Después de cinco años enfrentando esta situación, el Instituto de la Vivienda ni el gobierno local han dado solución al problema. El desplome del baño común que utilizaban las familias de los apartamentos 5,7 y 9 del edificio, ocasionó en 2004 lesiones a dos residentes. El edificio fue declarado inhabitable en 1970 y los escombros del derrumbe permanecían en el mismo lugar. A principios del mes de julio se detectaron varios casos de dengue en la zona, y fueron declaradas la emergencia sanitaria y la higienización del lugar. No obstante, los escombros no han sido removidos, y los apartamentos mencionados siguen sin baño (*Cubanet*, 17/7/09).

July 18: Children will be at the center of attention on Sunday, July 19, as the country celebrates the National Children's Day in squares and parks throughout the nation. Children will enjoy games, special performances for kids and sales of books organized in every corner of the country, reported *Granma* newspaper. In Havana, activities will begin with the screening of the Cuban cartoon series *Capitan Plin*, at the Jose Marti Park, in Alamar (ACN, 18/7/09).

July 19: A Spanish priest murdered in February in Havana was killed by his "sentimental partner," the Spanish newspaper *El País* reported. The Reverend Eduardo de la Fuente Serrano, 61, in Cuba since 2006, was found on a roadside outside Havana on February 14. Church sources said he was stabbed and strangled. According to *El País*, De la Fuente "died at the hands of another man, who was his sentimental partner, to whom [the priest] passed himself off as a foreign businessman." The police told the Church about this "as well as about the capture of the perpetrator and his accomplices, but, because of its sensitive nature, the affair was treated with the utmost discretion" (*The Miami Herald*, 19/7/09).

July 19: A church statement with details about the slaying of two priests was published by Cuba's Communist Party youth newspaper - an unusual step in a country where state-controlled media rarely report on religion or common crime. The story in *Juventud Rebelde* was the first chance most Cubans had to learn about the investigation into the crimes that have sparked rampant rumours. The statement, issued by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, said police had arrested the alleged killer of Reverend Mariano Arroyo. The priest's body was discovered July 13 at his parish in the coastal neighbourhood of Regla on Havana Bay across from the capital. It said a suspect had confessed to murdering the 74-year-old native of Cabezon de la Sal in Spain's Cantabria region. "Possible accomplices" also have been captured, according to the statement, though it did not describe them. The story said authorities also have arrested "at least one person who has confessed" in the killing of Reverend Eduardo de la Fuente, a 59-year-old Madrid native. His body was found stabbed inside his partially torched car on a highway in a remote area outside Havana in February. "Those who committed that crime didn't know their victim was a priest," it said (*Canadian Press*, 19/7/09).

Julio 19: El conocido ex preso político cubano Jorge Luis García Pérez (Antúnez), organizó personalmente el gobierno municipal de oposición en Placetas. Antúnez ha estado buscando una forma efectiva de lucha contra la dictadura. Al parecer, la ha encontrado. Una ventaja de esta forma de lucha es su radical descentralización. ¿Encarcelar a los que protestan porque nadie resuelve la falta de transporte o tantos otros problemas? Si existen 169 municipios, potencialmente existen 1690 luchadores sociales diseminados en cada punto del país. Eso es prácticamente imposible de controlar. Y lo fundamental, no existe el marco legal para reprimir a quienes plantean demandas sociales y reivindican bienes y servicios que cualquier gobierno debía de poder ofrecer. Los gobiernos municipales de oposición no están para resolver los problemas creados por la dictadura. Su tarea es analizarlos a nivel local, buscar la forma de resolverlos, casi seguramente con medidas contrarias a la política del gobierno, y movilizar a la gente para que exija su solución (*El Nuevo Herald*, 24/7/09).

July 20: Five members of Britain's Royal Ballet came down with the H1N1 swine flu virus during their just-ended visit to Cuba, but all have recovered, a spokeswoman for the dance company said. Tests confirmed the dancers had the virus, they were isolated and given flu medicine the ballet had brought along on its first trip to Havana, said spokeswoman Elizabeth Bell. The outbreak forced some personnel shuffling among the 96 dancers, but performances went on as scheduled. "It was contained and the show went on," she said. "They are all well now" (*Reuters*, 20/7/09).

Julio 21: El médico opositor Darsi Ferrer, director del Centro de Salud y de Derechos Humanos Juan Bruno Zayas, fue detenido e internado en la prisión de Valle Grande, en el oeste de La Habana, dijo el activista disidente Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz. "Al parecer lo acusan de un delito común, de compra ilegal de materiales de la construcción para reparar su casa, pero para nosotros es una detención de motivación política", dijo Sánchez, quien encabeza la Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional. Sánchez dijo que a diferencia de las detenciones breves practicadas contra la disidencia en los últimos tiempos, se trata de "un encarcelamiento por motivos políticos, pues (Ferrer) es un disidente conocido y tenía programado una serie de actividades" opositoras. Ferrer, médico que no ejerce su profesión por dedicarse a actividades opositoras, ha sido detenido varias veces por diferentes causas, entre ellas organizar marchas silenciosas cada 10 de diciembre, Día de los Derechos Humanos. No fue posible contactar con Ferrer ni con su familia (*AFP*, 22/7/09).

July 21: Great Cuban musician Leo Brouwer received the 2009 National Cinema Prize from the hands of Culture Minister Abel Prieto, during a ceremony held at Havana's Charles Chaplin Hall. The prize –an original sculpture made by artist Nelson Domínguez– consisted in a delicately decorated guitar, which the creator himself unveiled before Brouwer. Composer Sergio Vitier, president of the jury that granted the prize, highlighted the artistic excellence and integrity of Brouwer, who has left an everlasting imprint in Cuban culture and cinema, and who is the composer of the soundtrack of some one hundred movies, filmed over the last five decades (*ACN*, 22/7/09).

Julio 22: Las autoridades educativas informaron que a partir del próximo curso escolar, que se iniciará en septiembre, los estudiantes deberán hacer pruebas de ingreso de Historia de Cuba, Matemáticas y Español para acceder a las conocidas como universidades municipales, publicó el diario oficial *Granma*. "Todo aspirante a cualquier tipo de curso tendrá que realizar y aprobar tres exámenes comunes y obligatorios: Historia de Cuba, Español y Matemática. Y se considerará aprobado quien obtenga 60 puntos o más", anunció el rotativo. El órgano del Partido Comunista de Cuba indica también que "para lograr la calidad requerida en el nivel superior", se aplicará también "un descuento ortográfico en los exámenes, trabajos de clase y tesis de diploma que podrá llevar a la suspensión", una "evaluación será más flexible en el primer año de la carrera, pero luego irá arreciando en rigor". De acuerdo con Pedro Horruitiner, director de formación de profesionales, dichas "medidas permitirán que no sea necesario efectuar todos los años un diagnóstico de Gramática como el realizado a 150,655 estudiantes que

cursaban los años terminales en las sedes universitarias, de los cuales 20,000 no aprobaron, y de ellos 7,900 concluían sus estudios este curso" (*Cubaencuentro*, 22/7/09).

Julio 22: Los trámites para talar árboles viejos en algunas ciudades cubanas son engorrosos a pesar del riesgo de que se desplomen sobre las viviendas al paso de un huracán, ahora que el Caribe está en temporada de ciclones, informaron hoy fuentes oficiales. El diario oficial *Juventud Rebelde*, portavoz de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, indica que "intentar la poda o la tala" de árboles se ha convertido en "un trámite desgastante e inseguro", a juzgar por cartas enviadas por sus lectores. El rotativo divulga testimonios de vecinos de La Habana y Santiago de Cuba cuyas gestiones con empresas estatales para talar árboles que afectan a sus viviendas ya demoran varios años. Los lectores de *Juventud Rebelde* refieren que funcionarios de las empresas de Servicios Forestales y Comunales les han respondido que no trabajan en patios particulares, no tienen fuerza de trabajo o carecen de instrumentos y petróleo para acometer la poda. La tala o poda de árboles con riesgo para inmuebles e instalaciones eléctricas es una de las principales medidas previstas en Cuba cada año para enfrentar la temporada de ciclones, que en esta región se extiende del 1 de junio al 30 de noviembre (*EFE*, 22/7/09).

Julio 23: El preso político Ariel Sigler Amaya, condenado a 20 años de cárcel en la Primavera Negra de 2003, está ingresado en terapia intensiva en el Hospital Nacional, en La Habana, "debido a que ha empeorado su estado de salud", informó la periodista independiente Aimeé Cabrera. Según confirmó a la periodista la esposa del opositor, Noelia Pedraza, el preso político "padece de la bacteria *klebsiella pneumoniae*, hemorroides, enfisema pulmonar, pólipos en la vesícula, faringitis crónica, cálculos en los riñones, osteoporosis, paraplejia pulmonar, artritis, hipotensión y mala absorción de vitaminas". Sigler Amaya fue trasladado el 21 de julio desde el Hospital Provincial de Cienfuegos hasta La Habana. Su esposa dijo estar muy preocupada por su grave estado de salud, "ya que no se ha encontrado un medicamento eficaz que lo mejore, y ya hasta rechaza (vomita) alimentos tan simples como jugos y caldos". Los familiares de Sigler Amaya y organizaciones opositoras han denunciado en reiteradas ocasiones el lamentable estado de salud del disidente (*Cubaencuentro*, 23/7/09).

July 23: Cuban President Raul Castro arrived in Havana after having participated in the 15th Summit of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) in Egypt and after working visits to Algeria and Angola. Also as part of this trip to Africa, the Cuban leader paid an official visit to Namibia. After a short technical stop in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, Raul and his accompanying delegation were welcomed at the Jose Marti International airport in Havana by First VP Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and Interior Minister Abelardo Colome Ibarra (*ACN*, 23/7/09).

July 23: Cuban television has scheduled for this summer a new season of its prime-time police drama series "Tras la Huella," which is a take-off on the famed US TV series "CSI" and includes episodes based on real-life crimes, a real innovation in a country where monopoly state-controlled media shun the crime beat. The response to the series by critics and viewers has been mixed, with some admiring it for combining a suspenseful storyline with a look at the technology behind criminal investigations and

others criticizing its imitation of the US show's formula and its avoidance of high-profile crimes on the island. In fact, "Tras la huella," which is produced by the Interior Ministry's film studios and occupies a prime-time Sunday night slot on Cuban television, is not a carbon copy of the CBS series, in which the advanced technology used by forensic investigators to catch criminals often overshadows the story's plot. Many viewers anxiously await each episode in hopes of learning about rumored crimes that have spread by word of mouth but with little in the way of detail. Mario Jorge, a 31-year-old taxi driver, complained that stories are repeated on the Cuban show, while "in real life things happen that they don't put in the series (*EFE*, 23/7/09).

Julio 24: Un estudio del Centro Nacional de Genética Médica de Cuba (CNGM) demostró que en la isla el color de la piel no expresa necesariamente la relación con una raza, y que en la mezcla de genes predominan los de origen caucásico, informó el semanario oficial *Granma Internacional*. La directora del CNGM, Beatriz Marcheco, indicó que la investigación, que buscaba conocer la estructura genética de la población cubana, fue realizada entre 2003 y 2007 en una muestra de 600 personas que viven en las provincias de La Habana y Matanzas, pero provienen de todo el país. Según los exámenes de genética molecular, en 368 personas de piel blanca la proporción de genes de origen europeo va del 24% al 99%, y los de origen africano del 1% al 73%. En 101 individuos de piel negra, los genes de origen europeo van del 12% al 99%, y los de origen africano del 1% al 87%. De acuerdo con los cálculos de "mezcla promedio", en el total de personas estudiadas la proporción de genes de origen caucásico es de 74%, los de origen africano representan el 17% y los de origen amerindio-asiático el 9% (*EFE*, 24/7/09).

Julio 26: Cuba inicia una semana de reuniones de sus órganos de dirección, Consejo de Ministros, Pleno del Comité Central del Partido y Asamblea Nacional donde se definirá el rumbo de la política económica y social de la isla. El presidente Raúl Castro anunció la agenda de trabajo y dio la tónica cuando comentó "aquí no sobra nada, generalmente solo problemas" durante el discurso que hizo en la celebración del 26 de julio o "Día de la Rebelión Nacional", en la ciudad oriental de Holguín. La Asamblea Nacional de Cuba o Parlamento, se reunirá en comisiones el 28 y el 29 de julio, para abordar "el impacto de la crisis global, los ajustes a los planes de la economía y el presupuesto estatal derivados de esta compleja situación", informó el diario oficial *Granma*. Castro dijo que el Consejo de Ministros de la isla analizará el 28 de julio "el segundo ajuste de los gastos previstos en el plan de este año a causa de los efectos de la crisis económica mundial en nuestra economía y en particular la reducción significativa de los ingresos provenientes de las exportaciones y restricciones adicionales para acceder a fuentes de financiamiento externo". Asimismo, el 29 de julio se celebrará el pleno del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, el único en la isla, en el cual se tratarán "asuntos vitales relacionados con la situación nacional e internacional" precisó el mandatario cubano ([Discurso de Raúl Castro](#); *AP*, 26/7/09).

July 28: Cuban boxers walked away with seven titles, a silver, and a bronze medal from the Pan American Championship of the sport that concluded in Mexico City. "We dedicate this triumph to the July 26 celebrations in Cuba," Cuban head coach Pedro Roque told the press and added that the performance of the Caribbean representatives

was excellent. Cuba dominated the competition with 42 points and was followed by Mexico, with 22 units and two gold medals, while Brazil was third with 16 points and two crowns as well (ACN, 28/7/09).

July 28: Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez has won one of the top prizes in US journalism, the Maria Moors Cabot award issued by Columbia University. "Years ago I turned my back on the academic and intellectual world, tired of seeing, so frequently, the masks covering the faces of my teachers and classmates. Today begins my journey back to the university campus, bearing in hand the special mention in the Maria Moors Cabot Journalism prizes with which I've been honored by Columbia University", Sanchez wrote in her blog *Generation Y*. "I think I will use the prestige and protection that the Cabot Prize brings with it to continue to grow the Cuban blogosphere (...) The distinction that I have received today can contribute to the birth of a new kind of instruction here, one without ideological conditions, without those ugly costumes which at one time made me distance myself from the academic world", she added (*Huffington Post*, 28/7/09).

July 28: The 12 permanent working commissions of the Cuban National Assembly meet at the Havana-based Convention Center prior to the third ordinary period of sessions of the Seventh Legislature. Parliamentarians will discuss important topics related to the social and economic development of the country such as measures adopted to reduce the effects of the current international financial crisis and the saving of oil and electricity, *Granma* newspaper reports. They will also analyze the implementation of the Social Security Law and its regulations as well as new directions for the 2009-1010 school year and the epidemiological situation in the country, among others. The more than 300 parliamentarians will also discuss topics related to the construction materials industry, the improvement of housing conditions, the production of food and the state of roads. They will also focus on different sectors in which the country is working to substitute imports and reduce unnecessary expenditures (ACN, 28/7/09).

Julio 28: La policía informó a la familia del médico disidente Darsi Ferrer, encarcelado desde el 21 de junio, que este sería encausado bajo cargos de "atentado y receptación". De acuerdo con la esposa de Ferrer, Yusnaimy Jorge Soca, el 25 de julio, mientras ella se encontraba con abogados amigos que le asesoran en el caso, se presentaron en la vivienda familiar varios oficiales, quienes dijeron a la madre del opositor que se le acusaba de esos delitos. Entre los oficiales estaba el instructor de cargos y un policía que participó en un registro en la vivienda el 9 de julio. En esa ocasión, la policía rompió la puerta de la casa y se llevó algunos sacos de cemento y dos ventanas de aluminio. Se sospecha que esos materiales podrían ser utilizados para inculpar a Ferrer, un connotado activista que dirige el Centro de Salud y Derechos Humanos Juan Bruno Zayas y realiza constantes denuncias sobre la situación sanitaria en la isla. El registro se produjo cuando la pareja se encontraba detenida en una estación policial de La Habana. Jorge Soca dijo no comprender que se acuse a Ferrer de "atentado" cuando este "fue golpeado por más de ocho policías" mientras estaba esposado (*Cubaencuentro*, 28/7/09).

July 28: National Assembly deputies drafted a bill to create a Comptroller General's Office that would replace the Ministry of Auditing and Control, the Cuban news agency

Prensa Latina reported. According to Assembly president Ricardo Alarcón, the CGO will be directly supervised by the Assembly, which will appoint a Comptroller General. José Luis Toledo Santander, chairman of the Commission on Constitutional Issues, said the CGO "will assist the National Assembly and the Council of State in the exercise of the highest oversight of state and government organizations." The CGO will "strengthen economic discipline and [...], raise the standards of auditing and control in the country," Toledo said. The bill will be voted on by the 600 deputies on August 1st (*The Miami Herald*, 29/7/09).

