

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

August 2003

Domestic Affairs

August 1: Fidel Castro attended a graduation ceremony at the Karl Marx theater in Havana during which more than 1 500 nurses received their diplomas. In his speech, Fidel Castro gave an overview of Cuba's health system and praised Cuban doctors and nurses abroad. [See also Foreign Affairs.] (Radio Habana Cuba, 2/8/03)

August 1: One of the 75 peaceful Cuban dissidents recently sentenced to stiff jail terms has smuggled a collection of poems out of prison describing the conditions of his incarceration, a manuscript his wife shared with the press. Yolanda Huerga showed the pages written by her husband, Manuel Vazquez Portal, who is serving an 18-year sentence. Most of the poems are about his incarceration in the Boniato jail in Santiago, about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from Havana. "The evening in a cell is like death/it is dim, uncountable/as if it contained a series of goodbyes," he writes in a poem called "The Universe Closes." His poem "Magic of Solitude" asks: "Where are the others, what are their jails like/Are there really only seventy-five of us?" Another ends: "I have a feeling, it's almost a certainty/that an entire country does not fit in a jail/unless the country is a jail." (EFE, 1/8/03)

August 1: Six of the 12 accused Cuban hijackers whose repatriation launched a firestorm of criticism of the Bush administration, have been released by the Cuban government while others remain at state security headquarters. Barbaro Perez Novo, 29, one of those repatriated, said that authorities released him and five others. "Although they told us we were free, we have to present ourselves at the trial," Perez Novo said from his home in the north central town of Nuevitas. His younger brother Yosvel Chavez Novo, remains at the Villa Marista security headquarters in Havana apparently accused of leading the group that stole the government-owned Gaviota 16, Perez Novo said. No trial date has been announced. (KRT Wire, 1/8/03)

August 1: Cuban shooter Eglis Cruz earned the first gold medal of the 2003 Pan American Games after winning the women's air rifle competition. (The Globe and Mail, 2/8/03)

August 4: The Centre for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS) at the University of Havana has released a study on the lives and aspirations of youth in Havana. Focusing particularly on their daily lives, the study notes that most youths lack hope for the future. They expressed special interest in having their own businesses while career wise they seek "money-generating professions or ones that would allow them to work for themselves" like computers, languages and some traditional trades. Females favour stay-at-home strategies, taking themselves from the work force as a means of grappling with the crisis from the domestic front. (Cubanet, 4/8/03)

August 5: Cuban authorities launched a website denouncing a "campaign of lies" against the communist island. According to Cuban National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon during a press conference presenting the Internet endeavor, Alarcon said that the site "signs on to the battle of ideas" launched by Fidel Castro, its goal "to make our truth known in view of the calumnies and lies being spoken against Cuba". The site was set up by 60 Cuban journalists, known as "The Circle of Journalists Against Terrorism". (News 24, 5/8/03)

August 5: Fidel Castro said that Cuba is "speeding up" research on the human genome, which will insert the island in current international genetic programs. At a ceremony for the inauguration of the National Centre for Medical Genetics and the graduation of 202 Masters in Genetics (specialists), Castro emphasized that the country "is in a position today to step up research on the human genome as soon as possible." (World Data Service, 6/8/03)

August 5: Six of 12 men implicated in the hijacking of a government boat last month were immediately freed upon their return to Cuba, one of the men said. Fermín Suárez said Cuban authorities let him walk free, but his 27-year-old son was among the six still in custody in the provincial capital of Camagüey pending trial on charges of theft. (AP, 5/8/03)

August 7: Cuban oppositionists have had a cautious reaction to Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo's decision to stay in Cuba. Longtime Cuban opposition leader Elizardo Sánchez was in Santiago's Boniato prison with Gutiérrez-Menoyo in the 1980's. By choosing to stay in Cuba, Gutiérrez-Menoyo was exercising his civil right to determine his country of residence, Sánchez said, "a right that is denied to millions of Cubans on the island and in exile." However, Sánchez stopped short of welcoming the former rebel commander to the opposition movement and pointed to Gutiérrez-Menoyo's past statements that many dissidents are either undercover Cuban agents or pawns of the U.S. Interests Section. "Personally, I can't hide my reservations of Menoyo's political position," Sánchez said. "For years, in public declarations, he has tried to disqualify [the opposition]. If he stays, he could either do civic work or create a fifth column, creating opposition to the opposition.

August 7: Vladimiro Roca, leader of the illegal Social-Democratic Party considered that Gutiérrez Menoyo's conditioning of his support to oppositionist groups on the island on an independent stance vis à vis Washington is "not transparent". "I do not put any condition to work with any oppositionist, Roca said." "Whoever calls himself oppositionist, I do not care what he may be as long as he opposes the government and favours changes". "Menoyo never contacted me during his visits to Cuba", added Roca. "His decision to return to the country marks the start of a new stage, because the continuous flow of emigration has done great damage to the internal opposition movement," Dimas Castillo, with the dissident Democratic Socialist Current, told the press. [See also Exile Community.] (Notimex, IPS, 7/8/03)

August 8: Revolutionary "comandante" turned dissident Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, says the democratization of Cuba "is inevitable" and that his 22 years in the Castro regime's jails fostered in him the patience to wait for it while working on behalf of a new democratic revolution. Menoyo moved into his former flat in the El Vedado neighborhood of Havana, calling it the "base of operations" for his fight to promote democracy in Cuba after 17 years of exile. Though he is aware that he is returning to the country "at the time of the harshest repression in recent years," Gutierrez Menoyo told the press that "the democratization of Cuba in the medium term is inevitable." "Change originates from the top in this country. It has to come from power, because they have to come to the conclusion that they will lose all or part of that power," the dissident said, adding that he is convinced the government harbors a "reformist" faction. Menoyo denied any agreement with Cuban authorities prior to his decision to stay in the island. (EFE, El Nuevo Herald, 8/8/03)

August 8: Many wives and mothers of Cuban dissidents seek solace each Sunday in the Church of St. Rita, named for a patron saint of desperate causes. "We pray to Saint Rita because we are seeking the seemingly impossible: freedom for Cuba and all its political prisoners," said Noris Duran, one of the group's founders. A few wives and mothers began attending Mass at the church three years ago. In April, after state authorities convicted 75 writers, economists and other dissidents of trying to subvert Cuba's communist government, their numbers began to swell. Dressed in white clothes with black trim or a black scarf, as many as two dozen women, who call themselves the Committee of Women Seeking Freedom for Political Prisoners, walk softly into the modern, vaulted church on Sundays. They neither carry posters nor chant slogans. Waving fans to disperse the suffocating summer heat, they simply pray. (The Nation, 8/8/03)

August 8: Renting a private home in Cuba will be more expensive and difficult after the recent measures taken by the government on the island, increasing taxes and toughening conditions on landlords. According to the new legislation a private owner may rent two rooms of his/her home to foreigners and non-resident Cubans and can only rent the whole house to Cuban residents. He

must obtain authorization and pay a fixed tax which fluctuates according to city and zone and which may reach \$US250 a month per room in Havana, regardless of the number of days the room has been rented. (EFE, 8/8/03)

August 8: Cuban dissident Oscar Espinosa Chepe was transferred to the Carlos J. Finlay military hospital in Havana after his health deteriorated, said his wife, Miriam Leyva. He is reportedly suffering from severe cirrhosis of the liver and anaemia. (El Nuevo Herald, 9/8/03)

August 9: Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, former rebel commander turned opposition leader who returned from exile to live permanently in Cuba said he has been contacted by officials in Havana, but declined to provide details of the discussions. "Logically there would have been some contact," Gutiérrez-Menoyo told the press. "I understand that initially my attitude created irritation in the highest ranks." Gutiérrez-Menoyo said that being able to talk with Cuban officials about his intentions was "an acceptable starting point." (AP, 11/03)

August 9: Blanca Reyes, wife of Cuban journalist and poet Raúl Rivero, jailed in April after a crackdown by the regime of Fidel Castro, says she's "very concerned" by the "unacceptable and subhuman" prison conditions of her husband. According to Reyes, Rivero is in a "high security" prison, and can only see visitors once every three months, instead of every month, including spousal visits; consequently, she can only take food to him every three months. (Europa Press, 9/8/03)

August 11: La Isabelica, a coffee plantation museum, is being restored due to its historic, architectonic and environment values. Built on the ruins of coffee plantations, it is a true evidence of the culture introduced in Cuba by French colonizers, mainly coffee cultivators running away from Toussaint Louverture during the Haitian revolution. Located in Gran Piedra, Santiago de Cuba, these ruins have been declared World Heritage. (AIN, 11/8/03)

August 11: Six Cubans who hijacked a boat to get to the United States but were repatriated by the US Coast Guard were tried and face sentences of 8 to 10 years in jail, officials said. The six men pleaded guilty to stealing a government-owned surveying boat in which they tried to reach the United States. Prosecutors asked for sentences of seven years for Abel Nápoles Rodríguez, eight years for 22-year-old bakery worker Yosvel Chávez Novo, nine years for Angel David Velázquez Roldán and Mijael Suárez Martínez and 10 years for Antonio Carrión and Noelvis Martínez Carrión. A panel of five judges who presided over the one-day trial in the Provincial Tribunal of Camaguey have 10 days to return a verdict and decide on the sentencing recommendations, defense attorneys said. The defendants all testified in court and the proceedings were open to relatives and the international media, offering a rare glimpse into Cuba's judicial process. (Reuters, Sun Sentinel, 11/8/03)

August 12: A Cuban opposition group lauded as "courageous and unprecedented" a decision by former revolutionary commander Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo to return to the island after 20 years of exile. The social-democratic Arco Progresista movement said the former rebel commander's decision "shows his strong commitment to Cuba's future and personal courage." The movement noted in a statement issued on the island that Cuban exiles who value dialogue and have a "constructive" vision for Cuba's future should have the opportunity to exercise their "right to live and share the necessary changes with their compatriots on the island." The illegal Arco Progresista includes, among others, the Cuban Democratic Socialist Current, the Cuban Movement for Democracy and the Social-Democratic Coordinating Committee. (EFE, 12/8/03)