July 28: Cash-strapped Cuba should consider putting more of its state-run economy in the hands of producers, as President Raul Castro has done with agriculture, the country's top economic commentator said. Ariel Terrero, during his regular Tuesday appearance on state-run television, did not call for private management, but suggested that sectors such as food services and retail could perform better if they were run in a new way. "In the Cuban economy, there's a need to look for formulas more dynamic, more intelligent, of understanding property, of running a business, of running a cafeteria," he said. Terrero pointed to Castro-led reforms in the island's agriculture that include decentralization of decision-making, greater emphasis on private co-operatives and farms, and the leasing of state lands to some 80,000 individuals. "The leasing of state lands, which in the end is the placing of state property in the hands of producers, could be applied in other sectors, for example food services, retail trade, and other areas where really it is impossible, given the diversity and breadth, for the state to administer directly," he said. Terrero, who regularly comments on economic affairs in Cuba's tightly controlled state media, said big, concentrated operations such as nickel plants, sugar mills, hotels and the power grid were not the same as an appliance repair shop or a cafeteria. "I think this diversity requires new thinking about the concepts and manner of understanding property in the Cuban economy," he said (*Reuters*, 28/7/09).

Julio 28: La disidencia moderada cubana pidió un diálogo entre el gobierno y la sociedad para encarar lo que estima es una crisis general, en la cual "la nación ya no aguanta más", según un mensaje entregado a la prensa. "El gobierno cubano, si decide pegar el oído a la calle, tiene aquí una opción: abrirse a dialogar con la sociedad cubana", dice el Mensaje a la Nación firmado por los partidos Progresista Solidaridad Democrática, al que suman otras 70 organizaciones, todas ilegales. La sociedad cubana "pese a las angustias y violencias cotidianas a las que se ve obligada, y al malestar profundo por la acumulación de vidas frustradas, tiene una magnífica capacidad para el perdón y para el ejercicio pacífico de la controversia", señala el documento ([Mensaje a la nación](#); *El Nuevo Herald*, 29/7/09).

July 28: The actions and measures applied by Cuba in epidemiological surveillance were presented by the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) to the members of the National Assembly's Defense Commission. MINSAP Deputy Minister, Dr. Luis Estruch, informed the Commission on the Dengue Prevention Program, the eradication of its vector, the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, and the situation of the A H1N1 virus on the island. Estruch

Announced that over 200 cases of the A H1N1 virus have been confirmed in Cuba, most of them imported, and said that preventive measures continue at air terminals and ports, in order to prevent it from spreading (ACN, 29/7/09).

July 28: Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez told the press that she was "surprised" to receive a special citation from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism as part of the 2009 Maria Moors Cabot Prizes for outstanding reporting on Latin America and the Caribbean. She said that the most important thing about the honor was that it gives her prestige and "protection." "That's not to say total immunity, because in Cuba no one can be immune from the weight of the state coming down on you, but it does give me a minimum protection to keep my blog going and continue in my determination to expand the Cuban blogosphere," Sanchez said. She said that in Cuba "there are a lot of young people who are creating their own spaces and are beginning to speak with pluralism and diversity about how they see the reality they are living through." "More and more I object to people identifying the blogger phenomenon in Cuba with me. Yoani Sanchez has been a pioneer, she's been a promoter, but she's not the only one, not even the one who is doing the most work right now," she said. The official awarding of the Cabot Prizes will take place on Oct. 14 at Columbia's New York campus, which Sanchez hopes to attend if Cuban authorities don't refuse her permission to leave the country, as has occurred on other occasions. "I believe they have learned something during this time and it's that every time they don't let me go somewhere, all they're doing is making my blog more attractive and increasing the number of visitors to *Generacion Y*," she said (EFE, 28/7/09).

July 29: The 12 permanent commissions of the Cuban National Assembly continued meeting to discuss topics of social and economic significance prior to the third ordinary period of sessions of the seventh Legislature. The commission of Construction and Industries will discuss, among other aspects, the national investment plan for water supply as well as the renovation and construction of new supplying networks. Meanwhile, deputies Ena Elsa Velazquez and Miguel Diaz Canel, Ministers of Education and Higher Education, respectively, will brief the commission of Education, Culture, Science and Technology on the changes that will be implemented for the 2009-2010 school year. Deputy Minister of Economy and Planning Magalys Estrada will speak before the commission of Health and Sports about the collection of solid waste and the state of dumping sites in provincial capitals. The group of National Defense will approve projects for the second half of the year and will assess the work of the first six months of 2009 while the National Commission of Highway Administration and Traffic will present a report on the prevention of accidents and the current situation in this respect (ACN, 29/7/09).

Julio 30: Tres ciclistas cubanos desertaron del equipo nacional de ciclismo que participaba en el torneo Panamericano de la especialidad con sede en Ciudad México. Los velocistas Ahmed López, Yosmani Pol y Odaimis Álvarez cruzaron la frontera del país azteca por el paso de Laredo y el 29 de julio ya se encontraban en territorio estadounidense en busca de un nuevo destino para sus vidas. Con el argumento de que iban a entrenar, se asusentaron del grupo, montaron en un taxi y con la ayuda de un

amigo llegaron a Monterrey. Un día después alcanzaron la frontera. "Sin duda, nuestra partida es un golpe para ellos", dijo Pol, "Incluso, sabemos que ya se realizó una reunión para analizar lo que sucedió. Pero uno hace su destino y nada ni nadie debe interponerse. Ni yo ni mis compañeros nos consideramos traidores" (*El Nuevo Herald*, 30/7/09).

Julio 30: El cantautor cubano Silvio Rodríguez dijo que la revolución necesita "cambio" y "sangre joven", durante una conferencia de prensa tras arribar a la capital paraguaya para un recital organizado por el gobierno del presidente Fernando Lugo. "Creo en la revolución como un proceso que necesita cambio, profundización, que necesita ayuda, que necesita sangre joven pero que confíe en todos esos compatriotas que lo hicieron posible", precisó el cantautor. La revolución "tiene entre sus méritos haber tenido éxito medio siglo al lado de la mayor potencia reaccionaria mundial", dijo en referencia a Estados Unidos. Opinó además que "que la revolución se ha dado cuenta de que los tiempos han cambiado y que hay realidades, medidas, situaciones, que nuestra sociedad tiene que evolucionar. Para esa evolución no basta solamente la voluntad", dijo. El cantautor se presentará en la fachada litoral del Palacio de López, la sede del gobierno paraguayo, invitado por el presidente Fernando Lugo para un concierto gratuito (*AFP, EFE*, 31/7/09).

July 30: Cuba's National Assembly will set up a powerful new agency tasked with fighting corruption, which President Raul Castro has called a "deadly cancer" plaguing the communist-ruled island's economy. In his regular spot on state television, Cuba's top economic commentator Ariel Terrero said the Comptroller General's Office, to be created through new legislation, will try to ensure that state revenues are properly used. The office will have sweeping powers to audit and control all government and economic entities. Cuba's campaign against corruption in its society and economy has been a long one, with what leaders consider high stakes for the future of the communist system installed after Fidel Castro took power in a 1959 revolution. But fighting corruption is not easy on an island gripped by economic crisis where inequality is growing and the average wage of ministers and company managers is between \$40 and \$100 per month including bonuses. Official information on corruption in Cuba is sparse but, in 2000, Attorney General Juan Escalona, testifying before a parliamentary committee, reported his office began the prosecutions of 5,800 white-collar criminal cases. Foreign businessmen report that corruption at the very highest level of government is rare. But kickbacks are relatively common among state-run company managers and even more so at government offices where Cubans go to take care of housing and other problems. "The other day I went to legalize my home and the housing director said 'you have two choices, pay me \$600 or wait two years,'" one Havana resident said (*Reuters*, 30/7/09).

Julio 31: Cuba registró 10,665 accidentes de tránsito en 2008, la cifra más alta de los últimos cinco años. Las víctimas mortales fueron 778, informaron medios oficiales. El diario *Juventud Rebelde*, que cita un informe presentado a la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular por el inspector general de Vialidad y Tránsito, Óscar del Toro, precisa que se registraron 835 accidentes más que en 2007. Sin embargo, de enero a junio últimos, según Del Toro, los accidentes "muestran una tendencia a la disminución", con 378 casos menos que en igual periodo de 2008. Los accidentes en las vías cubanas

dejaron el año pasado 778 muertos y 7,707 heridos (7,2 muertes por cada 100,000 habitantes y 13,9 por cada 10, 000 vehículos). En opinión del director nacional de Tránsito, coronel Francisco Buzón, Cuba "necesita con urgencia" el plan de seguridad vial, "pues lo que no se haga con rigor tiene un alto costo social y económico". Entre las causas de los accidentes, las autoridades señalan el exceso de personas en el traslado masivo de pasajeros, el deterioro de las vías, las imprudencias, el mal estado de los vehículos, deficiencias de señalización y el incumplimiento de las normas (*Cubaencuentro*, 31/7/09).

Julio 31: Sin mucho ruido ni mayores explicaciones, el gobierno cubano comenzó a desmontar el sistema de internación obligatoria de estudiantes de enseñanza media, una de las varias reformas para mejorar la calidad de la enseñanza que serán aplicadas a partir de septiembre. La noticia, que circulaba desde hace un tiempo en las escuelas, fue confirmada al término del curso escolar por la ministra de Educación, Ena Elsa Velásquez. La titular de esa rama afirmó que el proceso comenzará en La Habana con el alumnado de décimo grado, que en el año académico 2009-2010 recibirá sus clases en instalaciones de la propia ciudad. La obligatoriedad de tener que cursar el bachillerato en internados rurales y el deterioro generalizado de la educación era motivo de preocupación e insatisfacciones en el seno de las familias, así como entre estudiosos sociales y sectores de la sociedad civil, que alertaban sobre lo indispensable del papel de los progenitores en la adolescencia. "Siempre habrá estudiantes internos, porque hay regiones del país donde los jóvenes viven aislados, debido a sus características geográficas", acotó Velásquez, quien aclaró además que el sistema mantendrá el llamado plan de escuela al campo, en que el plantel completo se traslada para hacer durante 45 días trabajos agropecuarios productivos. El modelo de escuela en el campo surgió hace casi cuatro décadas como alternativa a los preuniversitarios en la ciudad, pero a principios de los años 90 se hizo obligatorio. La decisión resultó polémica, sobre todo por no dejar otras opciones (*IPS*, 31/7/09).

Julio 31: Una detallada información sobre el programa constructivo y otros temas inherentes a las funciones del Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda, ofreció a los diputados a la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular Víctor Ramírez, presidente de este organismo. El directivo informó que el plan de viviendas comprende 32,000 inmuebles en 2009, de los cuales han sido terminados hasta el presente mes 16,970, para un 53 por ciento del cumplimiento. Entre las dificultades que han frenado la agilidad del programa, Ramírez señaló la carencia de fuerza calificada y dificultades para transportar los materiales desde las provincias a los municipios, y desde estos a los Consejos Populares. En lo que va de año, según explicó, ha sido recuperado el 60 por ciento de los inmuebles derrumbados totalmente como consecuencia de los meteoros ocurridos en 2008. En cuanto a los techos derribados parcialmente se han logrado cobijar el 58 por ciento y se ha avanzado un 70 por ciento en las cubiertas dañadas totalmente. Al referirse a la conservación de la vivienda aseguró que se han realizado 71 000 labores de mantenimiento (34 por ciento de lo planificado) y 69,000 rehabilitadoras (54 por ciento de lo previsto). Apuntó que hay garantía material para cubrir las acciones planificadas, las cuales no se corresponden con las necesidades acumuladas (*Juventud Rebelde*, 31/7/09).

July 31: Cuban President Raul Castro has postponed what was to have been the ruling Communist Party's first congress in 12 years, saying it may be the last under the aging "historic leadership of the revolution" and must be done right, state-run media reported. Castro said the party has to carefully analyze economic matters to determine "what must be perfected and even eliminated" as Cuba moves into the future without him or brother Fidel Castro at the helm, according to the newspaper *Granma*. The congress, where direction is set for the country's future, was expected to take place at the end of this year. No new date has been set. *Granma* quoted Raul Castro, who spoke to the party's central committee, as saying, "Because of the laws of life, this will be the last (congress) led by the historic leadership of the revolution," referring to age and time. Raul Castro said the congress, which would be the sixth in the party's history, would be held only when the party has completed preparations and the public has been consulted. "It has to be the people, with the party at the vanguard, that decides" future direction, he said ([Granma's report](#); *Reuters*, 31/7/09).

Julio 31: Ante el anuncio de la posposición del Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba publicado en el diario oficial *Granma*, el economista disidente Vladimiro Roca, presidente del ilegal Partido Socialdemócrata de Cuba, dijo: "No veremos un congreso del PCC mientras Fidel Castro tenga los ojos abiertos". "Fidel Castro no está dispuesto a entregar el poder que mantiene como primer secretario del Partido", opinó Roca desde La Habana. "Todo el mundo sabe que Raúl ejecuta, pero el que dirige el país es Fidel". Sin embargo, Roca manifestó que a nivel popular no interesa la posposición del congreso, sino las restricciones económicas que puedan comprometer aún más las condiciones de vida del cubano de a pie. "Parece que entre las afectaciones se anunciará un nuevo plan de apagones, con un plan de zonificación más estricto, se limitará la distribución de productos agrícolas y se cerrarán algunas tiendas en divisas", indicó (*El Nuevo Herald*, 31/7/09).

Economy

Julio 1: Cuba produjo 1,42 millones de toneladas de azúcar sin refinar en el 2008 y más que duplicó la refinación en un intento por recuperar parte del brillo de lo que fue en el pasado una vibrante industria, según un informe oficial. Si bien los resultados del 2009 no estarán disponibles hasta dentro de un año, *Reuters* calcula que la producción se redujo a 1,3 millones de toneladas de azúcar en la recién terminada zafra del 2009, según reportes de prensa y fuentes del sector. La estatal Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONE) reportó en su sitio web que en el 2008 la producción de azúcar refinada fue de 247,000 toneladas, en comparación con las 110,000 toneladas del año anterior (*Reuters*, 1/7/09).

July 2: The Cuban government failed on three occasions to pay the installments on the US\$355 million credit deal it signed with Russia on September 28, 2006, the Russian Federation's Audit Chamber revealed. "Since the signing of the agreement," which grants Cuba credit against Russian goods and services, "the Cuban side has three times violated the payment terms," said an Audit Chamber press release, read in Moscow by auditor Viktor Semyonovich Kosourov. "However, access to the credit line was not halted and, as of June 1, 2009, interest penalties for late payment have not been imposed." During the

Russian audit, several "deficiencies" were found in Cuba's selection of Russian suppliers. Havana appears to have placed contracts with companies that have "minimal capitalization and scant production or marketing capabilities," Kosourov said (*The Miami Herald*, 3/7/09).

July 6: President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan has signed a decree endorsing a cooperation agreement in the area of tourism between the Ministry of Tourism & Culture of Azerbaijan and the Ministry of Tourism of Cuba, which was signed in the city of Havana, on 26 February 2009 (*ABC.AZ Daily News*, 6/7/09).

July 6: The ranks of Cuba's family farmers have grown by more than 30,000 this year as the government conducted the biggest land-lease distribution since the country's 1959 revolution in an effort to solve an agricultural crisis, a newspaper reported. Communist authorities began leasing 4 million acres of fallow state lands in October, mainly small parcels, to private family farmers and interested individuals as part of an effort by President Raul Castro to reform the state-dominated sector and increase food production. The official trade union weekly *Trabajadores* newspaper said a total of 78,113 land leases have been granted since the program began, up from 45,000 in January when figures were last released. "A study of fallow state lands found there were 1.69 million hectares (4 million acres), of which 689,697 hectares (1.7 million acres) have been leased, or 41 percent," *Trabajadores* said. Farmers said the program had borne visible results, though they added it took months to actually gain the land once granted. "I am thrilled to see how wasted state lands are turning into food providers, but there are cases where the land is leased but has not been put to use due to organizational questions," Alfredo Estevez, a farmer in central Camaguey province, said. *Trabajadores* said 56,000 of the leases were in production (*Reuters*, 6/7/09).

Julio 7: Cuba sufre ya el impacto del cambio climático mundial con un aumento de la temperatura media anual, del nivel del mar y huracanes más intensos, afirmó la presidenta de la Agencia del Medio Ambiente, Gisela Alonso. Durante el siglo XX se registró un incremento de la temperatura media anual en la isla de 0.6 grados Celsius y una tasa del aumento del nivel medio del mar de 2.14 milímetros por año, aseguró la científica ante la VII Convención Internacional sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo. Según Alonso, también se incrementó la furia de los huracanes, se produjeron sequías más frecuentes, una mayor cantidad de tornados y eventos caracterizados por fuertes lluvias. Otras afectaciones son la merma del potencial hídrico, los cambios en los patrones de rendimiento de los cultivos, disminución de los manglares y enfermedades humanas relacionadas con el clima, confesó la especialista. Tras advertir que el cambio climático constituye una amenaza al desarrollo sostenible de la isla, Alonso dijo que se aplican programas para enfrentar sus efectos en Cuba, entre ellos el forestal Nacional, el ahorro y el uso racional del agua (*Notimex*, 7/7/09).

Julio 7: Cuba produjo 1,7 millones de toneladas de crudo en el primer semestre de 2009 y espera llegar a cuatro millones a fin de año, un volumen similar al de años anteriores, informó el jefe de Exploración y Producción de la petrolera estatal Cupet, Orestes Hernández. Cumplir esa meta de cuatro millones de toneladas "va a depender en gran

medida de los resultados de pozos nuevos", que ya están unos en evaluación y otros en desarrollo, declaró el funcionario a la televisión estatal. Un informe de ese medio oficial explicó que la perforación y exploración de al menos once nuevos pozos figura entre los principales desafíos de Cupet para este año, especialmente en la llamada "franja de crudo pesado" del norte de las provincias de Matanzas y La Habana (*EFE, 7/7/09*).

July 7: Cuba and a consortium of foreign oil companies have once again postponed plans to drill for oil in the island's still-untapped fields in the Gulf of Mexico, diplomatic and industry sources said. Cuba had announced the consortium, led by Spain's Repsol-YPF, would drill in June or July, but now it is uncertain when work will begin in the waters that Cuban oil experts say may contain 20 billion barrels of oil. "The project has been postponed until a further date for more study," said a foreign oil industry source with direct knowledge of the plans. "It is premature to say when drilling might begin, later this year or next," he added. A European diplomat said he had first-hand knowledge that drilling was postponed at least until the end of 2009, if not into 2010. Neither source wished to be identified. Cuban authorities were not immediately available for comment (*Reuters, 7/7/09*).

July 9: Brazil said it would give Cuba up to \$300 million in credits to start rebuilding the island's port of Mariel, better known as the site of a 1980 Cuban exodus to the United States. Brazilian Industry and Trade Minister Miguel Jorge said \$110 million had been approved by his government and the rest would likely be, as Brazil strengthens its ties with communist-led Cuba. He said in a news conference that construction, to be led by a Brazilian company, would begin "very soon" with the building of infrastructure including highways and a railroad for the port about 30 miles (50 km) west of Havana. Brazilian officials said Cuba expects the entire port project, which will be built in several phases, to cost up to \$2 billion. The first phase is projected to take four or five years to complete and cost \$600 million, they said. Cuba wants Mariel to serve as logistics center for its still-nascent offshore oil industry and to be equipped to handle shipments from around the world, including the United States, just 90 miles (145 km) to the north of Cuba (*Reuters, 9/7/09*).

Julio 9: Cuba le adeuda a Venezuela unos \$4,670 millones por la compra de petróleo y productos refinados, según estimaciones de la Universidad de Miami. La isla ha comprado petróleo y subproductos por \$12,300 millones a Venezuela desde el 2003. De ese monto, 38 por ciento fue financiado a 25 años, dijo Jorge Piñón, analista de temas energéticos en el Centro de Políticas Hemisféricas de la Universidad de Miami. Sus cálculos se basan en los precios de mercado y cifras difundidas por la Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas de Cuba. Las importaciones totales de Cuba crecieron el 64 por ciento a \$4,100 millones en el 2008 conforme subieron los precios del crudo, dijo Piñón. Ningún funcionario de la embajada cubana en Caracas estuvo disponible para opinar (*Bloomberg, 9/7/09*).

July 15: A steady increase of business between Cuba and Mexico was confirmed by Odalis Seijo, vice president of the Cuban Chamber of Commerce. Seijo, who is taking part in the 16th Session of the Cuba-Mexico Business Committee in the Mexican capital,

said that bilateral trade grew by 75% in 2008 and it is expected that it will continue growing this year. Seijo highlighted the importance of increasing the number of exports from Cuba to Mexico and put emphasis on the development of relations in the agricultural sector with products that are currently not included in the exchange list (ACN, 15/7/09).

July 15: Brazil's state-owned oil company Petrobras has completed seismic work in its leased Cuban offshore bloc and is studying whether to drill a well, the head of its Cuban operations said. Under terms of the lease, the company has until next May to make the decision, Joao Figueira said in a press conference at Petrobras's newly opened Havana office. He said the bloc, located east of Havana and offshore from Cuba's most prolific onshore oil field, has good prospects, but it remains to be seen if it has sufficient accumulations of oil to make wells profitable. "From a geological standpoint it's pretty well located in terms of oil generation," he said. "The challenge and uncertainty are related to the reserve distribution, size and production per well." Spain's Repsol-YPF, part of a consortium with Norway's Statoil Hydro (STL.OL) and ONGC Videsh of India, drilled an exploratory well in 2004 and said it found traces of high quality oil. But a planned second well has been postponed repeatedly due to problems that include difficulty getting a drilling rig that does not violate restrictions of the United States' 47-year-old trade embargo against Cuba. PDVSA, the national oil company of Venezuela, Cuba's socialist ally, has said it plans to drill an exploratory well in Cuban waters next year. Other bloc holders include Vietnam state oil and gas group Petrovietnam and Malaysia's state-run Petronas (*Reuters*, 16/7/09).

Julio 15: La crisis mundial no estropeará los planes de vender 5 millones de cajas anuales de Havana Club para el 2013, aseguró el director de la compañía, Marc Beuve-Mery. La empresa presentó una nueva planta de producción del ron en la localidad de San José de las Lajas, a unos 40 kilómetros la capital. "El crecimiento de la marca ha sido continuo desde que comenzó", la coinversión en 1993 indicó el funcionario durante un recorrido por las nuevas instalaciones. Havana Club Internacional es una mixta entre Cuba Ron SA y el grupo francés Pernod Ricard que comercializa su producto en más de 120 países y ocupa el lugar 25 entre las bebidas alcohólicas más vendidas. La planta de 23 hectáreas y que le costó a la firma unos 70 millones de dólares fue inaugurada oficialmente en 2007, pero hasta ahora no había sido mostrado a periodistas. Beuve-Mery confirmó que en 2008 la compañía vendió 3,4 millones de cajas --cada caja corresponde a 9 litros según parámetros internacionales-- sin tener acceso al mercado más grande del mundo, Estados Unidos, donde las sanciones impiden la comercialización del productos cubanos (*AP*, 15/7/09).

Julio 15: Un año después de que el gobierno de Cuba autorizó la entrega de tierras agrícolas ociosas a quienes las solicitan, los resultados de la medida están siendo fuertemente cuestionados tanto por sus logros productivos como por la burocracia que involucra el proceso. Es un debate que, curiosamente, se está librando en los medios oficiales de prensa de Cuba y en las agencias noticiosas acreditadas en la isla. "Lo que existe es un proceso que lleva trámites e involucra a varios organismos", dijo el diario *Trabajadores*, al negar que la burocracia estatal afecte la entrega de tierras. "La entrega

de tierras ociosas en usufructo parece convertirse en tema para otra campaña mediática contra Cuba. Algunas agencias han recurrido a personajes que piden el anonimato o a descontextualizar opiniones, citadas en reportajes de la prensa nacional, para desvirtuar la marcha de este proceso", se lamentó el órgano oficial de la Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (*Marti Noticias*, 15/7/09).

July 17: Workers at the "10 de Octubre" Thermoelectric Power plant, in the municipality of Nuevititas, Camaguey province, started key rehabilitation actions in order to increase power generation and the availability of energy for the National power distribution network. Juan Manuel Crespo Salas, told the local press that ongoing works also allow making operations more efficient, since they burn less fuel. He announced that in the upcoming weeks block five of that plant will be taken out of service for a 40-day general maintenance, thanks to the national energy program, known as Energy Revolution, which includes measures like the withdrawal of the role played by thermoelectric plants as main electricity suppliers for the country. Cuba is working on the repairs of other thermoelectric plants like the "Antonio Guiteras", in Western Matanzas province ; the "Antonio Maceo" (Renté), in eastern Santiago de Cuba, and the one in the Havana locality of Santa Cruz del Norte, said the deputy minister of Cuba's Basic Industry Manuel Presa (*ACN*, 17/7/09).

Julio 19: El presidente cubano Raúl Castro avanzó un paso más en el alivio del control centralizado sobre el gasto en divisas, al entregar su manejo a los ministerios a partir de julio; sin embargo, surgió al mismo tiempo un agujero negro de cientos de millones de dólares de cuentas sin pagar acumuladas en los últimos siete meses, que mantiene en estado de crispación a la mayoría de las empresas extranjeras que negocian con Cuba, de acuerdo con fuentes del circuito de negocios en La Habana. Un empresario extranjero radicado en La Habana y que pidió el anonimato dijo que, habrá más eficiencia en la contratación ahora que el gobierno controla su presupuesto de compras en moneda dura. Pero al mismo tiempo acaba de aparecer un agujero negro que no sabemos cómo vamos a resolver y además se está socavando la confianza en los bancos. Los medios empresariales consideran que la decisión de dispersar en el gabinete el manejo del presupuesto de importaciones es más política que económica o financiera. El conflicto ahora es que no queda claro cómo se puede restituir el valor de ese agujero negro, que según algunos cálculos puede valer unos mil millones de dólares, puesto que el nuevo sistema de pagos sólo se aplica a las operaciones que se contraten a partir de julio. Esta crisis en el sector bancario no la vivió Cuba siquiera en los peores momentos de la década pasada, tras la caída de la Unión Soviética. Sólo algunas empresas, excepcionalmente, han logrado la repatriación de sus fondos en forma total o parcial, pero la mayoría se mantiene en la incertidumbre, sin que haya, por ahora, ninguna explicación oficial (*La Jornada*, 19/7/09).

July 20: Los institutos Finlay de Cuba y Bio-Manguinhos de Brasil aumentarán este año hasta en 50 millones, las dosis de una vacuna contra la meningitis bacteriana que producen conjuntamente para que la emplee la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) en países de África y Oriente Medio. La vicepresidenta de Investigación del Finlay, Rosa Lydia Solís, explicó que ese incremento se debe a que en África subsahariana,

especialmente, se vive la peor temporada de esa epidemia desde 2006, con más de 56,000 enfermos y cerca de 2,000 muertos, informó el semanario oficial cubano *Trabajadores* (EFE, 20/7/09).

Julio 20: El gobierno cubano, a través de su empresa Labiofam, compró la parte extranjera de la compañía mixta Bio Vietnam, productora y comercializadora de productos biológicos para el control de plagas. La Habana adquirió con esta operación todas las acciones de Bio Vietnam, que exporta el 85% de sus producciones a distintos continentes. Según informes difundidos por la radio oficial cubana, la empresa productora y comercializadora es ahora del gobierno cubano en su totalidad. La parte adquirida por La Habana estaba en poder de un socio británico y su obtención le permitirá ampliar su capacidad productiva y de servicios (*Xinhua*, 21/7/09).

July 21: International tourism rose 2.7 percent in Cuba during the first six months of the current year, announced the National Statistics Office (ONE) in a press release. The number of tourists that visited the Caribbean archipelago in this first semester was 1,375,907, the biggest figure in Cuban history and some 36,265 more than during the same period of the previous year, for a 2.7 percent growth, reported ONE in its website. Over the last month of the semester, June, Cuba received 164,904 visitors, which translates into a 7.3 percent increase compared to June 2008, and 22.1 percent compared with the same month in 2007. These figures match the Ministry of Tourism's expectations for this period, considering the world economic crisis. Cuba expects to receive nearly 2,350,000 tourists this year, practically the same amount of last year (ACN, 21/7/09).

July 21: The Angolan minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology, José Rocha, assured in Luanda that the Governments of Angola and Cuba are implementing an agreement providing for staff training, seeking to respond to the demands in the sector. Speaking to the press, on the fringes of the meeting between the presidents of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, and Cuba's, Raul Castro, the minister said the accord aims to develop technologies of information and communication. Angola and Cuba last February in Luanda signed four legal accords aimed at strengthening and widen bilateral cooperation. The cooperation accords focus on Geology and Mining, Industry, including a Memorandum of Understanding on the state and perspective for cooperation between the two countries and the Education Ministries of Angola and Cuba (*Angop*, 21/7/09).

July 21: Cuba is cutting estimates of imports by billions of dollars this year and projecting a decline in export revenues due to the international financial crisis, according to a government report. The Economy and Planning Ministry forecast was drawn up within two months of President Raul Castro's replacement in March of Cuba's entire economic leadership team after a dismal 2008 performance. The report outlines adjustments to the 2009 plans of the old cabinet, including projections of 2.5 percent economic growth compared with the original 6 percent. The report says imports will plummet 22.2 percent, or some \$3.4 billion, compared with an increase of nearly \$1 billion first projected. Exports will decline by \$500 million, compared with an increase of

\$600 million the old cabinet forecast. "I think the figures are much more realistic and indicate they are trying to get the current account back in the black," a foreign businessman said, asking his name not be used. The current account is a broad gauge of the balance of foreign exchange flowing in and out of a country, in Cuba's case critical given the Caribbean island's dependence on imports. The report coincides with a video of a cabinet meeting, apparently in May, making the rounds of state managers. Economy and Planning Minister Marino Murillo Jorge announced at the meeting that the country was short 30 percent of the resources needed to meet the 6 percent growth figure, a source familiar with the video said (*Reuters*, 21/7/09).

July 22: The Cuban central bank has authorized the release of some funds in foreign business accounts that have been blocked by the government for months and caused a growing reluctance to trade with Cuba. Central bank Instruction #3 issued this month allows the transfer or payment of foreign exchange from the frozen accounts with the approval of a government ministry, business sources familiar with the resolution said. They said some 600 accounts, with frozen funds estimated at \$600 million to \$1 billion, would potentially be involved. Faced with a drying-up of liquidity as the global financial crisis increasingly hit home, Cuba's state banks in January began telling many businesses their funds were simply not available for the moment. While renewed access, even if only partial, to accounts is welcome, business sources said it is being offered with the proviso that they continue to do business with the island (*Reuters*, 22/7/09).

July 26: More belt-tightening may lie head for Cuba as President Raul Castro said the government will look at making its second "adjustment to expenditures" this year due to the effects of the global financial crisis. He said Cuba needs to press ahead with his program for getting more land into the hands of private farmers, calling the lone major reform of his administration a top national priority. Castro spoke to thousands of red-clad Cubans in the eastern city of Holguin to mark the anniversary of the July 26, 1953 rebel attack on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba that is considered the start of the Cuban revolution. In particular, he said there has been a "significant reduction in export income and additional restrictions to access external financing sources." Cuba's only major reform so far has been in agriculture, where Raul Castro launched a program to let private farmers cultivate unused state land. He said that of 110,000 applications for land, 82,000 have been granted. More needs to be done to advance the land plan so Cuba can increase food production and cut import costs, he said. The island, 90 miles (145 km) from the United States, imports about 60 percent of its food. "It is an issue of national security to produce the products in this country," Castro said. "We spend hundreds of billions of dollars, and I don't exaggerate, bringing them from other countries." "The land is here, the Cubans are here, let's see if we work or not, if we produce or not," he said, pounding the podium ([Discurso de Raúl Castro](#); *Reuters*, 27/7/09).

Julio 26: El primer estudio en Cuba sobre peligros tecnológicos relacionados con sustancias que pueden ocasionar un impacto negativo en el medio ambiente se realiza en la capital de la isla desde el mes de junio, informó el semanario oficial *Tribuna de La Habana*. La investigación abarca a todas las empresas y almacenes que por las características de su trabajo usan o guardan productos tóxicos, inflamables, radioactivos,

explosivos corrosivos y otros, indica la nota. La acción está coordinada por la Agencia de Medio Ambiente (AMA) y hasta el momento "solo hay estudios muy específicos" en entidades de La Habana (*EFE*, 26/7/09).

July 28: Cubana de Aviación will inaugurate a new route: London-Holguín-Havana, the official radio station *Radio Rebelde* announced. Holguín, on the island's eastern end, about 500 miles from Havana, is a major tourist destination. The airline will use Ilyushin-96 aircraft with capacity for 258 passengers. Flight frequency will be weekly (*The Miami Herald*, 28/7/09).