August 12: Cuba won their ninth consecutive Pan American Games baseball gold medal, 3-1 over the United States. Cuba coach Higinio Velez dedicated the win to Fidel Castro on the eve of his birthday. Ariel Pestano dedicated his efforts to his late mother who died in March. (AP, 13/8/03)

August 13: With greetings from his oldest comrades in arms and young Elián González, Fidel

Castro marked his 77th birthday. "A giant kiss from the grandson who loves you so much," Elián and other children from his 4th grade class wrote to Castro in a letter published in Juventud Rebelde, the communist youth newspaper. Elián was 6 years old in 2000 when Castro led a successful international campaign to return the boy from his relatives in Florida and return him to his father on the island. Castro's birthday is cause for "great happiness" for the Cuban people, said a letter published in the Communist Party newspaper Granma by Armando Hart, who fought alongside his longtime friend during the revolution that triumphed in 1959. (AP, 13/8/03)

August 13: Fidel Castro celebrated his 77th birthday, addressing some 4,000 graduating doctors and reviewing the achievements of a revolution he said had "hands clean of injustice and blood." "Our system is the most humanitarian that has ever existed in the history of humanity," he asserted in an improvised hour-and-a-half-long speech to the graduates. "The hands of this revolution are full of humanism, are clean of injustice and clean of blood," Castro insisted, adding that since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 "nobody has ever been executed (in Cuba) extra-judicially (...) but rather in accord with the laws." (EFE, 13/8/03)

August 14: Six men sent back to Cuba by US authorities were convicted and sentenced to 7 to 10 years in prison for hijacking a government boat and trying to reach Florida, a court official said. (AP, 15/8/03)

August 14: The Cuban government undertook an island-wide computer census. The measure, code-named "Operation Windows," seeks to inventory all computers, including those in government offices as well as the ones in private hands, and to confiscate any that are deemed of "dubious origin." The questionnaires intended for use in private homes ask for the name of the owner, the brand description of the machine, documents that attest to the legal ownership of the computer, year and manner of acquisition, and the purpose for which the computer is intended and used. The sale of computers in Cuba has always been tightly controlled and, on occasion, banned outright, especially to private persons. (Cubanet, 14/8/03)

August 15: Cuban dissident journalist, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, already debilitated and gravely ill from a liver ailment, had been given new pills by a government psychiatrist. "Oscar doesn't even know what they gave him. We don't even know what kind of treatment they are giving him," Espinosa Chepe's wife, Miriam Leiva, said by phone from Havana. "They are all powerful, and we are helpless." Leiva has petitioned the Cuban government to let her husband serve out his 20-year term at home, but she has not been given an answer. (The Miami Herald, 15/8/03)

August 16: The men who converted a 1951 Chevy truck into a boat to sail to the United States were visited by police who hauled away the metal frame of an old tractor one had in his garage. No one was arrested in the police operation, said Marcial Basanta, one of the men involved in the unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to the United States. Eduardo Pedro Grass, who was also in the same group, said the officers thought they were trying to build another floating vehicle. The men denied that and said they are awaiting word from the US government on their applications to emigrate legally. (The Miami Herald, 17/8/03)

August 16: Cuban official daily Granma reports that a group of two Venezuelans and eight Cubans were sentenced in Havana charged with drug trafficking. The group smuggled nearly four thousand grams of cocaine, carrying them in their digestive tracts. The provincial court of the City of Havana sentenced to a prison term of life to the Venezuelan Marco Tulio Daza Velazco, who had been judged in Germany for having illegally introduced 700 grams of cocaine in that country. The other Venezuelan was sentenced to 20 years in jail. The Cuban Jorge Luis Perez Huguet was sentenced to 30 years, Gilberto Gómez, José Lake, Javier Lake Brown and Maximo Gómez Muñoz were sentenced to 20 years. Other people were sentenced to 10-15 years in jail. (AIN, 16/8/03)

August 17: The Pan American Games ended with Cuba's team finishing second in the medal count. Cuba took home 150 medals, including 72 golds. (The Toronto Star, 18/8/03)

August 17: Fidel Castro returns to Havana from a three-day visit to Paraguay. The leader of the Cuban Revolution attended the inauguration of the South American country's new president, Nicanor Duarte. Arriving at Havana's José Martí International Airport, Castro was accompanied by the world renowned Paraguayan writer, Augusto Roa Bastos. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/8/03)

August 17: Thousands of young Cubans who took part in the Havana Rap Festival heard rhyming local musicians touch on subjects including prostitution, racism, social exclusion and escape to freedom with a degree of critical irreverence uncommon on this island. The weeklong festival, which brought together more than 70 Cuban and foreign hip-hop groups in Havana for a series of discussions and concerts, was marked by protest songs. The annual event, which is sponsored by the government's Institute of Music and a communist youth organization, has become the main showcase for Cuban rap groups and a unique window on the grievances and aspirations of Cuba's young people. (EFE, 17/8/03)

August 18: The Cuban Government has published a book alleging that the leading Cuban dissident, Elizardo Sanchez, is a government spy. It claims he was decorated in the 1990s by Cuba's Ministry of the Interior for uncovering CIA agents working against Fidel Castro. The book, *El Camaján (The Freeloader)*, written by two Cuban Government journalists, alleges he has been leading a double life and that five years ago he was recruited by the Cuban authorities as a spy. (BBC, 18/8/03)

August 18: Elizardo Sánchez, president of the Cuban Human Rights Commission, vehemently denied he is spy for Castro's government. The allegations, he says, are an effort to discredit his opposition to Castro. "It's a colossal lie," the 59-year-old activist told reporters at his home. "It is part of a campaign, like those in the former Soviet Union, to disqualify and silence dissidents," he said. Sánchez said he had met with Ministry of Interior security officials for many years, but only to press for the release of political prisoners and seek a dialogue to improve Cuba's rights situation. "I'm prepared to meet with anyone, even with Satan, if it could help improve the situation of my country," he added. "I was never decorated. This is total infamy." (Reuters, 16/8/03)

August 18: The book "El Camaján" denouncing dissident Elizardo Sánchez as a Cuban government spy, has sown further disarray and suspicion among Cuba's small dissident movement already shaken by mass arrests in March and the surfacing of a dozen infiltrators as witnesses during the trials of 75 members. The slander against our brother Elizardo Sanchez is not worth comment," said Oswaldo Paya, winner of the European Parliament's Andrei Sakharov prize for freedom of expression. "If he ever was a state security agent, they are doing this now because he is no longer any use to them, so he is as much a member of the opposition as any of us," said Vladimiro Roca. (Reuters, 16/8/03)

August 19: With ten medals and the twelfth position among 64 nations, the Cuban delegation that participated in the 2nd World Tournament of Sports for Blind People, in Canada, returned to the island. Cuban blind athletes competed in athletics, swimming, judo and for the first time in goalball, a team event introduced in the island for that sector. (AIN, 19/8/03)

August 19: Cuba has begun breeding scorpions to use their poison to make medicines to treat uterine, breast and lung cancer. The Cuban company Labiofam S.A. is combining scorpion venom with other natural substances to create a medicine that is used at Havana's Pedro Kouri Tropical Medical Institute to treat cancer patients. (EFE, 19/8/03)

August 19: Opposition groups in Cuba closed ranks around human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez, dismissing as "slander" allegations that the well-known dissident was a government spy. "In my view this is a merciless attack aimed at destroying a person," social democratic dissident Manuel Cuesta Morúa told the press. Oswaldo Payá, with the Christian Liberation Movement, described the allegations as "slander against our brother." (IPS, 19/8/03)

August 19: Promoter of the Varela Project, Oswaldo Payá, told the press he knows a third book discrediting internal dissidents in Cuba is on its way. "I know it ("El Camaján") will not be the last one, and that a third edition of the lies is coming out soon, perhaps this time against me," Payá told foreign correspondents. According to Elizardo Sánchez, the title of the third book, which he said is already at the printer's, will be "Who is Payá". (IPS, 19/8/03)

August 19: The prominent human rights activist Elizardo Sánchez, a member of the coalition Todos Unidos (Everyone United), admitted to "contacts" with police officials since 1988. The "contacts," in which "the situation of political prisoners" was discussed, began in 1988. After that, "I was in prison from 1989 to 1991. The contacts resumed in 1997. Sometimes they visited me at home or formally summoned me. On other occasions they would arrest me, although they always clarified that it was just to chat," said the activist, who was accompanied by Vladimiro Roca, another member of Todos Unidos. (IPS, 19/8/03)

August 19: Former revolutionary and moderate exile leader Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo said it could well be that Elizardo Sánchez was a double agent. Gutiérrez Menoyo, who returned to the island after 20 years in exile, said the book "El Camaján" could be the result "of a disagreement (between state security and) Elizardo, because he wasn't doing things exactly as they wanted." Diplomatic officials said that regardless of the veracity of the book's contents, the accusations could foment doubt and deal a blow to the Cuban opposition. (EFE, 19/8/03)

August 20: Members of the 11th Canadian Solidarity with Cuba Brigade have met with family members of the five Cuban prisoners being held in the United States. The members of the 11th Canadian Brigade are carrying out volunteer work in citrus plantations in the province of Pinar del Río, located to the west of the Cuban capital. During their stay, the brigadistas -- many of whom are Latinos who reside in Canada -- have been touring schools and hospitals as well as places of social and cultural interest. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/8/03)

August 22: Four tons of narcotics were impounded by Cuban authorities in the first semester of 2003. Of this volume, 98% was seized as a result of actions against international trafficking. According to the Cuban Ministry of the Interior (MININT), the bulk of drugs impounded consisted of marijuana (86%), with slightly less than half a ton of cocaine and small quantities of other illicit substances. According to MININT sources, during the first half of 2003, there has been an increase of maritime and aerial incursions by drug traffickers near the island evidenced by the seizure of 196 floating packages of drugs - 154 of marijuana and 42 of cocaine - that washed ashore and the sighting of 27 suspicious speedboats and 14 aircraft, a higher total than in the same period last year. (Radio Habana Cuba, 22/8/03)

August 22: Fidel Castro attended the launching of three books written by famous Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos, the 1989 Cervantes Award winner, who is in Havana invited by the Cuban leader. The presentation of the books "Hijo del Hombre" (Child of Mankind), "Cuentos Completos" (Complete Stories), and "Poesías Reunidas" (Reunited Poetry), took place in the Che Guevara Hall of the "Casa de las Américas" cultural center with the presence of important personalities of the arts and literature sectors in Cuba. (AIN, 22/8/03)

August 22: As a result of the arrest of 75 Cuban cultural and social activists in recent months and their being sentenced to harsh terms of imprisonment of up to 28 years, the Prince Claus Fund has decided not to provide financial support to the 8th Havana Biennial, which will be held in November 2003. All those sentenced were engaged in critical Cuban cultural and social arenas. The convictions signal a significant deterioration of the situation for intellectuals and artists. The body responsible for organising the 8th Havana Biennial, which is an internationally acclaimed platform for non-western art, is associated with the government and has not distanced itself from the policy of prosecution. As a result, the Prince Claus Fund is forced to withdraw its collaboration. (Prince Claus Fund, 22/8/03)

August 23: Fidel Castro has awarded Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos with the Order of Jose Marti, the country's highest decoration for foreigners and named for the Cuban independence fighter. After receiving the award in the Palace of the Revolution, Roa Bastos said he was overwhelmed at the honor. Roa Bastos, whose best-known and most highly praised work is "Yo, el Supremo", praised the Cuban revolution, which he said was admired around the world. (EFE, 24/8/03)

August 26: Five months after the communist government's crackdown on the opposition, relatives of some imprisoned Cuban dissidents say their loved ones have become sick behind bars and are receiving poor treatment. The Cuban government has not responded to the family's specific complaints about poor hygiene and substandard medical treatment for their jailed loved ones, but authorities insist their human rights and health are being respected. Writer and poet Raul Rivero, 57, has lost 50 pounds and "looks like a little old man," his wife, Blanca Reyes, told the press. Gisela Delgado, wife of jailed political activist Héctor Palacios, said her 62-year-old husband has an ear infection. "His daily life is hell," Delgado said of Palacios, who is serving 25 years in the western province of Pinar del Río. (AP, 26/8/03)

August 26: Cuban sculptor Jose Delarra, whose giant statue of Argentine-born Cuban revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara is in central Cuba, died of a heart ailment. He was 65. The impressive monument by Delarra is in Villa Clara province, 186 miles east of Havana. The memorial also houses the remains of Guevara and several of his guerrilla comrades, who were killed in Bolivia in 1966. Delarra's work can be found in 40 countries, including Angola, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Spain, where he lived for several years before 1959 and built five monuments. (The Miami Herald, 28/8/03)

August 27: A veteran Cuban cigar maker broke his second world record for rolling the longest stogie in the world. José Castelar Cairo's recognition by the Guinness Book of Records was announced. It took Castelar five days to manufacture his record-shattering 14-metre cigar - a feat that far surpassed his first milestone: a three-metre cigar he and his buddies rolled in 1999 as a way to attract passing tourists. (CNSNews, 28/8/03)

August 27: Two Cuban organizations participating in the "Assembly To Promote Civil Society," composed of more than 350 Cuban opposition groups and directed by Marta Beatriz Roque, have been incorporated into the "Cuban National Congress" (in Miami), an entity of a representative parliamentary nature. Both organizations, "The Cuban Human Rights Foundation," founded by Juan Carlos González Leyva, the blind lawyer who is now a political prisoner in Cuba, and the "Cuban Democratic Coalition," are presided over by Reinaldo Cosano Alén. The inclusion of these two organizations as commissions of the "Cuban National Congress" took effect August 7, 2003. (ICEI, 27/8/03)

August 28: One of the leading interpreters of Cuban bolero music, singer Lino Borges, died in his hometown of Batabanó, a local radio station reported. He was 71. Severo Alberto "Lino" Borges, upon the death of Fernando Alvarez, was considered the last living interpreter of Cuban bolero music from the 1950s. (The Miami Herald, 29/8/03)

August 29: Yipsi Moreno of Cuba won the women's hammer throw title at the world athletics championships. Moreno threw the hammer 73.33m in the second round and no one could match the gentle giant, who won the Pan American Games title earlier this month. (The Australian, 29/8/03)

August 31: The Cuban Track and Field squad had a poor performance at the World Championship in Paris, dropping down to ninth place in the medal standings. The Cuban delegation tallied one gold and one silver medal. Cuban sports sources regarded the performance as modest. Cuba had finished sixth at the previous World Championship, which took place in Edmonton, Canada. (World Data Service, 31/8/03)

Economy

August 4: Managers and foreign companies doing business in Cuba are in an uproar over the government's surprise move to introduce foreign exchange controls for state-run enterprises, but sources say the Communist nation has begun to reconsider the measures. Foreign suppliers and businesses in Cuba that sell products to the state companies complained that they will face further delays of over two weeks in collecting payments and arrears from the cash-strapped state. "It is a real mess," said one Western diplomat. "This will lower financial confidence and paralyze trade," said another. Some foreign companies have stopped doing business with state-owned companies until the government clarifies how and when they will be paid for goods and services, foreign business sources in Havana have said. (Reuters, 4/8/03)

August 7: Cuba and Japan tighten collaboration links with the signing of a bilateral agreement on the processing of urban garbage in Havana. This was the main result of the visit made by a mission of the Japanese International Collaboration Agency (JICA) presided by Katsura Miyazaki, Vice Director of the Social Development Department of that governmental organization. (AIN, 7/8/03)

August 7: Cuba's foreign debt has spiraled so high during its current economic crunch that creditors will probably have to forgive significant portions during any post-democracy restructuring, an official from the Inter-American Development Bank said. "I think there will be a forgiveness element," Dennis Flannery, executive vice president of the IADB said at a Cuban economic forum in Miami. "I think the terms of restructuring Cuba's debt will be highly concessional." Cuba's foreign debt is so high -- it owes \$12 billion in hard currency, plus Russia claims it is owed another \$20 billion, Flannery said, citing the State Department -- that a credit agency has listed the Caribbean nation among the world's riskiest investments, along with Iraq and Angola, a nation to which Cuba once sent military and economic aid. Flannery added that Cuba's economy is in disastrous shape: "It's pretty much a cash economy." Asked whether communist-run Cuba risked running out of cash, he told journalists "it could, and then it would become a humanitarian case like African countries." The conference of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy addressed rebuilding Cuba after a transition to a market economy - - something none of the participants expect under the government of Fidel Castro. (Sun Sentinel, Tehran Times, (7,9/8/03)

August 7: Sherritt International Corp. said it earned \$33.6 million, 18 cents per share, in the April-June period, compared with \$24.5 million, 15 cents per share, in the year-ago quarter. During the quarter, Sherritt - which earlier this year divested its Canadian metallurgical coal business and rolled Fording Inc.'s thermal coal operations into the Sherritt Coal Partnership II managed by Luscar Ltd. - "agreed to participate in the Cuban government's initiative to consolidate the telecommunications industry in Cuba." Negotiations continue and the company said it "may effectively dispose of its interest in the Cuban cellular telecommunications business." It also said that "as a result of working capital, financing and operating factors," it has lost management control of its Cuban soybean processing business, now accounted for as an investment. Sherritt added that it "has been one of the largest foreign investors in Cuba for over a decade and continues to have a co-operative and mutually beneficial relationship with the state." (Canadian Press, 7/8/03)

August 8: A recent air transportation agreement reached between Cuba and Canada has made Air Canada the second airline company from that country to fly to Cuba after Air Transat. The new air connection will offer different itineraries including flights from Calgary, Halifax, Ontario, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. Air Canada's destinations will include Havana, the Varadero Beach Resort and Holguín. (Radio Habana Cuba, 8/8/03)

August 8: Cuba is seeking to merge the three firms in its telecommunications sector, according to Canada's Sherritt International Inc. Sherritt said that it "agreed to participate in the Cuban

government's initiative to consolidate the telecommunications industry (...) Negotiations continue in respect to a possible arrangement pursuant to which Sherritt may effectively dispose of its interests in the Cuban cellular telecommunications business." The state-run telecommunications company is in merger talks with a telecom venture in which Sherritt has an interest and with another venture involving Telecom Italia SpA aimed at developing a wireless service for the local population, foreign suppliers said. Fixed-line operator Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba SA (Etecsa) and state-owned Celulares del Caribe (C-Com), with only a few thousand subscribers, are also involved in the negotiations, suppliers and diplomatic sources said. Communist-run Cuba's telecommunications are among the least developed in Latin America and the Caribbean. The government reported at the close of 2002 that there were 650,000 fixed-line phones, or 5.8 phones per 100 residents. The island's 11.3 million people have almost no access to mobile phones. Cell phones are available to tourists and other foreign visitors. (Reuters, 8/8/03)

August 9: 500,000 people living in remote mountainous areas of Cuba will finally be able to pack away their oil lamps, listen to radio, and even watch TV, thanks to the growing use of renewable energy sources in this Caribbean island nation. "A plan got underway this year to bring electricity to some 100,000 homes using photovoltaic (solar) panels," Luis B rriz, president of the non-governmental organisation Cubasolar, which promotes the use of renewable, green-friendly sources of energy, told the press. The pace at which the project will go ahead will depend on the funds available to Cubasolar. "It would be great if we could complete it within a year, but our work will depend on the available financing," said B rriz. "He said it cost 1,870 dollars to bring electricity to each home through photovoltaic or solar electric panels, and to equip each household with six lamps, a TV set and a radio cassette player. (IPS, 9/8/03)