July 28: Cuban parliamentarians discussed the need of saving electricity, during a meeting of the Commission for Energy and the Environment, held as part of the 3rd ordinary period of sessions of the island's National Assembly. Basic Industry Minister Yadira Garcia stressed the importance of preventing an excess of electric power consumption in the various territories. She highlighted that local governments and State Central Administration Entities must demand the implementation and fulfilment of the energy saving programs, by way of mechanisms that will continue to be improved, she said. During the session held at the Havana's Convention Center, Garcia pointed out that several workplaces that are not implementing the saving mechanisms have been detected. She announced that, starting August 1st, the rigor of the measures implemented some two months ago will increase, some of which could lead to the temporary closing of production facilities (*ACN*, 29/7/09).

July 29: Russia granted Cuba a 150-million-dollar credit line for the financing of technical supplies to be acquired by the island in that European country. The agreement was signed in Havana by the director of International Financial Relations Department, State Debt and Financial Assets of the Russian Finances Ministry, Konstantín Vishkovski, and by the Cuban Minister for Foreign Trade and Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca. Vishkovski is part of a large delegation of Russian entrepreneurs visiting Cuba, headed by Vice President Igor Sechin, which closed other four deals with Cuban companies. Cuba's CUPET and Russia's Zarubzhniift also signed four agreements for at-risk oil exploration, which lay the grounds for future works in the island's exclusive economic area of the Gulf of Mexico. The two countries agreed to start collaboration projects in the fishing industry, after signing a document establishing working areas in this sector (*ACN*, 29/7/09).

Julio 29: El viceministro de Economía y Planificación de Cuba, Adel Izquierdo, reconoció la "grave situación económico-financiera" que atraviesa el país como consecuencia de los efectos de la crisis internacional. Según informa el diario oficial *Granma*, Izquierdo explicó durante la reunión de la Comisión de Asuntos Económicos de la Asamblea Nacional de Cuba que las principales causas de la crisis por la que pasa la isla son la "reducción significativa de los ingresos provenientes de las exportaciones" y las "restricciones adicionales para acceder a fuentes de financiación externa". El viceministro sustentó con "inobjetables cifras y hechos" la "grave situación económico-financiera que atraviesa el país, por lo que explicó que su departamento ya trabaja "en los

lineamientos para elaborar el Proyecto de Plan Económico Social para 2010 y en la proyección de la Economía para el periodo 2009-2015" (*Europa Press*, 29/7/09).

July 30: Agriculture was at the center of intense debates by deputies during the Cuban Parliament's 3rd Ordinary Session, which analyzed the report presented by the Agriculture Ministry (MINAGRI). The report originated discussions on the implementation in Cuban territories of six strategic programs designed by the major economic sector. Agriculture minister Ulises Rosales del Toro briefed deputies on the current performance of the sector and its prospects and he also called on the need to increase efforts, efficiency and discipline, since food production is a Must for the country (*ACN*, 30/7/09).

Julio 30: El gobierno de Venezuela anunció la creación de la empresa Puertos del Alba, encargada principalmente de la "modernización" de la infraestructura portuaria del país. La Habana tendrá una participación del 49% en el proyecto. La estatal Bolivariana de Puertos tendrá el 51% de las acciones de la empresa, cuyo capital inicial es de 3,200 millones de bolívares (1,488 millones de dólares), y el restante corresponderá al "grupo empresarial de la Industria Portuaria", adscrita al Ministerio cubano de Transporte. Además de la modernización portuaria, Puertos del Alba tendrá funciones de recuperación, equipamiento y "construcción de puertos tanto en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela como en la República de Cuba", dijo la Gaceta Oficial venezolana (*AFP*, 30/7/09).

July 31: Raul Castro is trying to squeeze more productivity out of Cuba's socialist economy while at the same time fighting to keep it afloat in the face of the global economic crisis. Official newspaper *Granma* said Economy and Planning Minister Marino Murillo Jorge told the central committee, on July 29, that the 2009 economic growth forecast had been lowered again, to 1.7 percent. That was down from 2.5 percent, which was a revision from the original forecast of 6 percent growth for the year. Raul Castro has tweaked the system and reshuffled his cabinet but his only major economic reform so far has been in agriculture, where he is putting more state land in the hands of private farmers (*Reuters*, 31/7/09).

July 31: It's hard to find a spare tire in Cuba these days, or a cup of yoghurt. Air conditioners are shut off in the dead heat. Factories close at peak hours, and workers go without their government-subsidized lunches. Cuba has ordered austere energy savings this summer, and the secretive Council of Ministers and Communist Party Central Committee met to consider more cuts to cope with budget deficits and plummeting export profits. "The only thing I know is that we're screwed," said one 27-year-old who only gave the name Raul because he sells cement and housing materials on the black market. "I don't work. I find a way to survive." Workers at a tire factory in San Jose de las Lajas, a rugged farming town 30 miles (50 kilometers) south of Havana, said production is down and the factory goes dark when demand for electricity is high — leaving gas stations and mechanics short on spare tires. In the central province of Cienfuegos, a large dairy that supplies ice cream and other products to much of the country and exports cheese has been ordered to cut production, according to the Communist Youth newspaper

Juventud Rebelde. Yogurt is scarce in Havana — sold only in upscale grocery stores that cater to tourists and are too expensive for most Cubans. Some government office workers say their hours have been cut to between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m., and others are being told to come in only twice a week. State companies also have stopped offering employees low-cost lunches in worker cafeterias to save power. Other government offices, businesses, banks and stores have ordered air conditioners turned off for much of the day, rather than close early. Customer service, never stellar in state-run institutions, has suffered even more. In the sweltering banks, barbershops and boutiques, listless employees are more interested in fanning themselves than serving sweating customers (*AP*, 31/7/09).

July 31: Air Italy began its direct flights to Havana with the arrival at the Jose Marti International Airport by a Boeing 767 with 200 passengers on board, including a delegation of Italian journalists. The initiative constitutes the first direct connection between Italy and Cuba through that air company. The director of the Cuban Tourism Office in Italy, Jose Antonio Serguera, told reporters that Air Italy previously flew to Havana through third countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, like Poland. From now on, the Italian air company will maintain weekly flights from Rome to Havana, every Friday, with a stopover in the city of Milan (*ACN*, 31/7/09).

Exile Community

July 13: Ardoles Chapman, a star pitcher for Cuba in this year's World Baseball Classic who defected in the Netherlands on July 1, has signed with an agent and looks set to seek a Major League Baseball career. Chapman pitched for four seasons for Holguin in the Cuban league with 130 strikeouts in 118 innings this season and made an impression upon Major League Baseball talent scouts with a 101-mph fastball at the World Baseball Classic. Chapman, who was with a team from the Communist island nation preparing for a Dutch tournament when he defected, signed with Athletes Premier International, a firm headed by Edwin Leonel Mejia. "I am very excited to be starting a new chapter in my life and have Edwin and the rest of the team at Athletes Premier by my side to help me realize my dreams," Chapman said in a statement released by the agency (*AFP*, 13/7/09).

Julio 13: Jorge García Más recuerda el día en que se reunió en un barrio de La Habana con Jesús Martínez, el capitán del barco que embistió el remolcador "13 de Marzo", causando la muerte a 37 personas. No tuvo ningún reparo en decirle, sin alzar la voz, que era un asesino. Este tenso encuentro fue recordado por García al cumplirse 15 años de la tragedia del remolcador "13 de Marzo" en la que murieron 10 niños. Para García, quien perdió 14 familiares en el dramático suceso, este es un año más de impunidad. El gobierno cubano ha negado su responsabilidad en los hechos, a los cuales se ha referido como "un lamentable accidente". La tragedia parece languidecer en la memoria del exilio en Miami. Jóvenes organizadores de una vigilia en los predios de la Universidad Internacional de la Florida (FIU) no lograron convocar suficientes interesados para cerrar un círculo de manos cogidas alrededor de una fuente del recinto. Sólo 25 personas asistieron al evento y guardaron 15 minutos de silencio en memoria de las víctimas del remolcador (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/7/09).

Julio 14: El reinicio de las conversaciones migratorias entre Cuba y Estados Unidos desataron opiniones encontradas entre organizaciones de la comunidad exiliada en Miami, aunque coinciden en su escepticismo sobre la real voluntad del gobierno de Raúl Castro para mejorar las relaciones bilaterales y propiciar un cambio de política hacia Washington. La Fundación Nacional Cubanoamericana (FNCA), partidaria de que el presidente Barack Obama impulse una estrategia de "pasos calibrados" hacia La Habana, consideró que la decisión responde a los mejores intereses de Estados Unidos en relación con su política migratoria. El Consejo por la Libertad de Cuba (CLC) considera totalmente improductivo el paso dado por Obama el pasado 22 de mayo, cuando decidió retomar los encuentros bilaterales sobre el tema migratorio. Mauricio Caver-Carone, director ejecutivo del Comité de Acción Política US-Cuba Democracy, cree que es inadecuado presentar el encuentro de Nueva York con aires de sensacionalismo. "Esto no es más que una conversación de bajo nivel para mostrarle al mundo que esta administración está dispuesta a hablar, pero creo que la Secretaria de Estado [Hillary Clinton] ha dejado bien claras las pautas de lo que se debe hablar allí", dijo Caver-Carone desde Washington, D.C. " El empresario Carlos Saladrigas, presidente del Cuba Study Group, opina que "abrir el diálogo es siempre una oportunidad para buscar soluciones a las diferencias bilaterales". El ex prisionero político Ángel de Fana, director de la agrupación Plantados, coincide en que las autoridades estadounidenses deben conformar una agenda con temas migratorios de alta sensibilidad, como la retención de cientos de cubanos en la isla, a pesar de que ya tienen visa para emigrar (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/7/09).

Julio 17: Ante el creciente deterioro del sistema de salud pública de Cuba, la contribución humanitaria desde el exterior debe buscar vías para llegar a la población necesitada sin aguardar por cambios políticos en la isla, afirmaron médicos exiliados durante una conferencia internacional en Miami. "Tenemos que preguntarnos qué podemos hacer nosotros desde ahora y no esperar por un cambio de régimen político para llevar nuestra ayuda al pueblo cubano", manifestó el doctor Alfredo Melgar. "Nuestra tarea es llegar a los necesitados eludiendo la vía oficial". Melgar habló en la segunda sesión de la VII Conferencia de la Asociación de Trabajadores Cubanos de la Salud (ATCS), que se realiza en un hotel de Coral Gables. El evento reúne a una veintena de médicos y otros profesionales de la salud que residen en Venezuela, Nicaragua, República Dominicana, Puerto Rico y Estados Unidos. La intervención de Melgar --quien llegó a Estados Unidos en 1995-- estuvo dedicada a los consultorios independientes en Cuba, un sistema alternativo de atención primaria que comenzó a desarrollarse en el 2002 con respaldo de organizaciones humanitarias y grupos del exilio cubano (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/7/09).

July 20: Newly selected NASA astronaut Serena María Auñón says that if it were up to her, she would include *ropa vieja*, her favorite Cuban meal, on the menu of the International Space Station. "We have special kitchens here at NASA. Let's see what dishes they offer," Auñón said. The island's gastronomy is only one of several traditions the medical astronaut owes to her father, Jorge Auñón, a Cuban immigrant whose family sent him to the United States in 1960 while waiting for Fidel Castro's downfall. Auñón, 33, was selected in June, along with eight other astronauts, for the next several space

missions of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The class was chosen from 3,500 candidates (*The Miami Herald*, 20/7/09).

Julio 23: La Fundación Nacional Cubano-Americana (FNCA) manifestó su "oposición a la intervención" de otros países en los asuntos internos de Honduras y consideró irónico que los gobiernos de Cuba y Venezuela se erijan en defensores de la democracia hondureña. La FNCA, con sede en Miami, indicó en un comunicado que cree "firmemente" que la crisis "debe ser resuelta por el pueblo hondureño a través de sus leyes y de la celebración de elecciones libres y justas". También cree que la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) debe ayudar a los hondureños demandando a todas las partes que respeten la Constitución y sus instituciones democráticas. Para la FNCA, hay que contrarrestar los esfuerzos por parte del líder cubano Fidel Castro, de su hermano Raúl, del presidente de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, y de sus "aliados de intervenir en los asuntos hondureños e imponer un régimen totalitario" (*EFE*, 23/7/09).

Julio 29: El exiliado cubano Yotuhel Montané, nieto de un dirigente histórico de la revolución de Fidel Castro, fue acusado como principal proveedor de una red de narcotraficantes de Nueva York que se abastecía con sus envíos de cocaína desde Miami. Las autoridades del condado neoyorquino de Kings anunciaron que Montané, de 36 años y nieto del fallecido Jesús Montané Oropesa (1923-1999), será encausado por suministrar kilogramos de cocaína "en múltiples ocasiones durante los últimos años" a la banda del traficante llamado Eric "Fat Eddy" Rodríguez, radicado en el área de Brooklyn, según un comunicado de la oficina del fiscal de distrito Charles J. Hynes. Montané fue arrestado el 16 de julio en Miami como parte de una operación conjunta que involucró a un equipo especial de la Dirección Antinarcóticos (DEA), la Policía de Nueva York e investigadores de la Oficina Antinarcóticos del Departamento de Policía del Condado de Miami-Dade. Su abuelo, Jesús Montané Oropesa, fue un cercano colaborador de Fidel Castro desde el comienzo de la lucha insurreccional contra el régimen de Fulgencio Batista. Conocido como "Chucho" en el clandestinaje, fue fundador del Movimiento 26 de Julio. En 1956, participó en la expedición del yate Granma, que dio comienzo a la lucha guerrillera contra Batista en las montañas de la Sierra Maestra. A partir de 1988 y hasta su muerte fungió como ayudante personal de Castro. Su único hijo, Sergio Montané López, padre de Yotuhel, desertó del servicio diplomático en 1994 y actualmente vive en Miami (*El Nuevo Herald*, 30/7/09).

Julio 30: El presidente Barack Obama le otorgó la Medalla de la Libertad, el reconocimiento civil más importante en Estados Unidos, al médico de origen cubano Doctor Pedro José Greer, hijo. Greer estudió en la Escuela de Medicina de la Universidad de la Florida, donde ocupó el cargo de director del Departamento de Humanidades y Salud. Estableció una red de clínicas para atender a personas con bajos recursos económicos y los desamparados en Miami. Con el nombre Camillus Health Concern, en estos centros se les brinda ayuda gratuita a más de diez mil pacientes cada año, en ellas operan unos cien médicos, y muchos estudiantes de Medicina. Ha recibido reconocimientos del Vaticano y de parte de los expresidentes norteamericanos George Bush padre, Bill Clinton y Jimmy Carter (*Radio Martí*, 31/7/09).

Foreign Affairs

Julio 1: El canciller de El Salvador, Hugo Martínez, anunció el nombramiento de un grupo de embajadores, entre ellos el ex miembro del Partido Comunista, Domingo Santa Cruz, para la nueva sede diplomática en Cuba. El nuevo embajador ante Cuba fue anunciado justo un mes después que Martínez firmó un acuerdo con el vicescanciller cubano Alejandro González para restablecer las relaciones diplomáticas entre ambos países, poniendo fin a medio siglo de distanciamiento. El acuerdo fue alcanzado luego que el presidente de izquierda Mauricio Funes asumió el cargo de cinco años el pasado 1 de junio, terminando así con dos décadas de gobiernos de la derechista Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Arena). Santa Cruz, de 75 años, formó parte del Partido Comunista local y de la comisión política del ex guerrillero Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), al que pertenece el presidente Funes (*AP*, 1/7/09).

July 2: The Cuban journalist and poet Normando Hernandez has been awarded the annual Freedom of Expression award by the Norwegian Writers' Union. A delegation traveled from Oslo to the island nation to present the award, which included a prize of 100,000 kroner (about \$15,775). In this case, there were no hugs, no toast. Gonzalez, 39 and seriously ill, has been in prison for six years, except for a few stays in a Havana military hospital. Much of his incarceration has been spent at the notorious Kilo 7 in Camaguey. Gonzalez is one of 29 journalists arrested in the "Black Spring" of March 2003, when 75 dissidents were convicted of "endangering the state's independence or territorial integrity," according to the Cuban government. Gonzalez published stories critical of the health, education and judicial agencies. His reward was a 25-year sentence (*Bloomberg*, 2/7/09).

July 2: Cyril Svoboda, head of the Czech Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and former foreign minister, criticised the EU's pragmatic approach to Havana on arrival from a private visit to Cuba. Svoboda set out for the trip in cooperation with the People in Need foundation on June 27, without any publicity. He told journalists that only the Czech, Dutch and Polish embassies distribute medicines to the Cuban people who need them. The other EU countries unfortunately have preferred pragmatic policy to a free approach and a dialogue, Svoboda said. He added that only few of them meet dissidents. On the contrary, they show cordial relations with the official representatives of Cuba, an undemocratic state, Svoboda said (*CTK*, 2/7/09).