August 11: Cuba is promoting ecotourism in 60 areas on the island that have a rich biodiversity, tourism officials said. Seven of the nine major wetlands in the Antilles are located in Cuba, the official newspaper Juventud Rebelde reported. Some 22 percent of the island is considered a protected area, and 11 percent of those areas are active tourist destinations. About 630,200 ecotourists visited Cuba last year, 160,000 of whom visited the island on vacation packages that included some type of ecotourist activities. (EFE, 11/8/03)

August 12: Canada continues to be the main supplier of tourists to Cuba -- with more than 270,000 Canadian vacationers visiting the island between January and the end of May this year. Speaking with reporters in Santiago de Cuba, Ibrah m Ferradaz, Cuba's Minister of Tourism, noted that during "high season," there are more than 100 flights from 17 Canadian cities arriving in Cuba every week. Ibrah m Ferradaz said that Italians are Cuba's second largest tourist market, followed closely by vacationers from Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain and Mexico. (Radio Habana Cuba, 12/8/03)

August 12: The "Nueva Banca" Group, a Cuban financial institution, announced it would lend \$600 million to local companies to help bolster their production. The objective of the loan is to help local companies fulfill their commitments with the State and help them stay on the market, said Nueva Banca' president, Jos  Julio Rodr guez. (EFE, 12/8/03)

August 13: China has granted Cuba the status of a "Government Tourist" destination, which will make it possible to carry out organized trips to the Caribbean communist state, according to the official Cuban News Agency. It said that Cuba is the first Latin American country to receive such a status from Beijing, allowing the island to enter a major market. (Caribbean Media Corporation, 13/8/03)

August 18: The master plan for Varadero, the most popular beach resort in Cuba, calls for 26,000 rooms by the year 2010. According to the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR), the future development of the tourist resort will be carried out with special attention given to the preservation of nature. Lester Felipe Oliva, MINTUR representative in the western province of Matanzas, where the Cuban beach area is located, stated that the investment process includes four and

five-star hotel facilities. Oliva told the press that the program is approved by the Council of Ministers, led by MINTUR and the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry (CITMA). (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/8/03)

August 19: Cuba and Russia have signed an agreement in Havana to repair old Soviet cars and trucks. The Cuban company "Soluciones Mecánicas," which is based in Camagüey, signed the accord with Russian joint venture "Sociedad Anónima". According to José Julio Martínez, the director of "Soluciones Mecánicas," 80 percent of the cars and trucks rolling down the roads of the island were made in the former Soviet Union. (Radio Habana Cuba, 20/8/03)

August 22: Canadian WestJet Airlines Ltd. will expand its presence in the charter market this winter after reaching a deal to transport up to 80,000 passengers to Caribbean destinations for Transat A.T. Inc. The companies said the aircraft will serve Caribbean destinations in Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. The deal -- worth about \$29-million in revenue for Calgary-based WestJet -- is much larger than previous deals between the two companies. (The Globe and Mail, 22/8/03)

August 27: The governments of Brazil and Cuba have signed a cooperation agreement aimed at introducing actions to promote entrepreneurial activities in Cuba. The project would benefit education and culture, local development, tourism and the sugar cane industry. This project is scheduled to last three years. According to Sebrae (Brazilian Service of Support to Small and Micro Firms) President Silvano Gianni, sharing experiences would be important to the Cuban economy "particularly in spreading the entrepreneurial culture, which is not an exclusive culture of the capitalist system and may be very well present in any sort of political society". (Estado, 29/8/03)

August 28: The Latin American and Caribbean Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (OLACEFS) and Cuban officials are examining transactions taking place in the national economic system in order to avoid irregularities. The Cuban Minister of Audits and Controls, Lina Pedraza, explained to the visiting OLACEFS executive secretary, Alvin Weeden -- who also serves as the Panamanian Comptroller -- that Cuba is carrying out a strict plan to control, prevent and detect economic disorders. (Radio Habana Cuba 28/8/03)

August 28: The sugar industry is among the major contributors to the degradation of Cuban soil, a problem affecting nearly 70 percent of cultivable areas on the island. According to official figures, the soils in 11 of Cuba's 14 provinces suffer from erosion, compaction, acidity, salinity and lack of organic material, but the phenomenon is most dramatic in the east, where the island's most fragile ecosystems are found. Experts say the main culprit is five centuries of monoculture of sugarcane, a crop that depletes the soil's nutrients. Sugarcane production intensified in the early 19th century through the mid-20th century. Commercial cultivation of sugarcane and subsequent expansion of cattle raising led to the deforestation of extensive areas, a phenomenon that accelerated in the 19th century with the rise of coffee plantations in the eastern mountains. (IPS, 28/8/03)

August 29: Cuban cargo interests are backing a new triangular containership service between the Caribbean island, the Mediterranean and Canada. Melfi Lines will operate three ships averaging 900-teu capacity on a fortnightly service from the beginning of September. The Panamanian-registered carrier, which is owned by Cuban trading house Cimex Enterprises, is setting up its own operation following the demise last year of a direct service to Europe run by Coral Container Lines. (Tradewins, 29/8/03)

August 29: The Hanoi Electronics Co. (Hanel) won a contract to sell 10,000 computers to Cuba during the three-day visit to Vietnam by Fidel Castro, according to Vietnam News Agency's correspondents in Havana. The first 3,000-computer batch of the contract will be delivered to the foreign partner shortly. The company will also provide Cuba with a television assembly line free of charge, and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Copextel Co. to further

enhance its cooperation with Cuban electronics and informatics companies. (Vietnam News, 29/8/03)

August 30: The western province of Pinar del Río has the potential for excellent agriculture results, according to Cuban Agriculture Minister Alfredo Jordán. The Cuban government official recalled some of the most recent achievements of the sector, which included cattle-raising. Alfredo Jordán stressed the rapid recovery by the tobacco sector from the damage caused by recent hurricanes. He said preparations are well underway to begin a new stage in tobacco next month. (Radio Habana Cuba, 30/8/03)

August 31: Canada is planning to undertake several joint projects with Cuba to combat desertification and drought. According to Leonard Good, president of the Canadian company Global Environment Facility (GEF), he plans to visit the Sabana-Camagüey Project, located east of the Cuban capital. The Canadian business executive is in Cuba to take part in sessions of the 6th Conference of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought and to verify some joint projects between his country and the island. Speaking with reporters in Havana, Leonard Good said that some of the projects are already in the second stage of development and are proving very successful. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/9/03)

Exile Community

August 4: The leading organization claiming to speak for Miami's electorally important Cuban exile community called on President George W. Bush to fulfill his pledges to aid the internal opposition on the communist-ruled island. That was the heart of the message conveyed by Jorge Mas Santos, president of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). "We want the president to fulfill the pledges he made in May 2002 when he said he would give full support to internal dissidents that are struggling in conditions of poverty and solitude," Mas Santos said. "We demand that the migration accords (between Washington and Havana) that provide for all Cubans detained at sea to be returned to Cuba where they are tried by a regime without morals or justice, be revised," the opposition leader said. According to the accords signed in 1994 during the administration of then-President Bill Clinton, Cubans intercepted at sea are repatriated to the island. [See also, US-Cuba Relations.] (EFE, 4/8/03)

August 7: Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo -- a former revolutionary fighter with Fidel Castro in the 1950s who later opposed the Cuban ruler's regime -- told reporters at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport that he would stay in the Communist nation to "rebuild the Cuban revolution." "I come here to claim a legal space for the opposition, and I know that it will not be easy," Gutierrez Menoyo said. "It's my right as a Cuban to be here. The Cuban government is not making any concession. I don't have to ask anyone permission to live in my own country. Gutierrez Menoyo, 68, is a controversial figure among many Cuban exiles in the United States. He opposes the US embargo of Cuba and any other American tactics to oust Castro. He also has given up calls for an armed resistance in favor of working for movement toward democracy, even if Castro remains leader. Menoyo is the leader of the Miami based organisation Cambio Cubano and this is his seventh visit to his country. Castro's government has permitted him to go back to the island for visits because he gave up his revolutionary stance and follows a more moderate approach, calling for peaceful steps toward free and fair elections and other civil changes. He also supports dialogue with the Cuban government. "We have to build peaceful solutions. There has to be dialogue. It has to be understood. And this has to be done despite the ambitions and personal interests of one man," Menoyo said. (CNN, IPS, 7/8/03)

August 7: Within the exile community, reactions toward Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo's decision to stay in Cuba have been diverse. Andres Nazario Sargen, who founded Alpha 66 with Gutiérrez-Menoyo but did not follow his call for dialogue with Cuba's leadership, called the decision "a grave mistake." "We have been friends since the hills of the Escambray when we fought against Batista," he said. "I don't think he will accomplish anything." "I think what this shows, more than

anything else, is the nature of the regime. A man who helped bring the revolution to power and was jailed for more than 20 years, has now to beg to live under that dictatorship," said the executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, Joe García. Menoyo "has been working closely with Castro's government for a long time" and "has been trying to reach an arrangement with the government to create a space for himself within the system," said José Basulto, founder of Brothers to the Rescue [For more on this, see Domestic Affairs.] (Sun Sentinel, El Nuevo Herald, 8/8/03)

August 8: A Cuban exile in Miami condemned a dissident politician for his surprise decision to move to Havana and attempt to lead peaceful opposition to Fidel Castro's regime. "I'm very disappointed with Menoyo," Huber Matos, another fellow rebel leader told the press. "He is not the man he used to be. To me, he is allowing himself to be used by Fidel to make it look to the world that the opposition is allowed to exist in Cuba, while we know that those who oppose the government are punished." Some Cuban moderates were more supportive. Alfredo Durán, the secretary of the Cuban Committee for Democracy, which opposes US sanctions on Cuba, said: "He is a Cuban patriot, as he always has been". "You have to take your hat off to his courage. He is there non-violently and simply wants to exercise his civil rights and to live in his country." [For more on this, see Domestic Affairs.] (The Guardian, 9/8/03)