July 2: The 19th Cuba-Yemen Joint Intergovernmental Session wrapped up in Havana with the signing of a cooperation protocol in the fields of agriculture, health and education. The document was signed by Cuban Minister for Foreign Trade and Investment Rodrigo Malmierca, and Yemeni Agriculture and Irrigation Minister Mansur Ahmed Mohamed Al Howshabi (*ACN*, 2/7/09).

July 2: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo concluded a working visit to Panama which he described as very positive. Lazo, who headed the Cuban delegation to the swearing-in ceremony of President Ricardo Martinelli, told *Prensa Latina* news agency that during

his short visit he fulfilled a tight working agenda that included a meeting with the newly inaugurated authorities of Panama. Strengthening mutual cooperation bonds, particularly in the health, trade and sports sectors, was one of the main topics discussed in the meetings, said the Cuban Vice President. Lazo said the Cuban delegation participated in the farewell ceremony of outgoing president Martín Torrijos, to whom he communicated the Cuban authorities' decision to approve a partial-reaching commercial deal between the two nations (*ACN*, 2/7/09).

July 3: Cuban national baseball youth team will play friendly matches with its Canadian counterpart at the Nelson Fernandez Stadium in Havana province. The Cuban squad is taking these matches as part of its training before its participation in the Pan American World Qualifier in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, to run from September 24th till October 4th. The Canadian team, with a good offensive and pitching, arrived in Havana after concluding a 5-game series against a US college team, with players of 21-22 years of age (*ACN*, 3/7/09).

July 5: Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic President Mohamed Abdelaziz met with Cuban President Raul Castro to discuss bilateral and global issues, state media reported. "The leaders expressed their satisfaction at the excellent state of bilateral links and exchanged experiences about the many challenges confronting both peoples, both internally as well as on the international level, at a time when the world is suffering a profound economic crisis and dangerous conflicts persist," a government communique said. "Abdelaziz reiterated that his people will always stand with Cuba in its just struggle against the (US) blockade and for the release of the Five Heroes (Cuban agents convicted and imprisoned in the United States for espionage), as well as thanking (Cuba) for the ongoing solidarity of the island," the government communique said. Castro called the people of the Western Sahara a "heroic people who are fighting in very difficult conditions for their right to self-determination" and he expressed the Cuban willingness to continue providing support for their cause. Accompanying Castro in the meeting were Cuban First Vice President Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, and Abdelaziz had his foreign minister, Salem Ould Salek, with him (*EFE*, 5/7/09).

Julio 7: El ayuntamiento de Barcelona ha rehabilitado 57 apartamentos de 11 fincas de la calle de La Habana que lleva su nombre, en colaboración con la Oficina del Historiador de la capital cubana. El comisionado de Cooperación, Solidaridad y Paz de Barcelona, Manel Vila, explicó a corresponsales que la rehabilitación se hizo durante cuatro años, "con la gente dentro". Las obras costaron 554,000 euros, de los cuales 370,000 los aportó esa ciudad catalana y el resto la Oficina del Historiador de La Habana, Eusebio Leal, especie de alcalde autónomo del casco antiguo de la capital. La calle Barcelona está situada en el Barrio Chino del deteriorado centro histórico, detrás del Capitolio erigido a imagen y semejanza del de Washington, que fue sede del parlamento cubano y ahora alberga un museo (*EFE*, 7/7/09).

July 7: The International Press Institute called for the "immediate release" of the 22 journalists jailed in Cuba and warned of the risk of downplaying the importance of the

fundamental rights of freedom of expression and the press. The Vienna-based IPI noted in a statement that the UN Human Rights Council recently praised Cuba for making progress in promoting rights related to nutrition, education and health, but not freedom of expression. "Various national delegations, including those of Canada, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Chile, Italy and Slovakia, expressed concern about Cuba's violation of the right to freedom of expression and the continued imprisonment of journalists and human rights defenders," the IPI said. The UN panel, however, noted that 79 people were arrested in 2003 in an "arbitrary" manner. Among those detained in that government crackdown were 29 journalists, of whom 21 remain imprisoned, the IPI said. Dissident organizations on the communist-ruled island estimate the total number of political prisoners in Cuba at around 207. "I am indeed glad to see that the report includes concerns about the lack of freedom of expression in Cuba, as well as recommendations to lift restrictions on this fundamental right," IPI Director David Dudge said (*EFE*, 7/7/09).

Julio 8: El gobierno cubano anunció que retira de Honduras a 143 cubanos que cumplían tareas de apoyo al deporte y alfabetización y denunció que el nuevo gobierno "alienta acciones hostiles" contra los cubanos residentes en el país, según un comunicado de su embajada. En el texto, la embajada responsabiliza de esa decisión a los pronunciamientos de funcionarios del gobierno de Roberto Micheletti, que tomó el poder después que el 28 de junio el Ejército expulsó al presidente Manuel Zelaya y que afirmaron que algunos de esos cubanos participaban en tareas de adoctrinamiento. En uno de sus primeros pronunciamientos tras tomar el poder, Micheletti aseguró que se brindaría toda la seguridad a los cubanos que permanecieran en el país (*AFP*, 9/7/09).

Julio 9: El 29 Festival del Caribe llenó de colorido a la ciudad de Santiago de Cuba, al oriente de la isla, con sus bailes y canciones, desafiando las altas temperaturas veraniegas y las adversidades que suelen amenazar su celebración. Cuentan organizadores de la también llamada "Fiesta del fuego" que el fallecido intelectual santiaguero Joel James, fundador de estos encuentros, advertía a menudo que por estas fechas siempre asechaba alguna contingencia que conspiraba contra la participación de artistas de otros países. Pero ya fueran huracanes, siempre presentes en toda el área caribeña entre junio y noviembre, crisis económica o conflictos políticos, estas citas culturales organizadas por la Casa del Caribe nunca han dejado de realizarse. Su 29 edición, que transcurrió entre el 3 y el 9 de julio, no fue la excepción. Dedicada a Honduras y la cultura garífuna, ni el presidente constitucional Manuel Zelaya, ni la numerosa delegación invitada al festival pudieron acudir a la cita, por la severa crisis política que sacude a ese país centroamericano desde el 28 de junio, cuando un golpe de Estado desplazó al mandatario. Sin embargo, Honduras estuvo presente de principio a fin en discursos, talleres teóricos y entre exponentes y portadores de la cultura popular de distintas zonas de Cuba y de la región circundante, así como en participantes de coloridos desfiles de inauguración y clausura del encuentro (*IPS*, 17/7/09).

Julio 10: El presidente cubano, Raúl Castro, se reunió con el ministro brasileño de Desarrollo, Industria y Comercio Exterior, Miguel Jorge, que visitó dos días la isla con empresarios de su país para adelantar negociaciones sobre petróleo, puertos y empresas

mixtas. Un escueto comunicado divulgado por medios oficiales dice que también asistieron a la reunión -no anunciada previamente- dos vicepresidentes cubanos, Ricardo Cabrisas y Jorge Luis Sierra, y por Brasil el presidente de la Agencia de Desarrollo Industrial, Reginaldo Arcuri, y el embajador en La Habana, Bernardo Pericás. Jorge dijo en rueda de prensa que "lo más importante" de su visita fue concretar operaciones conjuntas para construir un puerto en Mariel, al oeste de La Habana, y anunció que la estatal Petrobrás abrirá una oficina en la capital cubana (*EFE*, 11/7/09).

Julio 10: Unos 80 cooperantes cubanos que trabajaban en Honduras, en su mayoría maestros, regresaron a Cuba tras ser retirados por el gobierno de la isla debido a "obstáculos" para realizar su labor en medio de la crisis política que vive ese país, informaron medios oficiales. Los cooperantes fueron recibidos por la ministra cubana de Educación, Ena Elsa Velázquez, quien explicó que su misión en Honduras finalizó "a causa de obstáculos impuestos por el Gobierno de facto de ese país para el desempeño de sus funciones", desde que fue depuesto el presidente Manuel Zelaya. La mayoría de los que regresaron participaban en el Programa Nacional de Alfabetización para jóvenes y adultos con el método cubano "Yo, sí puedo", pero también hay tres especialistas del Instituto Nacional de Deportes y dos del Ministerio del Azúcar. Su regreso se produjo horas después de que la embajada de Cuba en Honduras anunciara en un comunicado que retiraría a los 143 docentes cubanos que trabajan allí, porque el gobierno que preside Roberto Micheletti no completó el trámite de pasaportes de 83 asesores. Sin embargo, según el comunicado, Cuba mantendrá en ese país centroamericano al personal médico y paramédico que comenzó a brindar ayuda a fines de 1998, luego del paso del huracán "Mitch", "a menos que exista una solicitud expresa de que sea retirado" (*EFE*, 10/7/09).

July 11: Britain's Royal Ballet has arrived in Havana for five days' of sold-out performances in the company's first visit to Cuba. The performances, which begin on July 14, will include a tribute to Cuban ballet legend Alicia Alonso and feature the return of Carlos Acosta, a Cuban who is the ballet's principal guest dancer. Administrative director Kevin O'Hare said at a press conference that 150 people, including 96 dancers, made the trip with the London-based company. Julian Gonzalez, president of Cuba's National Council for Visual Arts, said tickets to the performances had sold out "in a matter of hours" as Cubans looked forward to seeing the prestigious company and watching Acosta perform. The company will perform at the Gran Teatro in central Havana the first three days, then move to Karl Marx Teatro for two more. Four of the performances will be shown live on big-screen televisions placed outside near the Gran Teatro (*Reuters*, 13/7/09).

July 11: Honduras today "is a country occupied not only by the coup-plotters but also by the armed forces of the United States," writes Fidel Castro in his latest article, published in the Cuban media. Castro reminds his readers that "the military base at Soto Cano [...] was used by Col. Oliver North when he directed the dirty war against Nicaragua." From there, the United States directed "attacks against the Salvadoran and Guatemalan revolutionaries. [...] It is home to the United States' Joint Task Force Bravo [...] which occupies 85 percent of the area of the base." "If President Manuel Zelaya is not returned to his post, a wave of coups d'état threatens to wipe out many Latin American

governments or place them at the mercy of extreme-right military officers" trained by the Pentagon, Castro warns. "Those dark days are not very distant," he writes. Castro then gives Zelaya some advice. He should "not now admit any dilatory maneuvers that might wear out the considerable social forces that support him and only lead to an irreparable erosion" ([The Coup Dies or Constitutions Die](#); *The Miami Herald*, 11/7/09).

July 12: President Raul Castro met Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika as he began a three-day visit to Cuba's north African ally ahead of a key summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. Castro, 78, was welcomed by Bouteflika at the airport before they held talks at a presidential residence west of the capital Algiers. The programme of Castro's visit was not made public, but Algerian government newspaper *El Moudjahid* said meetings would focus on "a major event, the 15th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement" in Egypt. This is the second trip this year to Algeria by Castro, who was handed the reins of power by his brother Fidel after the Cuban revolutionary leader underwent major surgery in July 2006. Raul officially became president in February 2008 (*AFP*, 13/7/09).

Julio 13: El escritor y periodista José María Penabad López, actual cónsul en Cuba, será el embajador ante el Gobierno de Raúl Castro, decidió el presidente Óscar Arias. El mandatario costarricense optó por ascender a Penabad después de que el académico Fernando Durán Ayanegui rechazó el ofrecimiento para ser el primer embajador en Cuba en casi 50 años, tras el restablecimiento de lazos diplomáticos en marzo último. El presidente Arias confirmó que "desde hace mucho tiempo" pidió al Gobierno cubano el beneplácito para Penabad, trámite diplomático obligatorio y que aún está pendiente de resolverse. Penabad, de 80 años y origen español, funge como jefe de la sede diplomática en Cuba desde el año 2003, nombrado por el entonces mandatario Abel Pacheco (*La Nación*, 13/7/09).

Julio 13: El ministro de Exteriores cubano, Bruno Eduardo Parrilla, inauguró en Egipto la reunión ministerial preparatoria de la cumbre del Movimiento de Países No Alineados (NOAL) con una llamada a potenciar el multilateralismo. Parrilla, que calificó a la NOAL como "el baluarte de los intereses comunes del pueblo del sur", denunció las políticas de los "países del norte" y dijo que su objetivo es expoliar a los pueblos menos desarrollados. El canciller cubano criticó también "la existencia de un injusto y expoliador sistema internacional que ahora transfiere a los países del sur el mayor impacto de la crisis global". Asimismo, recordó las injerencias de las grandes potencias, así como las guerras que estas lanzan, según él, con el objetivo de "imponer modelos políticos y arrebatar los recursos naturales a nuestros pueblos" (*EFE*, 13/7/09).

July 13: A total of 425,000 Bolivians have been operated on by Cuban specialists as part of Operation Miracle, said in La Paz Cuba's ambassador to Bolivia, Rafael Daussá. The Cuban diplomat said that the program, aimed at helping people of scant resources recuperate their sight, is working very well, with 243 Cuban experts distributed in 18 eye centers throughout the Bolivian territory, Daussá told *Patria Nueva* radio station (*ACN*, 13/7/09).

July 14: Spain asked Cuban authorities for information about the death of Spanish priest Mariano Arroyo, who was found stabbed and partially burned in his parish apartment on the outskirts of Havana, diplomatic sources told the press. The Spanish Foreign Ministry asked, through Madrid's Embassy in Havana, for the "maximum clarification" about the deed, which came five months after the murder of another Spanish priest, Eduardo de la Fuente Serrano, in Cuba under strange circumstances, according to the sources. The ministry is in contact with Arroyo's family and with ecclesiastical authorities to help them with the procedures for transporting the body to Spain once an autopsy has been performed. Arroyo, who was born in 1935 and came to Cuba to carry out pastoral work in 1998, was found stabbed and burned in his room at the parish house at the Church of Our Lady of Regla, on the outskirts of Havana (*EFE*, 14/7/09).

July 14: Britain's Royal Ballet, making its first appearance in Cuba, was set to begin five days of performances that star dancer Carlos Acosta, described as the "event of a lifetime" for his native Cuba. Acosta was to dance in three of the performances, including an appearance in a tribute to Cuban ballet legend Alicia Alonso. Tickets, priced at 20 Cuban pesos, the equivalent of 91 US cents, sold out quickly and have become one of Havana's most sought-after items. Some of the performances will be shown on giant television screens outside for free viewing by the public. Acosta, in an interview before a rehearsal at Havana's Gran Teatro, said the Royal Ballet's visit was as much an act of diplomacy as it was art. "The other thing is for the Cuban audiences to free the mind a little bit," he said. The company will pay tribute to Cuban prima ballerina Alicia Alonso with an excerpt of "Giselle," the dance for which she is best known (*Reuters*, 14/7/09).

Julio 14: El presidente cubano, Raúl Castro, concluyó su visita oficial de tres días a Argel, la segunda este año, y viajó a la ciudad egipcia de Sharm el Sheij para participar en la XV cumbre del Movimiento de Países No Alineados (NOAL). Castro fue despedido en el aeropuerto internacional de Argel por el jefe de Estado argelino, Abdelaziz Buteflika, con quien volvió a reunirse en la última jornada de su visita al país magrebí. Ambos mandatarios mantuvieron varios encuentros, en los que abordaron la preparación de la cumbre de Sharm el Sheij y la extensión a otros sectores de la estrecha cooperación bilateral en materia sanitaria. Desde hace años los dos países desarrollan una intensa colaboración en el sector de la sanidad, en el que se han creado sociedades mixtas para la producción y comercialización de medicamentos genéricos. Cuba facilita a Argelia tecnología sanitaria y equipos médicos y, en contrapartida, el país magrebí suministra petróleo y sus derivados al latinoamericano, con el que también mantiene otros proyectos de cooperación. Más de 120 médicos cubanos trabajan actualmente en once provincias argelinas, principalmente pediatras, ginecólogos, reumatólogos y oftalmólogos (*EFE*, 14/7/09).

July 14: Cuban President Raul Castro held bilateral talks with high-ranking officials from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and from Palestine, who are attending the 15th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Shortly after his arrival at the Egyptian beach resort of Sharm El- Sheikh, where he was welcomed by Egypt's International Cooperation Minister Faiza Aboul Naga, Raul Castro exchanged views with Kim Yong Nam, President of the Presidium of the Korean Supreme Assembly. During

the evening, the Cuban head of state met with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority (ACN, 14/7/09).

July 15: Cuba's president called for an international financial system that better takes into account developing countries' interests, as the global recession captured the spotlight at a summit of non-aligned nations. Raul Castro's remarks at the opening session of the two-day Non-Aligned Movement's meeting in this Red Sea resort were echoed by other leaders and build on earlier discussions among officials from the 118-nation grouping of mostly of African, Asian and Latin American nations. "We demand the establishment of a new international financial and economic structure that relies on the participation of all countries," Castro said, ahead of handing over the movement's presidency to Egypt. "There must be a new framework that doesn't depend solely on the economic stability and the political decision of only one country," the Cuban leader said, apparently referring to the United States. The new system must give developing countries "preferential treatment," he said without elaborating ([Discurso de Raúl Castro en la Cumbre NOAL](#); AP, 15/7/09).

July 15: Cuban President Raul Castro met with Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, as part of his working agenda at the 15th Non Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit, underway in Sham El-Sheik, Egypt. The Cuban President and the UN General Secretary exchanged on several topics regarding the world situation. In an address during the opening session of the NAM Summit, Ban Ki-Moon highlighted Cuba's role in the revitalization of the organization, which currently gathers 118 developing countries (ACN, 15/7/09).

July 15: Jorge Luis Sierra Cruz, vice president of the Cuban Council of Ministers, heads the official delegation of the Caribbean archipelago to the celebrations for the 200th anniversary of Bolivia's independence. According to *Granma* newspaper, the Cuban delegation will also hold talks with Bolivian authorities and will meet with Cuban education and health collaborators in the Andean nation (ACN, 15/7/09).

July 15: The 15th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) concluded in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, with the adoption of the Final Declaration of the meeting that brought together heads of state and government or representatives of NAM's 118 member nations. The Summit also passed special pronouncements of solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the International Day of Nelson Mandela. Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak delivered the closing speech of the Summit before more than 50 Heads of State and Government. Mubarak spoke out in favor of the need to create a new economic and financial international order as stated in the Final Declaration of Sharm El-Sheikh, which calls for the democratization of the United Nations. The Islamic Republic of Iran will be the venue of the 16th NAM Summit slated for 2012 in Teheran, as agreed by participants in the Sharm El-Sheikh meeting. After thanking the election of his country to host the next Summit of the Movement, Iranian's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said it is a privilege for his country to work along with Cuba and Egypt in NAM's Troika during the next three years (ACN, 15/7/09).

July 16: Cuban President Raul Castro arrived in Cairo, Egypt, from the Egyptian resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, where he participated in the 15th Summit of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). During the meeting, Cuba handed the pro-tempore chairmanship of the organization over to Egypt (*ACN*, 16/7/09).

July 17: The government of Cuba will grant 205 scholarships per year for a period of five years, in the fields of medicine, pedagogy and other technical areas, informed in Luanda, Cuba's ambassador to Angola, Pedro Ross Leal. Speaking during a press conference after a ceremony commemorating the 56th anniversary of the attack to the Moncada Barracks in 1953, the diplomat explained that the first group of 100 students have already benefited from the five-year scholarships. He announced that the other 105 students will leave next September and will remain in that country until they finish their courses (*Angop*, 20/7/09).

July 17: Cuban President Raul Castro met in Egypt with his counterparts of Viet Nam, Nguyen Minh Triet, and Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa. According to Granma newspaper, the meetings took place in a cordial and respectful environment (*ACN*, 17/7/09).

July 17: Cuban President Raul Castro paid homage to Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), in the mausoleum where his remains are kept in Cairo. Nasser was a promoter and founder of the Non-Aligned Countries Movement (NAM), the most important Arab political leader of his time, and President of Egypt from 1956 to 1970. During the homage ceremony, the Cuban president extolled the life work of the outstanding military and Egyptian leader who was also his friend, as reported by the Cuban National News TV broadcast. During the day, the Cuban president also visited the Museum of Coptic Art which treasures a valuable collection of Coptic art from the Christian period, from the year 300 to 1000 CE. Raul also visited the Museum of Egyptian Antiques, one of the most famous in the world, which houses nearly a quarter of million archaeological pieces from the Pharaoh age, including mummies and sarcophaguses (*ACN*, 17/7/09).

Julio 18: La comisaria europea de Relaciones Exteriores, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, viajará a La Habana para discutir proyectos de cooperación en áreas de interés común, para los que la Comisión Europea (CE) propondrá una partida de 37 millones de euros. Ferrero-Waldner llegará a Cuba el jueves 23, después de visitar Argentina y México, según indicaron fuentes comunitarias. Tras la reanudación de la cooperación entre la Unión Europea (UE) y el gobierno cubano el pasado otoño, ambas partes deben decidir ahora cómo llevar a cabo esa ayuda, así como la financiación que le otorgarán, añadieron. En esta ocasión, la comisaria austriaca estudiará las posibles áreas de cooperación con la Isla, en especial las referentes a rehabilitación y reconstrucción tras el paso de huracanes, agricultura y seguridad alimentaria y medio ambiente. Para los proyectos que se generen en esos ámbitos la Comisión propondrá un presupuesto de 37 millones de euros como punto de partida (*EFE*, 18/7/09).

Julio 18: El Royal Ballet de Londres finalizó su primera visita a Cuba tras cinco presentaciones en La Habana con teatros abarrotados, largas ovaciones y elogios de los

medios de comunicación de la isla, que califican su presencia de "histórica" y "memorable". El Royal Ballet ha bailado en muchos países del mundo, pero nunca nos hemos sentido con tanto calor como con el pueblo de Cuba", dijo la directora de la compañía inglesa, Mónica Mason, en un diálogo con el público habanero transmitido por la televisión estatal. Mason elogió que en Cuba haya una compañía como el Ballet Nacional, dirigido desde hace 60 años por Alicia Alonso, y agradeció que de esa tradición haya salido el cubano Carlos Acosta, primer bailarín del Royal desde 2003. Acosta pidió a sus compatriotas agradecimiento a la compañía inglesa y dijo que los cubanos son "deudores" de esta visita, pues "es algo que no se puede soñar". El ministro cubano de Cultura, Abel Prieto, agradeció el "esfuerzo enorme" del Royal para lograr estas funciones, cuyas entradas se vendieron a 20 pesos nacionales (menos de un dólar al cambio oficial), un costo muy alejado del habitual precio internacional. "Esto no le ha costado un centavo al pueblo de Cuba. Ellos han venido gratuitamente a actuar acá", explicó Prieto (*EFE*, 18/7/09).

July 19: Cuban leader Raul Castro arrived in Namibia on a state visit to strengthen ties with the southern African country, the government said. "Your visit provides a valuable opportunity to further consolidate the excellent bilateral relations and the longstanding bonds of friendship and solidarity that exists between our two countries," Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba told Castro. According to Pohamba, Namibia wants to increase co-operation with Cuba in infrastructure development, agriculture, fishing and the health sector. Castro will meet former president Sam Nujoma, before flying to Angola for a two-day visit. Ties between Namibia and Cuba started during pre-independence days, when Cuban troops stationed in neighbouring Angola helped Namibia's liberation army to fight against apartheid South Africa's troops in southern Angola, in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. "We will never forget the proud years in the trenches in Angolan soil and the sacrifices Namibians, Cubans and Angolans made to liberate southern Africa from apartheid South African rule," said Castro (*AFP*, 20/7/09).

July 19: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo is heading the Cuban official delegation that is attending commemorations in Nicaragua for the 30th Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. Vice President Lazo and his delegation will take part in activities marking the historic event and will also meet with Nicaraguan authorities and leaders from other countries attending celebrations. The Cuban delegation includes members of the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party and the Foreign Affairs Ministry (*ACN*, 19/7/09).

Julio 20: Los epidemiólogos Aramis Martínez, y su asistente, S. Yalina, que fueron invitados a Sri Lanka para ayudar a controlar la rápida expansión de la epidemia de dengue en ese país, no llegaron a su destino en la ciudad de Colombo. Según informó el diario *Daily Mirror*, se esperaba que los especialistas llegaran a esa ciudad el 18 de julio. "Fui al aeropuerto con el vicedirector general de servicios de Salud, Palitha Mahipala, para recibir a los dos epidemiólogos cubanos que debían llegar en un vuelo de la aerolínea Emirates, vía Dubai. No se encontraban entre los pasajeros que se registraron en el mostrador de migración", informó el periódico, que citó al portavoz del Ministerio de Salud cingalés, W.M.D. Wanninayake (*Xinhua*, 20/7/09).

July 20: The President of Cuba, Raúl Modesto Castro Ruz, arrived in the Angolan capital (Luanda) starting an official 48-hour visit to the country at the invitation of his local counterpart, José Eduardo dos Santos. On his arrival at "4 de Fevereiro" International Airport, Raúl Castro received welcoming greetings from the Angolan prime minister, António Paulo Kassoma, deputy Foreign Affairs minister, Exalgina Gamboa, and from other government officials, as well as military honours. According to the visit agenda, the Cuban statesman will travel to the Presidential Palace, where he will receive welcoming greeting from the Angolan Head of State, José Eduardo dos Santos. The official conversations between the delegations of the two countries will be held simultaneously with a private meeting between the two Presidents (*Angop*, 21/7/09).

Julio 20: La comisaria europea de Relaciones Exteriores, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, abogó en Buenos Aires por "profundizar el diálogo" político con Cuba. "El camino para reforzar los vínculos con Cuba es profundizar el diálogo político", consideró la comisaria austríaca en rueda de prensa, horas antes de ser recibida en la sede del gobierno argentino por la presidenta de este país, Cristina Fernández. Ferrero-Waldner dijo que Cuba está dando "pasos positivos" en ese sentido y sostuvo que en ese "diálogo franco" se podrían abordar "temas de interés común, entre ellos el de los derechos humanos". Entre las áreas posibles de cooperación con Cuba, la comisaria identificó la seguridad alimentaria, el comercio, el medioambiente, la investigación tecnológica y la reconstrucción de daños por huracanes y demás desastres naturales (*EFE*, 20/7/09).

Julio 21: La reincorporación de Cuba a la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) llevaría "pocas semanas" si la isla asumiera las mismas obligaciones que el resto de los países, aseguró el titular de esa entidad, el chileno José Miguel Insulza. Para Insulza, "todo el mundo sabe que el retorno de Cuba llevaría unas pocas semanas si estuvieran dispuestos a decir claramente que quieren guiarse por las mismas obligaciones y las mismas responsabilidades". El diplomático chileno señaló que cuando se derogó la exclusión, los jefes de delegación decidieron que "la participación de Cuba en la OEA será el resultado de un proceso de diálogo iniciado a solicitud del gobierno de Cuba y de conformidad con las prácticas, los propósitos y principios de la OEA". Finalmente, Insulza juzgó que "lo histórico de la resolución dependerá de lo que Cuba esté dispuesta a hacer y de lo que los otros países estén dispuestos a aceptar" (*Télam*, 21/7/09).

July 21: Cuban President Raul Castro held official talks in Luanda with his Angolan counterpart Jose Eduardo Dos Santos shortly after the Cuban delegation was officially welcomed in that African nation. Raul and Dos Santos addressed the implementation of current bilateral agreements, according to a report by Cuban TV. In a statement to the press, Angola's Health Minister Jose Viera Van Dunen said Cuba's cooperation is crucial for his country to reach its objectives in the field of health. Since 2006, the number of Cuban collaborators in Angola has increased to over 2, 000. More than 1,000 of them work in the health sector, another 500 are professors. Angola kicked off a national literacy campaign this year with Cuban assistance, while over 200 Angolan youths are studying in Cuban education centers; 140 of those youths are taking medical courses (*ACN*, 22/7/09).

July 22: The 37th Contingent of the "Jose Marti" European Solidarity-with-Cuba Brigade left the island after fulfilling a program of voluntary work and visits to historical and social sites in central and western Cuba. The farewell ceremony was held at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp in the municipality of Caimito, Habana province. Belgian Edwin Carpentier, with the Brigade's Coordinating Committee, said the opportunity to share with Cubans by doing voluntary work was an honor and an important element in the consolidation of a communist conscience of brigade members (ACN, 22/7/09).

July 23: Cuban President Raul Castro wound up his working visit to Angola. Before his departure, the Cuban head of state exchanged with representatives of over 2,000 Cuban workers currently offering their services in that African nation. Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos gave a farewell ceremony to the visiting Cuban head of state in front of the Presidential Palace in the capital Luanda, in which both presidents greeted delegations of both countries, *Granma* newspaper reported. During his stay in Luanda, Raul Castro held official talks with his Angolan counterpart Jose Eduardo Dos Santos. The two heads of state addressed the implementation of current bilateral agreements. In recent statement to the press, Angola's Health Minister Jose Viera Van Dunen said Cuba's cooperation is crucial for his country to reach its objectives in the field of health. Since 2006, the number of Cuban collaborators in Angola has increased to over 2,000 (ACN, 23/7/09).

Julio 23: La situación de los defensores de los derechos humanos en América Latina es "muy preocupante", especialmente en Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Perú y Venezuela, según un informe elaborado en 2008 por dos organizaciones no gubernamentales, divulgado en Bogotá. El secretario general de la Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura (OMCT), el suizo Eric Sottas, dijo en conferencia de prensa que las "ejecuciones sumarias y las desapariciones" son las principales formas como en varios países de la región se ataca a los defensores de las garantías fundamentales. Sottas señaló que, en general, los ataques contra esos activistas en América Latina se incrementaron en 2008, pero señaló a Colombia, Cuba y Venezuela como los países que "más nos preocupan" (AFP, 23/7/09).

Julio 23: Benedict XVI named Archbishop Giovanni Angelo Becciu as apostolic nuncio to Cuba. A Vatican communiqué announced the appointment of the 61-year-old prelate, formerly the nuncio to Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe since 2001. In this position, Archbishop Becciu was one of the Church authorities who welcomed the Pope in the Luanda airport last March, during the Pontiff's visit to Africa. Born in the Italian region of Pattada, Giovanni Angelo Becciu was ordained a priest in 1972. He succeeds Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi, who in March was appointed as nuncio to Lithuania and Estonia (*Zenit*, 23/7/09).

Julio 23: El Parlamento de Trinidad y Tobago aprobó una ley que permitirá conceder licencias a los médicos cubanos para que cubran las carencias de profesionales de la salud en los centros médicos estatales, informó una fuente oficial. La nueva legislación,

aprobada anoche, implica la creación de una junta médica paralela que tendrá como función la concesión de dichas licencias a médicos procedentes de Cuba y otros países. El ministro de Salud de Trinidad y Tobago, Jerry Narace, señaló que el gobierno se ha visto obligado a crear esta junta paralela debido a que el actual consejo médico insistió en que los médicos cubanos pasaran una serie previa de exámenes de conocimiento médico y del idioma (*EFE, 24/7/09*).

July 24: The European Union's commissioner of external relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, made a surprise visit to Cuba for talks on improving bilateral relations with the communist government there. The top EU diplomat was to meet for talks with Cuban President Raul Castro, as well as with the Cuban foreign, trade and culture ministers, as part of a review of relations between the EU and Havana, according to EU sources. According to *Granma* newspaper, the representative of the European Commission met with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla; the Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca; and Culture Deputy Minister Rafael Bernal. During her meeting with Rodriguez Parrilla, Ferrero Waldner expressed the Commission's interest in further strengthening the existing political dialogue between this European institution and Cuba and also in creating a contractual framework that contributes to the future development of bilateral relations. For his part, the Cuban diplomat reiterated that Havana is open to dialogue based on the principles of respect, equality and non-interference in domestic affairs. He added that Cuba is willing to negotiate a bilateral framework for relations with the European Union that includes political relations, trade and cooperation in order to replace the obsolete, unilateral and interfering European Union Common Position on Cuba imposed in 1996 by former Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar, at the request of the US Government (*DPA, 23/7/09; ACN, 24/7/09*).

Julio 28: El viceprimer ministro ruso, Igor Sechin, se entrevistó con el general Raúl Castro, al final de una breve visita a la isla durante la que se firmaron nuevos convenios bilaterales en el sector económico, informaron fuentes rusas en La Habana. Esta es la quinta visita que realiza a Cuba en el último año Sechin, quien llegó a la isla procedente de Venezuela y Nicaragua, acompañado de una delegación de ministros y empresarios (*EFE, 29/7/09*).

July 29: The first eye clinic opened in the Caribbean with Cuban medical assistance was recently inaugurated by Guyana's president Bharrat Jagdeo. The eye clinic was opened in Port Mourant, in the region of Berbice, with modern equipment donated by Cuba. Once surgery services become stable, the centre is expected to perform some 10,000 eye operations per year that will benefit Guyanese people and patients from neighbour countries (*ACN, 29/7/09*).

Julio 29: El ministro de Defensa de Bolivia, Wálker San Miguel, distinguió al embajador de Cuba, Rafael Dausá, con la medalla del "Mariscal Andrés de Santa Cruz" en el máximo grado por el apoyo del país caribeño en los desastres naturales que varias regiones bolivianas padecieron entre 2006 y 2008. El homenaje se desarrolló en un acto en la residencia del embajador cubano en recuerdo al 56 aniversario del asalto del cuartel

Moncada del 26 de julio. A la distinción asistieron una decena de ministros del gabinete de Evo Morales (*EFE*, 29/7/09).