August 8: Tense negotiations about proposed protests at the Latin Grammys award show have produced a compromise between the city of Miami and Cuban exile groups. Protesters can come, but they must keep their distance. Protesters agreed to gather 168 feet away from the awards show. (The Miami Herald, 8/9/03)

August 12: The former diplomat who runs the Washington office of the Cuban American National Foundation has resigned in the midst of a disagreement over the organization's decision to criticize the Bush administration on Cuba policy. Dennis Hays, executive vice president of CANF, acknowledged that he doesn't agree with the foundation's public criticism but said that did not lead to his resignation. Hays downplayed his disagreement with others in CANF's leadership: "The important thing is to move forward to advance the cause of freedom and democracy in Cuba, and there is a variety of ways it can be done. And there will be disagreements over what the best of those ways may be." Camila Ruiz, a former aide to US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Republican-Miami, was appointed to succeed Hays. (The Miami Herald, 13/8/03)

August 13: Celia Cruz' husband, Pedro Knight, told the press that he dreams of someday taking his wife's remains from the Bronx to the island she fled when Fidel Castro seized power in 1960. "I would take her home to be buried next to her mother," Knight said. "That's what she always wanted." Cruz had been living in New York for two years when her mother died in Cuba in 1962. Castro did not allow her to attend the funeral. She vowed not to return while he was in power. (New York Daily News, 14/8/03)

August 20: A group of Cuban-Americans who plan to support the right of Cuban musicians to attend the Latin Grammys could throw a wrench in the city's plans for a smooth awards ceremony. City officials and civic leaders in Miami are praising a Miami police plan that would accommodate Cuban-American protesters who charge that the island's musicians are representatives of Fidel Castro's "oppressive regime." The Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences has agreed to the city's plan to place anti-Castro protesters about 260 feet from the red carpet entrance of the American Airlines Arena. However, representatives of Alianza Martiana, which supports an end to the US embargo of Cuba and dialogue between the United States and Cuba, also applied for a permit -- to demonstrate in support of the right of musicians from Cuba and all over the world to express themselves. "Art unites us," said Alianza spokesman Max Lesnik. "Politics divides us." (The Sun Sentinel, 20/8/03)

August 21: Brothers to the Rescue founder José Basulto, who has yet to receive a monetary award in his judgment against the Cuban government for the the shoot-down of two of the exile group's planes, already has plans for the money: He will give it back to Cuba. The trust will also

be used to pay for infrastructure in a post-Castro Cuba, said Basulto. The Brothers for Democracy trust fund counts among its board members 36 business people, clergymen, activists and others -- including singer Willy Chirino -- who have pledged their services to helping Cubans on the island. (The Miami Herald, 22/8/03)

August 21: Miami exile leaders said that the indictment of a Cuban air force general and two MiG fighter pilots by the federal government is a direct result of a recent series of letters sent to President Bush by the Cuban American National Foundation, Republican state legislators and other local officials. Cuban Americans have suggested that the president risked losing the community's financial and electoral support for his reelection campaign next year if the administration did not move aggressively to target the Castro regime. Exile leaders said they took the administration's moves as evidence that, ultimately, the United States under Bush might bring charges against Castro himself and rewrite the so-called "wet foot, dry foot" policy that allows fleeing Cubans to remain in the United States only if they reach land -- although there was no direct suggestion of that from the White House. "These are very, very positive steps," said Jorge Mas Santos, chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation, in an interview. "Still, there's a lot more that can and should be done." (The Miami Herald, 22/8/03)

August 25: Cuban American Miriam Masullo plans to open a local campaign office next month. She has opened a campaign bank account in Miami and recently recruited volunteer campaign workers during a visit to South Florida. She met with local Cuban-American activists and went on Spanish-language radio to drum up donations. Masullo has declared her candidacy for the US Senate -- in Connecticut. But she's looking to raise money in South Florida's Cuban exile community. (The Miami Herald, 26/8/03)

August 26: A visiting pastor from Cuba told Tulsans that Cubans are hungry for religion. After decades of languishing under communism, churches in Cuba are full, according to a Cuban pastor and seminary professor who visited Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Reverend Daniel Montoya teaches at Seminario Evangélico in Matanzas, Cuba, about 200 kilometers from Havana. He was in Tulsa to build partnerships between Cuban and American Christians, and spoke at First Presbyterian Church. "There is revival in every church in Cuba; the churches are full," Montoya said in an interview. "People are hungry for religion, and they are asking for transcendence." He said the growth of the church through the 1990s is the result of an opening of President Fidel Castro's government toward the church, a crisis in Marxist ideology, and frustration with the poor economic conditions in Cuba. (Tulsa World, 30/8/03)

Foreign Affairs

August 1: The Cuban government has officially confirmed that it is turning its back on EU aid. In a letter sent to Member States' embassies in Havana and to the European Commission, it says the Cuban government has decided to reject official development aid sent to Cuba by the EU, noting that the practical implications of the decision will be detailed in time by the Cuban foreign investment ministry. The Cuban decision is in reaction to "unacceptable conditions" policy of the European Union, notes the letter, which confirms the statements made by Fidel Castro. (Agence Europe, 5/8/03)

August 1: Livid in temper and vivid in his turns of phrase, Fidel Castro said charges that a Cuban doctor's negligence caused the death of a Venezuelan child was the kind of "vile, insidious falsehood and moral corruption" being hurled at Cuba. "We are not about to abandon our mission just because we are slandered as we are well aware of the millions of lives that have been saved by our health care professionals," Castro told over 1500 nursing school graduates. Castro described Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as "an exceptional man" and "one of the people I most admire" among those he has met in his decades in power. He said Cuba would continue to send doctors to help disadvantaged people living in shantytowns on the outskirts of Caracas, under an aid program signed with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. [See also Domestic

Affairs] (EFE, Tehran Times, 1/8/03)

August 1: Fidel Castro launched a new tirade against all those who have criticized his government's human rights record, telling them to "go wash out their mouths, have a good gargle" for besmirching his country's good name. "Go ahead and offer a million dollars, or 20 million, to the first person who can show there has ever been a single man tortured or an extrajudicial execution in the 44 years of revolution," Castro told over 1500 nursing school graduates. "What are they going to tell us?" he asked and made an obvious swipe at the European Union. "These are the shameless ones who have killed, executed, started wars, shed so much blood, defended their colonial or imperial interests and condemned millions of human beings to poverty and under-development," Castro said in his three-hour Havana harangue, "They want to tell us off? Better they should go wash out their mouths, have a good gargle, and use whatever they've got handy to sterilize their mouths before they utter the name of Cuba, the most exemplary country there ever has been." [See also Domestic Affairs] (EFE, 1/8/03)

August 1: According to the spokesman of the European Union's Executive, Erick Maner, the EU is awaiting for clarification from the Cuban government as to how it intends to implement its decision to reject EU's assistance. The spokesman said the European Commission "regrets" the decision adopted by the Cuban government. (Radio Martí, 4/8/03)

August 1: The Italian Presidency protested on behalf of the EU against the treatment of sick dissidents imprisoned in Cuba. A press release issued by the Italian foreign ministry notes that Italy and the European Union are extremely concerned at the state of health of several dissidents currently imprisoned on the island, particularly the economists Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Martha Beatriz Roque. Cuba's ambassador to Rome, Hugo Ramos Milanés, was summoned to the Italian foreign affairs ministry. (Agence Europe, 1/8/03)

August 1: The government of France expressed concern over the health of jailed Cuban dissident Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello. The French foreign ministry spokesperson, Hervé Ladsous, said that France's embassy in Havana has been instructed to pass France's concerns to Cuban authorities. (Radio Martí, 2/8/03)

August 1: The President of the Vietnamese National Parliament, Nguyen Van An, begins an official visit to Havana. Invited by his Cuban counterpart Ricardo Alarcón, the Vietnamese legislative leader is leading a high-level delegation from Hanoi. The Vietnamese legislative delegation will be made up of ministers, deputies and businesspeople. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/8/03)

August 2: Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge refused to throw out Havana's bid to host the 2012 Games - pitting the tropical capital against New York and seven other cities. Rogge said he was confident the Cuban capital's proposal would be as strong as any of the other cities. (New York Post, 3/8/03)

August 3: Caracas Mayor, Alfredo Peña, accused Fidel Castro of "blatantly interfering" in Venezuela's internal affairs. The Mayor cited recent statements from Castro saying that Peña is "against" Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and that he "orders the Metropolitan Police against the people" of that South-American nation. (Europa Press, 4/8/03)

August 3: During an interview with the Mexican newspaper "Reforma", the Spanish president, José María Aznar, said that "the way things are on the island, the Cuban government is going nowhere. On the contrary, it will have increasingly bigger problems. Isolating itself will only bring more suffering to the Cuban people". (Europa Press, 3/8/03)

August 4: In an exclusive interview, Brazilian Sports Minister, Agnelo Santos Queiroz, - the only member of the Communist Party in Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's cabinet - expressed his enthusiasm for a visit to Cuba in September. "We are going to strengthen Cuba-Brazil relations. When Vice

President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque visited us a short while ago I spoke to them about a large integration project, because we have many things in common, in order to exchange professionals, coaches and our experiences," commented Queiroz. (Granma International, 4/8/03)

August 5: The wife of dissident Roberto de Miranda, who is imprisoned in Cuba and who was awarded the Pedro Luis Boitel Freedom Prize in Miami, told the press that her husband would have dedicated the award to the children and "the freedom of the Cuban people." The award, which takes its name from Pedro Luis Boitel, a Cuban political prisoner who died while on a hunger strike in 1972, was created by Rumanian physicist Gabriel Andreescu in 2001, with the support of eight Central and Eastern European human rights groups, with the aim of paying tribute to internal dissidents in Cuba. (EFE, 5/8/03)