July 29: An agreement to create a regional Eye Center for Jamaica and the member nations of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was signed in Kingston by representatives from that country and Cuba. Health Minister Rudyard Spencer and Cuba's ambassador to Jamaica, Gisela García, signed the document at the offices of the Jamaican Prime Minister, the seat of that nation's government (*ACN*, 29/7/09).

Julio 30: Los negativos originales del Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano (Cuba) fueron incorporados en el registro "Memoria del Mundo" de la UNESCO, organización que anunció la incorporación a esta lista de treinta y tres nuevos fondos de archivos y documentos de valor excepcional. Los noticieros cinematográficos latinoamericanos del Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) se produjeron cada semana durante treinta años (1960-1990), recordó la UNESCO. Se trata de "documentos históricos únicos en su género porque muestran las guerras de independencia de muchas colonias africanas y otros eventos internacionales de ese periodo, ilustrativos de la creciente bipolarización del mundo", explicó la organización. "Estos noticieros constituyen el archivo cinematográfico más exhaustivo de la historia de la revolución cubana, pero su alcance internacional les hace cobrar también una importancia mundial", según estima la UNESCO (*EFE*, 31/7/09).

July 31: Member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) are participating in the first film festival organized by the group, with Montevideo, Uruguay, as host city. The two-day event will be held at the Florencio Sánchez Cultural Center in the Uruguayan capital, with the screening of documentaries by filmmakers from Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, all of them ALBA member countries with diplomatic missions in Uruguay (*ACN*, 1/8/09).

Security

Julio 3: La administración del presidente estadounidense George W. Bush fue el momento más peligroso para Cuba luego de la crisis de los misiles en los 60, dijo el mandatario Raúl Castro. "Los pronósticos se confirmaron. Evitamos la guerra y con ello la ganamos", comentó el gobernante según la edición del diario oficial *Granma* que reportó una reunión del Consejo de Defensa Nacional. Castro hizo un balance de los planes de la isla en torno a fortalecer sus capacidades defensivas que comenzaron en 2003 y se reforzaron en 2006, año en el cual enfermó el ex presidente Fidel Castro, un rival histórico de Washington. Según *Granma*, la reunión buscó además proyectar el trabajo futuro de la Defensa Civil, pero siempre bajo la doctrina militar de "la Guerra de Todo el Pueblo". El concepto implica un uso moderado de las tecnologías para repeler a los invasores, pero un extenso uso de las técnicas guerrilleras provocando enormes bajas al enemigo por parte de todos los pobladores de la isla. "Basta un dato para ilustrar la magnitud de cuanto se ha hecho en la preparación del personal: para julio del próximo año, cerca de un millón de cubanos habrá recibido la capacitación" militar necesaria, señaló el diario. La reunión constató "los avances en el restablecimiento, preservación,

modernización y producción de armamento y otros medios de combate", manifestó *Granma* (AP, 3/7/09).

Julio 18: Más de 350 primeros oficiales y oficiales superiores recibieron su diploma de graduado de la Academia de las FAR General Máximo Gómez, Orden Antonio Maceo. La ceremonia estuvo presidida por el miembro del Buró Político y viceministro jefe del Estado Mayor General de las FAR, general de cuerpo de Ejército Álvaro López Miera, así como otros jefes principales de la institución armada. En el Instituto Superior del MININT también más de 800 profesionales de las provincias occidentales concluyeron sus estudios, en una graduación denominada Aniversario 50 del triunfo de la Revolución. Los egresados son de nivel superior y medio, procedentes de Pinar del Río, La Habana, Ciudad de La Habana, Matanzas y del municipio especial Isla de la Juventud, y recibieron sus correspondientes ascensos al primer grado de oficial y diplomas, en acto realizado en la sede del Instituto Superior del Ministerio del Interior (ISMI) Eliseo Reyes, Capitán San Luis. Con la presencia en la ceremonia de representantes del Consejo de Estado, del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, jefes principales del organismo e invitados, oficiales del MININT entregaron a 25 de ellos sus títulos de Oro (*Juventud Rebelde*, 19/7/09).

US-Cuba Relations

July 1: Timothy Broglio, the Catholic archbishop for the US Armed Forces, presided over a Mass in the Cuban city of Guantanamo and called for reconciliation between Washington and Havana, the Cuban bishops conference said. "Let's pray to God that one day we can worship together, without anything separating us," Broglio said in a Mass celebrated June 24 at Guantanamo's cathedral with officials of the Cuban government and Communist Party in attendance, according to a note on the bishops conference's Web site. The prelate said his visit to Cuba "is an opportunity to communicate the affection the people of the United States of America feel towards you." "It's true that the recent history of relations between our respective governments has not been easy or happy. But that doesn't mean a barrier must be formed between believers in one part of the world and another," he added (*EFE*, 1/7/09).

Julio 2: El diario oficial cubano *Juventud Rebelde* acusó al gobierno estadounidense que preside Barack Obama de usar un "lenguaje confuso" sobre el golpe militar en Honduras. Un artículo de ese periódico, portavoz de la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, califica de "imprecisas y oscuras" las primeras reacciones de Washington tras el secuestro y deportación del presidente hondureño, Manuel Zelaya. "Estados Unidos sigue respondiendo, pero aún con su estilo de cachumbambé (balancín infantil). El Pentágono, que siempre ha mantenido una relación demasiado estrecha con las Fuerzas Armadas hondureñas, decidió suspender su cooperación con ese poder, pero hasta el momento se trata de aplazar las operaciones militares conjuntas", agrega la nota. Según el diario, el anuncio pudo alegrar a quienes han denunciado la presencia de tropas estadounidenses en América Latina, pero "viene acompañado de palabras tramposas que no le dan firmeza a la posición del imperio" (*EFE*, 2/7/09).

July 6: A bus full of medical and school supplies headed to Cuba will depart from Miami, continuing its decades-long battle against the US-imposed embargo on the island nation. Officials of Pastors for Peace, the ecumenical agency that delivers humanitarian aid to Latin America, say they hope President Barack Obama will lift the embargo and fulfill his promise to improve US-Cuba relations. The organization runs a caravan that includes dozens of buses and trucks that travel across the United States each year to pick up supplies. Each year since 1989, the convoy crosses the US-Mexico border, and loads the goods onto a Cuban government freighter to be distributed in Cuba (*The Miami Herald*, 6/7/09).

Julio 7: La secretaria de Estado norteamericana Hillary Clinton sostuvo que el diálogo entre los gobiernos de Estados Unidos y Cuba depende de "cambios fundamentales" por parte del régimen cubano. "Estamos abiertos a dialogar con Cuba, pero hemos dejado claro que queremos ver cambios fundamentales en el régimen cubano", dijo Clinton en entrevista con la televisora venezolana *Globovisión*. Clinton dijo que "los presos políticos deben ser liberados (y) se deben celebrar elecciones libres y justas". "Yo siempre he dicho que si uno piensa que está haciendo un buen trabajo, pues sal y persuade a la gente de que vote por ti en una elección honesta, libre y justa", agregó. Los gobiernos de Cuba y Estados Unidos reanudaron las negociaciones sobre migración, un tema que "creemos es importante", dijo Clinton (*AFP*, 8/7/09).

Julio 8: La sucursal estadounidense de Philips, el poderoso conglomerado multinacional de equipos electrónicos, fue penalizada con \$128,750 por la administración de Barack Obama por realizar ventas de equipos médicos a Cuba en violación de las regulaciones del embargo. Philips Electronics of North America Corporation (PENAC), con sede en Nueva York, aceptó pagar la multa impuesta por el Departamento del Tesoro tras reconocer infracciones cometidas a través de una de sus filiales en el extranjero entre junio del 2004 y marzo del 2006. Es la mayor penalidad impuesta a empresas estadounidenses por violaciones del embargo durante el año fiscal 2009, que concluye el 30 de septiembre (*El Nuevo Herald*, 8/7/09).

July 8: John Block, Ronald Reagan's secretary of agriculture, urged US leaders to drop restrictions on American travel and food sales to Cuba. "For years I've felt we should be doing business with Cuba," Block told reporters in a conference call. The call was arranged by the Center for Democracy in the Americas, which favors trade and travel with Cuba, as part of a campaign to ease the US embargo. Block noted that Americans were selling grain to the Soviets during Reagan's presidency and that the United States trades with Vietnam (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/7/09).

July 12: Prospects for Cuban performances by the New York Philharmonic look promising following a tour of concert halls and meetings with music officials on the island, orchestra president Zarin Mehta said. Mehta said a final decision will be made by the Philharmonic's board of directors. Eric Latzky, the orchestra's vice president for communications, said an official announcement could be as much as a month off. But Mehta said the trip looks promising, with tentative plans for performances on October 31 and November 1 at the 900-seat Teatro Amadeo Roldan, a renovated concert hall a few

blocks from the Malecon coastal highway. "We have to go back now and work on repertoires, budgets. There are practical considerations like: how do you get the instruments in, where do you store them?" Mehta told the press in Havana. The Philharmonic's incoming music director, Alan Gilbert, would conduct. The island's Culture Ministry invited the orchestra to perform in Havana, and US officials have agreed to allow the musicians to visit under an exemption to legal restrictions on travel to Cuba, Latzky said (*AP*, 13/7/09).

July 12: One way to see Cuba is by visiting under a special license issued by the US Treasury Department. One such license allows travel for humanitarian projects. And that's how the M.S. Hershey Foundation is able to offer trips to Cuba. The foundation partners with the Bringing Hope Foundation, which is licensed to travel to Cuba "to deliver humanitarian supplies to an independent charity to benefit the Cuban people." The M.S. Hershey Foundation has an interest in Cuba because since the early 1900s, Milton S. Hershey built a sugar refinery and a town in Cuba he named Central Hershey to provide his chocolate factory with sugar, which was in limited supply due to World War I. That connection is what has motivated the foundation's 10 trips to Cuba in as many years. "There's a lot of interest [in our trips to Cuba]," says Jan Hester, travel planner for the M.S. Hershey Foundation in Derry Twp. "It's a unique story. And people are fascinated by it." Next year's trip is scheduled for April 16-24 and will include visits to Havana and Hershey along with humanitarian missions, says Hester, who will escort the group of 20 to 24 people (*Pennlive.Com*, 12/7/09).

July 14: Tampa Councilwoman Mary Mulhern and Tampa Port Authority Commissioner Carl Lindell will join about two dozen businesspeople on a fact-finding trip to Cuba, hoping to lay the groundwork for Tampa-area trade once US-Cuba relations improve. The group is scheduled to fly from Miami to Havana on July 17 and return July 22, with a full itinerary of meetings. Lindell and the businesspeople will pay their own expenses. Mulhern will use her own money beyond about \$1,380 for hotel, airfare and travel visa expenses drawn from her city council member discretionary account. "This trip is for the benefit of my constituents," Mulhern said. "It involves economic development possibilities, trade and jobs" (*Tampa Tribune*, 14/7/09).

July 14: The US State Department confirmed it will meet in New York to resume long-suspended talks between the United States and Cuba. In a three-sentence news release, the department said the talks will "focus on how best to promote safe, legal and orderly migration between Cuba and the United States." The US delegation, which includes representatives of the agencies involved in migration issues, will be headed by Craig Kelly, principal deputy assistant secretary of the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Congressional sources said Dagoberto Rodríguez, a Cuban Foreign Ministry official and the former head of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, will lead the Cuban delegation (*The Miami Herald*, 14/7/09).

July 14: President Barack Obama has informed Congress that he will waive for six months a 1996 law that permits lawsuits against foreign companies who use Cuban property once owned by Americans. The waiver has become routine. Both President Bill

Clinton and President George W. Bush blocked the ability of US citizens to sue over properties seized after Cuba's 1959 revolution. The provision is contained in the Helms-Burton Act, sponsored by the late US Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Dan Burton, which forbids US officials from restoring full diplomatic relations with Cuba as long as either Fidel or Raul Castro is in charge. Using language virtually identical to that which Bush used in his first waiver, Obama wrote to members of Congress that the waiver is "necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba" (*AP*, 16/7/09).

July 14: The first talks between the Obama administration and Cuba ended with an invitation for US diplomats to visit Havana in December, marking the official beginning of the first dialogue between Havana and Washington in six years. The invitation came as the head of the Cuban delegation characterized the six-hour gathering as a "fruitful working session." "Progress was made in the identification of areas in which both countries should work and cooperate (...)" Dagoberto Rodríguez Barrera, Cuba's deputy foreign minister, said in a statement. The Cuban delegation said it had submitted a proposal to US representatives for a new immigration agreement and "more effective cooperation to combat illegal alien smuggling." It also underscored its opposition to US-Cuba immigration policy, saying that "legal, safe and orderly migration from Cuba would not be achieved" under the US "wet foot/dry foot," policy which the Cubans said "encourages illegal departures and human smuggling." The policy allows most Cuban migrants who make it onto US soil to stay. The State Department didn't say whether it had accepted the invitation for talks in Havana, but spokesman Ian Kelly said the US delegation "reaffirmed the US commitment to promote safe, orderly, and legal migration" (*The Miami Herald*, 15/7/09).

July 15: Washington has denied Adriana Perez, the wife of Gerardo Hernandez, one of the Cubans imprisoned in the US, an entry visa to visit her husband. The US State Department denied an entry visa to Adriana, which will prevent her from visiting Gerardo, incarcerated in the US along with Rene Gonzalez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez. Gerardo was condemned to serve 15 years plus two life imprisonments and, he has been deprived of seeing his wife for 11 years (*ACN*, 15/7/09).

July 16: Fidel Castro blames the coup in Honduras on the US Embassy in that Central American country and other American diplomats in the region appointed during the administration of George W. Bush. "Unscrupulous characters of the extreme right who were trustworthy officials of George W. Bush" toppled the democratically elected government of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, Castro claimed. In a column posted on a government Web site, the 82-year-old former Cuban president stopped short of blaming Barack Obama for Zelaya's ouster. He suggested the US State Department conspired with the leaders who took power after the coup to broker a false diplomatic solution while Obama was distracted by travels in Russia. "The idea that the ambassador of the United States in Tegucigalpa, Hugo Llorens, knew nothing about or discouraged the coup is absolutely false," Castro wrote, referring to America's top diplomat in the Honduran capital. "He knew about it, as did American military advisers who have not

ceased training Honduran troops even for one second" ([Lo que debe demandarse a EEUU](#); AP, 17/7/09).

July 16: A New York man filed a lawsuit challenging the US government's restrictions on spending by American citizens and permanent residents while traveling to Cuba. The lawsuit, filed in US District Court in Brooklyn, alleges Zachary Sanders was fined after he failed to respond to a March 2000 request by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control for information on an alleged June 1998 trip to Cuba and travel while he was there. The complaint claims that people who respond to OFAC's request open themselves up for potential criminal sanctions. "The penalty imposed against Mr. Sanders is unlawful because the Fifth Amendment prohibits the government from punishing failure to obey any regulation that requires a self-incriminating act," the lawsuit said (*Dow Jones Newswires*, 16/7/09).

July 17: The prestigious New York Philharmonic will offer two concerts in Havana on October 31st and November 1st later this year. The announcement was made by Alejandro Guma, International Relations vice president of the Cuban Music Institute, who said that the concerts at the Amadeo Roldan Auditorium Theater in the Cuban capital will mark the end of a tour that will take the New York Philharmonic to various Asian nations. Guma added that these concerts will constitute a big cultural event as the New York Philharmonic is one of the most prestigious and emblematic cultural institutions of the United States (*ACN*, 17/7/09).

July 20: Cuban Vice President Esteban Lazo said in Nicaragua that the future of Latin America and the people's right to freely choose their leaders will be decided in Honduras. Lazo, who led a Cuban delegation to the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, pointed out that the Honduran usurpers would not be able to survive if they were not counting on Washington's support, and he singled out American authorities as responsible for the military action. In this regard, the Vice President quoted Fidel Castro as saying: "The only right thing to do at this moment is to demand the US government to cease its intervention, to stop providing military support to the coup perpetrators and withdraw its taskforces [from Honduras]," reported *Granma* newspaper (*ACN*, 20/7/09).

July 20: About 150 US and Cuban troops worked side by side, testing collaboration across a minefield that has long divided the Cold War adversaries. A Cuban Army helicopter flew over Guantanamo Navy base and dropped 500 gallons of saltwater on burning plywood to extinguish a simulated raging wildfire. American sailors crossed into Cuban-controlled turf to set up a mock triage center run by both nations' militaries, should catastrophe strike. Nearly anywhere else, the event would have been a run-of-the-mill training exercise. And although US forces at this remote base have engaged in the annual rite with the Cuban Frontier Brigade for more than a decade, the Bush administration forbade the disclosure of information. The Southern Command usually answered questions about the time, date or operation scenarios with "no comment." This time, the US military struck a different tone. It provided details but refused to let journalists already on the base for war-court hearings observe the "mass casualty

exercise." Sailors photographed the event but were forbidden to release the images, said US Navy base spokesman Terence R. Peck. Retired US Marine Corps General Jack Sheehan called the calibrated exposure a likely "trial balloon" by an Obama administration experimenting with expanded relations with Havana (*The Miami Herald*, 20/7/09).

Julio 20: Close to a hundred US citizens arrived in Cuba without Washington's permission to travel to the island, in an open challenge to the economic, commercial and financial blockade of their country against Cuba. All 98 members of the Venceremos solidarity brigade arrived in Holguin's Frank País International Airport, in the eastern region of the country, from where they headed to the city of Bayamo, in the nearby province of Granma. One of the coordinators of the group, Bob Guild, told the press that the brigade was proud to be in Cuba again, specially this year when the Brigade is marking its 40th anniversary (*ACN*, 20/7/09).

July 20: Ellen Bernstein, Associate Director of the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organization IFCO/Pastors for Peace, ratified that her organization will continue defying the US blockade against Cuba. Bernstein travelled to Havana to make the arrangements for the arrival, by plane, of some 130 members of the 20th US-Cuba Friendship Caravan, a humanitarian project that defies the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by Washington. The visitor told the press that the caravan is made up of US, European, Mexican and Canadian citizens, which, in 14 routes, have visited close to 140 US cities to denounce the criminal policy against the Caribbean nation (*ACN*, 20/7/09).

Julio 21: Estados Unidos puso sobre la mesa de negociaciones migratorias con Cuba el tema de más de 600 cubanos que el gobierno de Raúl Castro mantiene retenidos con visa en la isla, dijo una fuente de la Casa Blanca vinculada a las recientes conversaciones bilaterales. Según la fuente, que pidió no ser identificada, la delegación estadounidense presentó entre las prioridades de su agenda ante la representación cubana los casos de ciudadanos impedidos de emigrar legalmente a Estados Unidos, en su mayoría profesionales de la salud y sus familiares. "Definitivamente, el asunto de los cubanos retenidos es algo que mantenemos como preocupación esencial y que fue planteado en estas charlas", dijo la fuente sobre el encuentro sostenido en Nueva York (*El Nuevo Herald*, 21/7/09).

July 22: Cuba's former President Fidel Castro said that two rounds of talks to resolve a political crisis in Honduras, mediated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, were a US-backed ploy to buy time. Castro repeated accusations that the State Department and the "extreme right" in the US supported the overthrow of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya on June 28. His comments were posted in a "reflection on the *Cubadebate.cu* Web site. "The United States government's calculations were based on the fact that Arias boasts a Nobel Peace Prize," Castro wrote. "Oscar Arias's real history indicates that he is a neo-liberal politician, talented and fluid with words, extremely calculating and a loyal ally of the United States" ([The 30th Sandinista Anniversary and the San Jose Proposal](#); *Bloomberg*, 22/7/09).

July 23: A Miami journalist has released photos showing three fired Cuban officials holding up cans of beer and partying at a ranch apparently belonging to the deposed Cuban representative of business interests in Spain's Basque region. The pictures appear to be related to talk in Cuba that the officials — ex-Vice President Carlos Lage, former Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Fernando Ramirez de Estenoz, the former head of international relations for the Communist Party — were dismissed as part of a government purge in March for making insulting remarks about Fidel Castro while guests on the property of Conrado Hernandez, the Cuban business representative in the Basque region. In the photographs, Hernandez appears with the fired officials, toasting with beers and playing dominos. Maria Elvira Salazar, host of Maria Elvira Live on Miami's MegaTV, said about 30 pictures were delivered anonymously to her station, and she showed a bit more than half of them on July 20 and 21 during her show. Reached by phone, Salazar said "we cannot really know" what the pictures mean. "We only know what the Cuban government is saying (...) that they were fired for talking badly about the brothers," she said, referring to 82-year-old Fidel Castro and his younger brother Raul, who succeeded him as president in February 2008. She said the pictures show that the officials were "partying hard together" (*The Miami Herald*, 24/7/09).

July 24: Members of the 20th Pastors for Peace US-Cuba Friendship Caravan arrived in Cuba headed by the Reverend Lucius Walker. The caravanistas were welcomed at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport by the head of the Religious Affairs Office at Cuba's Communist Party Central Committee Caridad Diego, and the president of the Cuban Friendship Institute (ICAP) Kenia Serrano. This time, 130 activists make up the humanitarian caravan, which travelled across the United States collecting humanitarian aid for the Cuban people (*ACN*, 24/7/09).

July 24: President Barack Obama said he's open to more overtures to Cuba, such as lifting restrictions on academic travel to the island, but not without signs of changes from the government in Havana. "We're not there yet," he said. "We think it's important to see progress on issues of political liberalization, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, release of political prisoners in order for there to be the full possibility of normalization between our two countries." Several members of Congress and groups, including the leading association that promotes student travel to and from the United States, have urged Obama to remove what they said are restrictive regulations on academic and other "purposeful" travel to Cuba imposed by President Bush in 2004. The Association of International Educators said this week that study abroad to Cuba has "declined precipitously." Obama referenced last week's "government-to-government conversations" in New York and said that the administration's "hope is that if we're seeing progress on those issues, then they can begin to broaden." "We're taking it step by step, seeing if, as we change some of the old approaches that we've been taking, we are seeing some movement on the Cuban government side," he added. "I don't think it's going to be happening overnight. I think it's going to be a work in progress" (*The Miami Herald*, 24/7/09).

July 24: Governor Mike Beebe of Arkansas will travel to Cuba on a two-day visit to promote his state's agricultural interests, *The Arkansas News* reported. Beebe will be accompanied by the state's Economic Development director and two state legislators. "We will meet with trade officials and visit local markets that have sold or potentially could sell Arkansas farm products," Beebe said in his weekly radio address. The trip is being coordinated by Riceland Foods and Tyson Foods, producers of rice and poultry. There are indications that trade restrictions "may soon be eased further or lifted completely," Beebe said. "I have no knowledge of the specific trade politics or timing of any such decision, and that is not the purpose of my trip. I am going to Cuba to ensure that, if and when agriculture trade is permitted, Arkansas will be in the best possible position to seize the opportunity to sell our products" (*The Miami Herald*, 25/7/09).

Julio 27: La Sección de Intereses de Estados Unidos en Cuba negó la visa a un opositor anticastrista aduciendo que realizó actividades violentas contra el gobierno cubano, según informó el propio afectado, Tomás Ramos. Ramos inició sus actividades en la década de los años 60 y vivió en la Florida, desde donde viajaba clandestinamente a Cuba para realizar acciones violentas, como destrucción de torres de comunicación y organización de alzamientos armados. Perteneció a varios grupos anticastristas de Miami, los cuales lo enviaban la isla a cumplir misiones, razón por la cual fue capturado varias veces y por la que cumplió largas penas de prisión. El pasado año salió de la cárcel e intentó infructuosamente regresar a Estados Unidos (*BBC Mundo*, 27/7/09).

July 27: The Obama administration has turned off an electronic sign at the US diplomatic mission in Havana that had displayed pro-democracy and human rights messages to Cuban passers-by and riled the government for the past three years. The State Department said that the sign, a news "zipper" on the fifth floor of the sea-front American Interest Section in the Cuban capital, was shut down last month amid the administration's ongoing efforts to engage with Cuba's leadership that has already seen some US sanctions eased. "We believe that the billboard was really not effective as a means of delivering information to the Cuban people," spokesman Ian Kelly told reporters. He noted that since the sign was first erected in 2006, the Cuban government had taken steps to obscure it from view and questioned whether it was serving its original purpose. "It was evident that the Cuban people weren't even able to read the billboard because of some obstructions that were put in front of it," he said. He added that President Barack Obama's decision in April to allow US telecommunications companies to do business with Cuba would do more to boost the flow of information to the island (*AP*, 27/7/09).

July 28: US airports are pressing the government to broaden the list of ports of entry allowed to handle flights to and from Cuba, even though the White House is proceeding cautiously with changes in travel policy. In a recent letter, Peter Horton, the director of Key West International Airport in Florida, urged the Treasury Department to add the facility to the list of three big international airports in Miami, Los Angeles and New York. Earlier this year, Tampa's airport made a similar request. And airport officials in Houston, already one of the biggest gateways between the US and Latin America, say local business leaders have pressed them to push for access to Cuba, too. A new Key

West airport departure terminal, opened in February, is part of a big expansion of passenger facilities (*The Wall Street Journal*, 28/7/09).

July 28: Members of the 20th US-Cuba Friendship Caravan visiting the central province of Sancti Spiritus met with impaired people and health authorities of the area and discussed the effects of the US economic blockade against Cuba. Social Assistance Office director Lidia Caballero thanked the visitors on behalf of hundreds of disabled people in the province for having been able to collect more than 100 tons of aid to bring this year to the island. The 38 members of the caravan, led by the US Pastors for Peace Inter-religious Foundation, were touched by testimonies from visually impaired and deaf and mute people whose condition affects all the members of their families (*ACN*, 28/7/09).

July 29: A state senator from Wynne said he is leaving for a trip to Cuba, a trip he says could help Arkansans in the future. Senator Jim Luker (Democrat-Wynne), said the 3-day trade mission he is going on with Governor Mike Beebe; Arkansas Department of Economic Development official Maria Haley; Morrill Harriman, Beebe's chief of staff; and officials with Riceland Foods and Tyson Foods has potential. "Rice is a major part of our agriculture, and Cuba was once a major market for us (before the October 1960 embargo with the communist country was enforced)," Luker said. Luker, who represents Cross County as part of his Senate district, said Riceland Foods, Tyson Foods and consumers would benefit if the embargo were lifted. "We hope the (Obama) administration will liberalize trade with Cuba and foster trade," Luker said. "It is a potential major market for rice and chicken." Luker said under current standards, processed poultry can be sent to Cuba, and the sale of food stock is allowed. The trade of both items could lead to both Arkansas-based products being sent there, Luker said (*Jonesboro Sun*, 29/7/09).

July 30: The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy will hold its 19th annual conference in Miami, beginning Thursday, July 30. The three-day affair, sponsored by the University of Miami, will be held at the Hilton Hotel, 1601 Biscayne Blvd. Topics will range from the island's current economic and political situation to the state of its relations with the United States and other countries, from foreign investment to its reaction to natural disasters. In effect, "this conference is a supermarket of studies pertinent to the reconstruction of Cuba," ASCE president Jorge Sanguinety told the press. As described by Sanguinety, the purpose of the 20-year-old organization is to keep Cuba specialists abreast of the latest developments, in the expectation of a transition to democracy on the island (*The Miami Herald*, 30/7/09).

July 30: El economista disidente Oscar Espinosa Chepe definió con solo tres palabras el dilema que enfrenta el gobierno de Raúl Castro ante el impacto de la crisis mundial: reformas urgentes o caos. "Todo es propicio a condiciones favorables para incontrollables explosiones sociales", dijo Espinosa Chepe desde La Habana ante los participantes de la XIX Conferencia Anual de la Asociación para el Estudio de la Economía Cubana (ASCE), que sesionará hasta 1ro de agosto en Miami. "La actitud actual del gobierno negado a emprender reformas para mantener su poder, además de ser egoísta e

irresponsable, es antinacional". Hablando en la sesión de apertura de la conferencia ante más de 200 académicos, investigadores y estudiosos del tema cubano, Espinosa Chepe describió un panorama de desolación económica, parálisis política y marginalidad social que pudiera conducir al desplome total en la isla. "Recuérdese el Maleconazo de 1994, espontáneo y sin dirección alguna, lo que debe hacer reflexionar a todos los cubanos sobre los cambios urgentemente requeridos, podría conducir a la violencia y la anarquía", argumentó el economista, ex prisionero de la llamada Causa de los 75. El fantasma de un estallido social y las posiciones encontradas sobre el embargo gravitaron sobre la primera jornada del evento (*El Nuevo Herald*, 31/7/09).

July 30: Oscar-winning actor Benicio del Toro has been presented with an award by the Cuban government in Havana, in recognition of his body of work. The inaugural Tomas Gutierrez Alea prize was presented at a ceremony attended by US actors Robert Duvall, James Caan and Bill Murray. Puerto Rican-born del Toro played revolutionary hero Ernesto "Che" Guevara in two films out last year. Named after prolific Cuban filmmaker Alea, the new award was voted for by the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba. Del Toro - who won a best supporting actor Oscar for *Traffic* in 2001 - said it was "an honour" to receive the award and thanked Che director Steven Soderbergh. Murray sang songs to union members packed into a room behind the group's main headquarters. "This is a show that will never be able to be repeated," del Toro said. "Bill Murray singing, Robert Duvall with his flowers, James Caan sitting here next to me, with [Cuban actors] Jorge Perugorria and Mirta Ibarra. "It will stay in history forever" (*BBC*, 31/7/09).

July 30: A Miami federal judge has set an October date to impose new sentences on three of the so-called "Cuban Five" accused of spying in the United States. A federal appeals court last year ordered new sentences for Fernando Gonzalez, also known as Ruben Campa; Luis Medina; and Antonio Guerrero. Medina and Guerrero had been serving life terms, and Gonzalez was sentenced to 19 years. The appeals court ruled their sentences were too long. US District Judge Joan Lenard will impose new sentences on October 13. The five men were convicted in 2001 of acting as unregistered Cuban agents and of espionage conspiracy for attempting to penetrate US military bases. The US Supreme Court in June refused to review the case. They are considered heroes in Cuba (*AP*, 30/7/09).

Julio 30: El gobierno de Puerto Rico inició las gestiones con el fin de obtener los permisos necesarios para que Cuba pueda participar en los Juegos Centroamericanos y del Caribe Mayagüez 2010. El secretario de Recreación y Deportes, Henry Neumann, dijo que ya se designó a un funcionario de la Administración de Asuntos Federales de Puerto Rico (PRFAA) para que convoque a funcionarios de diversas agencias del gobierno federal que tengan que ver con esos permisos. Neumann manifestó que no vislumbra problemas con la otorgación de las visas a la delegación cubana. "Todo el mundo sabe que si Cuba no viene, los Juegos no tendrán el mismo sabor ni la misma importancia. Pero si vemos que no hay movimiento, nuestro secretario de Estado, Kenneth McClintock, moverá sus contactos empezando con la secretaria de Estado estadounidense, Hillary Clinton", afirmó (*AP*, 31/7/09).

Julio 31: Las medidas decretadas por el gobierno de Raúl Castro para incentivar la producción agrícola no conseguirán resultados eficientes ni lograrán llevar más alimentos a la mesa de los cubanos, aseguraron expertos ante la XIX Conferencia Anual de la Asociación para el Estudio de la Economía Cubana (ASCE). Al abordar el tema de la entrega de tierras ociosas en usufructo en la isla, el economista Juan Tomás Sánchez aseveró que no tiene sentido añadir nuevos campesinos en la inepta legislación agraria existente. "Ya existen en Cuba numerosos agricultores no estatales con una eficiencia y bajo costo probados en las peores condiciones, para tener que compartir las escasas raciones de implementos y suministros que puedan aparecer casi inesperadamente", dijo Sánchez. "Sacrificar lo existente por añadir un sistema de campesinos de supervivencia parece demostrar que la intención es otra". El economista agrícola José Álvarez, profesor retirado de la Universidad de la Florida, considera que la agricultura cubana está en callejón sin salida. "No hay forma de que un proyecto de reanimación agrícola pueda prosperar sin insumos ni estímulos suficientes y bajo el control de burócratas", opinó Álvarez. "Aunque la reorganización puede mostrar algún nivel de eficiencia, es difícil valorar de dónde va a proceder la inversión para garantizar un mínimo de aseguramiento para la producción, desde contenedores y medios de transporte hasta almacenes" (*El Nuevo Herald*, 31/7/09).

July 31: Governor Mike Beebe says he's optimistic that Arkansas can increase its agricultural exports to Cuba after a trade mission to the island nation. Beebe didn't say whether he thought the federal government's 47-year-old trade embargo should be lifted against Cuba. But Beebe told reporters he thinks there are signs that the federal government is open to easing trade restrictions against the nation. Beebe returned from a three-day trip to Cuba with legislators and economic development officials. Representatives from Riceland Foods Inc. and Tyson Foods Inc. also traveled to Cuba on the trade mission (*AP*, 31/7/09).