August 5: Speaking at the World Library and Information Congress in Berlin, Cuban dissident Ramon Humberto Colás denounced the suppression of cultural freedom in Cuba and the arrests of 17 of the island's independent librarians. "What's taken for granted to a European is far from normal to a Cuban," Colás said. Colás, the founder and driving force behind Cuba's independent library project until going into exile in late 2001, discussed how the initiative came about and how the regime's reaction made clear that not even the most minimal cultural freedoms exist on the island. (EFE, 5/8/03)

August 6: Fidel Castro met Vietnam's National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Van An, the local daily Granma reported. They held a dialogue in a "friendly" atmosphere in line with the "solid and profound relations" between the communist parties, governments and peoples of their countries, said Granma. (Xinhuanet, 7/8/03)

August 7: The first group of Cuban Jews to visit Jerusalem under Israel's Birthright program traveled to the Western Wall as part of an effort to strengthen ties between Israel and Jewish communities around the world. William Miller, an electronics instructor from Havana, said he got the idea for the visit and sent an e-mail to Birthright to try to set it up. Birthright asked Canadian Jewish groups to help organize the trip. Lorne Klemensberg of the Canada Israel Experience said the Canadian and Cuban Jewish communities have close ties. A Canadian Jewish delegation agreed to sponsor the Cuban delegation. It took the Cuban group a month to get government permission for eight young Cuban Jews to make the trip. Klemensberg said they had to promise to return to Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 7/8/03)

August 8: The book "Los disidentes" ("The Dissidents"), based on the testimony of a group of Cuban security agents that infiltrated the US embassy, was presented in Madrid. During the presentation of the book, at the Cuban Embassy, Puerto Real Mayor José A. Barroso told the audience that the book is the result of a dramatic and treacherous situation caused by US hostile actions against Cuba. Spanish lawyer and political scientist German Fabrés, who was also present, pointed out that these so-called "dissidents" are nothing but mercenaries. (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/8/03)

August 8: Granma, Cuban official newspaper, carried a report on comments made by Paraguayan President-elect Nicanor Duarte -- who has promised that his incoming administration "will fight against neo-liberal capitalism." The president-elect of Paraguay noted that neo-liberalism is based on profits alone and the 'logic' of success at the expense of the failure of others. (Radio Habana Cuba, 8/8/03)

August 8: Cuba has been invited to participate in the ministerial meetings of the East Asia-Latin America forum, which is to take place in Manila, Cuban official press reported. The invitation was handed over to Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez, by Assistant Secretary for American Affairs of the Foreign Ministry of Philippines, Cristina Ortega, who arrived in Havana for a working visit. (Xinhuanet, 8/8/03)

August 9: Up to a thousand Cuban doctors are working and living in slums in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, under a program sponsored by the Venezuelan government. The presence of the doctors in the slums is part of the "Inside the Barrio" program set up by President Hugo Chavez. (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/8/03)

August 9: Lázaro Ortiz and Elena Arnáiz, a Spanish married couple on vacation in Cuba, were expelled from the country. According to them, the reason for this was their friendship with Dagoberto Valdés, a lay member of the Catholic community in Pinar del Río and director of the "Vitrail" magazine that promotes human rights. (El Mundo, 12/8/03)

August 11: Hundreds of Havana-bound tourists at Rome's international airport were handed pamphlets describing Fidel Castro's Marxist-ruled island as a "human rights hell". The pamphlets were distributed by about 20 members of two youth groups linked to the Italy's National Alliance party, a member of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's ruling centre-right coalition. (AFP, 11/8/03)

August 11: A second group of Cuban refugees in less than three months was discovered off Mexico's Caribbean coast, migration officials said. The five men and three women were in good health when they were rescued from a small boat near Isla Mujeres, an island near the resort city of Cancun, said National Migration Institute spokeswoman Alicia Caballero. The Mexican Navy, which conducted the rescue, refused to divulge information on the case, including how long the refugees were at sea, where they were headed, or when they were rescued. (AP, 12/8/03)

August 11: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is alarmed by the deteriorating health of imprisoned journalist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who was transferred to a military hospital in, Havana. According to a statement issued by the organization, Cuban officials will send Espinosa Chepe back to jail "when they deem it appropriate". The 62-year-old journalist suffers from several severe medical conditions, including cirrhosis, hepatitis, liver failure, and high blood pressure. (Cubanet, 13/8/03)

August 12: Cuba will hold the 3rd Hemispheric Forum Against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in January, Cuban authorities announced. Organized by the Cuba Continental Social Alliance, the meeting will evaluate the continental campaign against the US-initiated FTAA, said Cuban officials. (Xinhuanet, 13/8/03)

August 12: The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has provided up SFr 550,000 (\$405,000) to assist film-makers from poorer countries. The three-year "Open Doors" programme will allow Cuban directors to show their work at the Locarno International Film Festival and bring them face-to-face with European producers to pitch new projects. "The idea is to foster a better understanding of Cuba and to promote cooperation with the Cubans, who are suffering from political isolation and an economic crisis," said SDC spokeswoman Sophie Delessert. (Swissinfo, 12/8/03)

August 13: Korean leader Kim Jong-il sent a message of greetings to Fidel Castro on the occasion of his 77th birthday. The message wished him "great success in his responsible work for accomplishing the cause of socialism and good health". (KCNA, 13/8/03)

August 13: The future of seven Cuban doctors who want to withdraw from the bilateral Cuba/South Africa agreement has yet to be decided by the medical profession's watchdog organization after it failed to take a decision early this month. The doctors accuse Limpopo's health authorities and Cuban embassy officials of wanting to disqualify them from working in the country after they gained permanent residence or married local women. They want to opt out of the agreement and freely practice medicine in South Africa. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) considered the matter but did not reach a decision, said HPCSA spokesperson Phephela Makgoke. (The Guardian, 13/8/03)

August 14: Fidel Castro declared his "spontaneous love" for Paraguay upon his arrival in

Asunción to attend Nicanor Duarte's presidential inauguration. "This is a country I've always admired for its history, for its heroes, and I've felt a spontaneous warmth, you could say," Castro said in brief statements to Radio Nanduti during his first visit to Paraguay. (EFE, 14/8/03)

August 14: Fidel Castro met with the elected president of Uruguay, Nicanor Duarte Frutos who is to take office during an official ceremony at the Legislative Palace of that nation. (AIN, 14/8/03)

August 15: Fidel Castro held a meeting with thirty members of parliament and senators of all the political parties of Paraguay. (AIN, 16/8/03)

August 15: Argentina suspended two of its diplomatic representatives in Havana after a federal judge order their detention and transfer to Buenos Aires under charges of selling passports to Cuban migrants. First Secretary Eduardo Porretti and Councillor Jose Maria Aller were ordered to remain in the diplomatic mission until their repatriation is processed. (El Nuevo Herald, 15/8/03)

August 16: While in Asunción, Paraguay, Fidel Castro reiterated his interest in increasing co-operation between Cuba and Paraguay. The Cuban leader placed a flower wreath at the National Pantheon of the Heroes and during an exchange with journalists he praised the struggle of the Paraguayans in their reconstruction work after the cruel wars that they had faced with. Fidel also underscored that an awakening can be seen in the hemisphere, and he assured that Latin America can not stand the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), and that the FTAA will not be able to deal with the awakening of Latin America. (AIN, 16/8/03)

August 16: The European Union development assistance that Cuba now refuses to accept was always more a "publicity stunt than real humanitarian aid," Fidel Castro told Paraguayans in his latest caustic tirade against his former Old World friends. "Europe is guilty of a naive and ridiculous farce," he said in a five-hour berating of the governments that dared to criticize Cuba's human rights record, that he delivered in Paraguay. He told a packed soccer stadium that "Often we spend three years discussing (aid projects) with them, so that they can travel first-class in their airlines and stay at five-star hotels, and when they get here it just goes on and on." (EFE, 16/8/03)

August 17: Basilio Mosso Ramos, State and Health Ministry from the Cabo Verde Republic, praised Cuban collaboration in the training of youngsters from that African country in medicine. "Trabajadores Weekly Edition" reported that Mosso Ramos considers the graduation of 43 students from Cabo Verde who studied medicine in Cuban universities of great significance. (AIN, 18/8/03)

August 17: "An honor for our country" is how Fidel Castro defined the visit to the island by Augusto Roa Bastos, the Paraguayan writer who won the Cervantes literary award in 1989 and is best known for his novel "Yo, El Supremo", about a ruthless dictator. Roa Bastos and Castro first met 44 years ago in Buenos Aires, and their paths crossed again during Castro's three-day visit to Paraguay, where he attended the swearing in of the new president, Nicanor Duarte. The Cuban leader visited the author in his Asuncion apartment and invited him to come see him in Havana. Roa Bastos flew back with him, and was greeted by the Cuban Defense minister, Raúl Castro, the Culture Minister Abel Prieto and a large number of intellectuals. (El País, 20/8/03)

August 19: Three Cuban athletes have defected to the Dominican Republic, where they were competing in the Pan American Games, an official said. The defections occurred during the international competition said General Fernando Cruz, director of the Dominican intelligence agency. Cruz refused to give further details on the defections. (AP, 19/8/03)

August 20: The wife of a Cuban political prisoner called on Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos "to take a closer look" at the reality on the island, where the novelist is currently staying as a guest of Fidel Castro. "I am merely the wife of a Cuban intellectual sentenced to 18 years in prison for exercising his right to freedom of thought and speech," Yolanda Huerga said in an open

letter published in the Asuncion daily Abc Color. Huerga identifies herself in the letter as the wife of Manuel Vázquez Portal, "a poet and journalist arrested and sentenced during the wave of repression in March 2003, along with 74 other peaceful opposition members and independent journalists." "I was astonished to learn that Augusto Roa Bastos, who I have respected and admired since I first read his book "Yo, El Supremo", several years ago (...) had joined in signing the manifesto titled here (in Havana) Solidarity with Cuba, but it's not in any way solidarity with the Cuban people but rather with the regime." (EFE, 20/8/03)

August 20: Since 1990, 15,000 Ukrainian children have been sent to Tará, a beach in northern Havana, to receive health treatment. Since the Chernobyl nuclear plant exploded in 1986, more than 20,000 children from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia have traveled to Cuba in hope of rehabilitation. Reflecting on the current state of the program, Dr. Carlos Oleda, a Cuban doctor in charge of the program, says: "On each flight to Cuba, there are three to four serious cases. We could bring 15 if we had the needed resources. We have the techniques (including bone marrow transplant), we have the doctors, but we don't have the resources." After the revolution, Tará served as a youth camp for Cuban children. Today, it houses the Chernobyl project, a misnomer of sorts, some kids from Brazil's nuclear accident and the Armenian earthquake also received treatment there. (UNIAN, 20/8/03)

August 20: The Spanish Cultural Center in Havana gave a gala farewell party before it is closed by order of Fidel Castro. Senior European diplomats were among the hundreds of people that had to be turned away from the building on Havana's Malecón avenue that has already been emptied of most its furniture and fixtures after Castro gave the staff its marching orders last June. Distinguished figures from Spain that spoke to Cuban audiences at the center include film director Pedro Almodóvar, and writers Manuel Vicent, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Almudena Grandes. Outstanding names on the Cuban cultural scene such as writers Roberto Fernández Retamar and Miguel Barnet and musicians Leo Brouwer y Chucho Valdés also made appearances at the center. (EFE, 21/8/03)

August 21: Cuba has sent a message of condolence to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan on the death of Sergio Viera de Mello, UN representative in Iraq who was killed in Baghdad. The message, signed by Interim Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez de Estenoz, expresses the Cuban government's sincere condolences to the United Nations and the families of the victims of the tragic events in Baghdad. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/8/03)

August 21: A spokesman for the German Foreign Affairs Ministry informed the press that Germany will not participate in Havana's 2004 International Book Fair. German authorities took the decision after "recent incarceration of 75 oppositionists and the reintroduction of the death penalty in Cuba. Havana's book fair is dedicated to a foreign country each year. This time Germany was going to be invited as the main country by Cuban authorities. (Europa Press, 21/8/03)

August 21: More than 160 countries will be represented at the upcoming 6th Conference to Combat Desertification, slated for August 25th through September 5th in Havana. According to organizers of the conference, at least 14 heads of state or government plan to attend the ten-day, United Nations-sponsored conference. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/8/03)

August 21: The 1,000 Cuban doctors providing healthcare to Caracas' poor are illegally practicing medicine in Venezuela and should be replaced, a top appeals court ruled. The decision was a blow to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's "Inside the Neighborhood" program, in which doctors from the communist island nation provide primary care to people in the slums of Caracas. The program was widely criticized by Venezuelans who argued that the doctors are practicing illegally and may not even be physicians. The judges ordered the government to replace the Cuban doctors with Venezuelans or licensed foreigners. (The Miami Herald, 22/8/03)

August 22: A controversy has arisen in Venezuela, between Hugo Chávez's government and the

opposition, because many of the advisers assisting with a gardening programme sponsored by Chávez are Cubans. Chavez's opponents, who accuse him of desiring to convert Venezuela into a communist dictatorship similar to that led by his friend, Fidel Castro, suspect that the Cubans are in Caracas to do more than teach farming. Chavez critics charge that the Cubans' true goal is to teach communism, spy or even provide paramilitary training to pro-Chavez guerrilla organisations. "[The Cubans in Venezuela] are persons prepared to indoctrinate," said retired Vice Admiral Rafael Huici, founder of an organisation of retired military officers. (BBC, 22/8/03)

August 24: President Hugo Chávez has vowed to defy a court order prohibiting Cuban doctors from practicing medicine in Venezuela and asked his friend Fidel Castro to send more medical personnel to work in the big-city shantytowns and rural villages. "This is constitutional craziness on a par with ruling that noon is now the same as midnight," Chávez railed in his weekly broadcast to the nation. He vowed to have the three judges of the Caracas lower court removed from the bench for exceeding their competency as well as the limits of common sense and denying citizens their constitutional right to decent health care. Chávez said that at his request Castro had agreed to send more medical personnel until their number rises from under 1,000 in the country at present, to total 5,000, but did not indicate a time frame for their arrival. (EFE, 25/8/03)

August 25: The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights expresses "its continued concern about the deteriorating health of Cuban economist and independent journalist Oscar Espinosa Chepe". (The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 25/8/03)

August 25: Cuba's Deputy Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Raúl Taladrid, is in Brazil to meet with authorities there and discuss bilateral cooperation. Raúl Taladrid and his accompanying delegation met with officials at the Palacio de Guanabara, the main governmental administrative office of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second largest state. Taking part in the meetings were Vice Governor Luiz Paulo Fernandes Conde, as well as the secretaries of economic development and tourism, education, and science and technology. (Radio Habana Cuba, 26/8/03)

August 25: Delegates from 170 countries attended the inauguration of the sixth UN conference on desertification in Cuba as poor countries complained about apathy among the richer ones. Fidel Castro and several of his ministers participated in the opening ceremony and forum, directed by Hama Arba Diallo, of Burkina Faso. The meeting will continue with workshops and round tables to analyze proposals to combat the encroachment of deserts on farmland and residences. (AFP, 26/8/03)

August 25: Reporters Without Borders expressed great concern at the plight of three imprisoned independent journalists - Mario Enrique Mayo, Adolfo Fernández Saínz and Iván Hernández Carrillo - who have been on hunger-strike for the past 10 days in the town of Holguín, in eastern Cuba. They are demanding proper food and medicine for prisoners who have serious illnesses. "Most jailed independent journalists in Cuba, especially Mayo, are being held in bad conditions that gravely endanger their lives," it said. "Their transfer to prisons hundreds of kilometres from their families exposes them even more to illness and lack of food." It called for the release for "humanitarian reasons" of Mayo and other journalists who were ill. Mayo, head of the Félix Varela news agency, and Fernández Saínz and Hernández Carrillo, both of the Patria news agency, stopped eating on 15 August, along with four other political prisoners in Holguín. (Canada News Wire, 25/8/03)

August 26: The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) accepted Cuba's proposal to turn the island into a collaborating center to fight dengue fever in the region. Dr. Jose San Martín, PAHO consultant on the theme, said the regional sanitary organization welcomed Cuba's initiative. Cuba's offer was made during the two-week 8th International Course on Dengue Fever held in Havana's Pedro Kouri Tropical Medicine Institute. (Xinhuanet, 26/8/03)

August 26: The Government of Greece refused Fidel Castro's request to visit Athens during the 2004 Olympic Games, informed the daily "To Wima." "Fidel wants to come, Athens says no", reads the headline quoting a spokesperson from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the spokesperson, Athens cannot ignore the political decisions of the European Union, which reduced substantially the level of diplomatic relations with Havana in the wake of the arrest and sentencing of more than 70 Cuban dissidents last April. (DPA, 26/8/03)

August 27: Cuba will help establish a regional center for the prevention of AIDS and other sexually-transmitted infections in Africa. Under the auspices of the United Nations, Cuba will be responsible for the organization of the centre, which will be dedicated to training health care workers specializing in HIV-AIDS prevention. According to Yoire Ferrer Savigne, a Cuban medical expert working with the United Nations, the objective of the new center will be to do everything possible to stop the terrible AIDS pandemic that is sweeping the African continent. (AIN, 27/8/03)

August 28: The Chilean Chamber of Deputies passed a proposal requesting President Ricardo Lagos to ask Fidel Castro to fulfill the democratic commitment he subscribed to during the VI Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Santiago, in 1996. The document presented by parliamentarians of the Christian Democratic party, and passed by a vast majority, urges Lagos to seek an explanation from the Cuban government for "refusing to carry out democratic elections" during the next Ibero-American Summit. (AFP, 28/8/03)

August 28: Colombian Nobel literature laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez has given the green light for a Cuban production of his only theatrical work, "Diatriba de amor contra un hombre sentado" (Diatribes of Love Against a Seated Man), Cuban filmmaker Pastor Vega revealed. Vega, who will direct the play, told the official Cuban news agency that his wife and muse, actress Deisy Granados, will star in the production, which is scheduled to open soon at the International Cervantes Festival in Guanajuato, Mexico. "Diatriba de amor ..." was written especially for Argentine actress Graciela Dufau, who played the lead when the play premiered. (EFE, 28/8/03)

August 29: Cuban dissident leader Oswaldo Payá appreciated the international support received for his nomination for the Prince of Asturias Award, of Spain. Payá thanked in particular former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. "I just thank Carter for his endorsement because once more he lends his voice in favour of the Cuban people", added Payá. (El Nuevo Herald, 31/8/03)

August 29: Dissidents and international rights groups said that they stood by Cuba's best known rights activist despite accusations that he was a spy for President Fidel Castro's communist government. Foreign diplomats in Havana said they would still trust the information reported by Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, head of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights. "Whether he is a state security agent or not, the figures are accurate and very useful, and we will continue using them," a European diplomat said. (Reuters, 29/8/03)

August 29: Cuba's internationally renowned art festival, the Biennial of Havana, has become the latest victim of soured relations between Europe and the communist island. While the event will be held as planned later this year, it will have to make do with about \$200,000 less than expected, now that three European foundations have withdrawn their support. "It's a heavy blow," Rafael Acosta de Arriba, president of Cuba's National Council of Plastic Arts, acknowledged Friday. The event, featuring about 300 exhibitions around Havana, will now have a budget of about \$156,000, he said. Acosta de Arriba told reporters that the groups withdrawing funds this year include the Prince Claus Foundation, named for the late husband of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. Two other foundations, one Dutch and the other French, also withdrew their aid proposals, he said. (AP, 29/8/03)

August 30: Paraguayan author Augusto Roa Bastos said in an interview with the press that the revolution will not end with the death of Fidel Castro because his strength lies in his ability to prepare for his succession. The author of "Yo, el Supremo," who has known Castro for more than

40 years, said he believed the revolution would "not end with Fidel." "In Cuba, there cannot be hereditary monarchies, but there can certainly be hereditary honesty in the handling of power," said Roa Bastos, 86, who believes that "the revolutionary process in Cuba is in transition" and that "the Cuban revolution is seeking the most effective way to advance the (revolutionary) project." (EFE, 30/8/03)

August 31: Foreign ministers of Gambia, Baboucara Blaise Ismaila, and of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque, signed cooperation agreements to increase bilateral exchanges. (Prensa Latina, 31/8/03)

August 31: Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, arrived in Havana to attend a UN Conference on Desertification and Drought. This is the third time that Venezuela's President visit the island in less that three months. (World Data Service, 1/9/03)

Terrorism

August 1: The European Council of Ministers requested the extradition of an ETA member living on the island by the Cuban government. José Angel Urtiaga Martínez was involved in the kidnapping of Diego Prado and Colón de Carvajal in 1983. (Europa Press, 1/8/03)

August 1: An Arabic television network has aired an audio tape it says was made by a top Al Qaeda official, who warns the US it will pay a high price if it harms any of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. Al Qaeda official Ayman Al Zawahri is considered to be Osama bin Laden's right-hand man. "America has announced it will start putting on trial in front of military tribunals the Muslim detainees at Guantanamo and might sentence them to death," the voice on the tape said. "I swear in the name of God that the crusader America will pay a dear price for any harm it inflicts on any of the Muslim detainees." (ABC Online, 3/8/03)

August 16: Fidel Castro, together with the presidents of eight Latin American countries, signed a declaration in Asunción, Paraguay, pledging to boost their effort to fight terrorism and drug trafficking in the region. The Declaration of Asuncion also urged regional solidarity with the government of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, whose country is plagued by a 40-year-long internal war, news from Asuncion said. (Xinhuanet, 16/8/03)

August 21: The heads of 10 leading law bodies around the world call on the US to give a "fair and lawful trial" to prisoners detained at Guantanamo Bay and be a "beacon of justice in an unjust world". In a letter to the press, law society chairmen and presidents, including those from Britain, France, Sweden, Australia and Canada, express misgivings about the US plan to put foreign prisoners held at Camp Delta in Cuba before partially secret military tribunals without juries. Human rights groups have voiced concern about the treatment and fate of the 650 or so prisoners. (The Guardian, 21/8/03)

August 22: The commander of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp has told the press the US military is hoping to release children it is holding there. A journalist in Guantánamo Bay, says the US's interviews with the three children - aged between 13 and 15 - reveal they may have been coerced into fighting in Afghanistan. General Geoffrey Miller who leads operations at the camp is seeking to have the children released in recognition of their age and co-operation, the journalist says. (BBC, 22/8/03)

August 24: In another sign that the US detention mission at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, is set for the long haul, the military announced it is building a fifth camp to hold more detainees and expand interrogation facilities. Camp V will make room for 100 more detainees, increasing the capacity at the remote naval base in eastern Cuba to 1,100, Lieutenant-Colonel Pamela Hart said in a telephone interview. (Taipei Times, 24/8/03)

August 26: The US Center for Security Policy says that a Russian-built electronic-intelligence

facility in Bejucal, about 20 miles southwest of Havana, is "a terrorist asset". "It gives Castro enormous abilities to conduct information warfare against US assets in space and presents a major threat to space dominance". (The Nation, 26/8/03)

August 27: New maneuvers to free terrorist Luis Posada Carriles and three accomplices are being undertaken in Panama. The four are scheduled to go on trial on charges of planning to assassinate Fidel Castro in November 2000. According to press reports, the Cuban-American National Foundation, based in Miami, is pulling out all the stops to free Luis Posada Carriles, Guillermo Novo Sampol, Pedro Remón Rodríguez and Gaspar Jiménez Escobedo. The four terrorists are being held at El Renacer Prison, located near the Panama Canal, awaiting their hearing that is slated to begin on September 3rd. They were arrested by Panamanian authorities nearly three years ago after it was discovered that they planned to blow up an auditorium with C-4 explosives at the University of Panama, where the Cuban leader was scheduled to speak. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/8/03)

US-Cuba Relations

August 1: The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs has released a new fact sheet on political prisoners in Cuba. (US Department of State, 1/8/03)

August 1: The threat of a military attack by the U.S. against Cuba still exists, but has dissipated in the short term as a result of complications associated with the US campaign in Iraq and pre-election turmoil for President George W. Bush, said in an interview the President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón. (La Jornada, 1/8/03)

August 1: A growing controversy about the fate of 19 Cuban migrants aboard a Coast Guard cutter has prompted a debate within the Bush administration about its policy of repatriating most Cubans intercepted at sea, according to several administration officials. A White House spokesman said the Bush administration was not changing its migration policy. "Our policy is one of a safe, orderly and legal migration," said Scott McClellan. "We expect that policy to be implemented and carried out in a consistent way." The debate is the first serious hint of a split within the administration about the controversial Cuban repatriation policy in effect since 1995, when former President Clinton and the Cuban government agreed to new migration accords. [See also, Exile Community] (The Miami Herald, 2/8/03)

August 3: The 53 Cuban migrants who made it to the Florida Keys have been released into the community. The 53 were released from Krome Detention Center, a spokeswoman for the US Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement said. The 32 men, 19 women, one boy and one girl were spotted on Key Largo. (Sun Sentinel, 4/8/03)

August 5: Seven Cubans -- apparently dissidents and some relatives -- have won a rare chance to be resettled in a third country after the Coast Guard intercepted them at sea, but 12 other people on the same boat were taken back to Cuba. Cuban-American activists and legislators had lobbied the White House for all 19 of the Cubans to be given safe haven because of their ties to the 24th of February Movement, an island dissident organization named in honor of Brothers to the Rescue fliers shot down by Cuban MiGs on February 24, 1996. The group reportedly included at least 10 members of the group and at least two members of the Democratic 30th of November Party and the Confederation of Democratic Cuban Workers. [See also, Exile Community.] (The Miami Herald, 6/8/03)

August 6: Suggesting that the Bush administration is unlikely to make major changes in its Cuban refugee policy, new State Department chief of Latin American affairs Roger F. Noriega said that any dramatic policy shift could invite a massive stampede from the island and a humanitarian tragedy. Asked about the Bush refugee policy, which has come under attack from Cuban exiles who say Washington should stop repatriating would-be refugees following the

execution in Cuba of three people who had hijacked a vessel to flee the island this spring, Noriega stressed that "we remain committed to safe, orderly and legal migration with Cuba." Noriega said he intends to "modernize" the US Radio and TV Marti broadcasts to Cuba through new ways of overcoming the Cuban government's jamming, and to find ways of sending videotapes and publications to the island. (The Miami Herald, 7/8/03)

August 7: Otto Reich, President Bush's chief adviser on Latin America, said that the administration will step up efforts to pressure the Fidel Castro regime, aid dissidents and hasten the political transformation of the island. The new measures will include boosting US radio and television broadcasts to Cuba and seeking international support for Cuban dissidents, Reich said in an interview between meetings in Miami with Cuban-American leaders. I know that President Bush is interested in doing more to accelerate the process of change in Cuba, and it's safe to say that in the next few weeks and months you will see some additional steps," Reich said. "It's been very difficult for this president to implement this policy for Cuba and the Western Hemisphere because up to this week he was denied the existence of his complete Latin American team. You are going to see an acceleration now that we finally have a team in place." Reich's main mission was to reassure community leaders that the Bush administration will toughen its policies rather than merely carry out those of former President Bill Clinton. (Sun Sentinel, 7/8/03)

August 7: New Jersey Democratic Congressman Bob Menéndez and Florida Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen announced that they plan to introduce legislation to posthumously honor fellow Cuban-American Celia Cruz, the "Queen of Salsa," with a Congressional Gold Medal. Senator Jon S. Corzine (Democrat-New Jersey) introduced a similar initiative in the Senate shortly after Cruz died at her home in Fort Lee, New Jersey, losing her battle with brain cancer. (EFE, 7/8/03)

August 7: Confessions by two of six admitted Cuban hijackers should not be used at their trial because FBI agents forgot to give them their Miranda warnings until afterward, a judge recommended. But US Magistrate John O'Sullivan said edited summaries of confessions by the other four defendants can be admitted at a trial scheduled to start next month in Key West, where the Cubana Airlines DC-3 landed March 19. (The Miami Herald, 8/8/03)

August 8: Ruling out tighter sanctions against Cuba, the Bush administration is pushing for a democratic transition on the island through increased international pressure and more robust support for Cuba's dissidents. The administration dispatched three officials to Miami in hopes of coming up with fresh ideas for bringing about a democratic Cuba. They have been consulting with elected leaders of the Cuban-American community. The US delegation dispatched to Miami consists of Otto Reich, White House special envoy for Latin America; Dan Fisk, a top State Department Cuba specialist; and Adolfo Franco, an assistant administrator at the Agency for International Development. (AP, 8/8/03)

August 8: Cuban nominees in the forthcoming Latin Grammys may miss next month's awards ceremony in Miami because of visa problems. "We have not received any visa applications from Cuban citizen Grammy nominees in connection with the Latin Grammy Awards ceremony," a US State Department spokeswoman said. "Visa applications received from award nominees to attend the Latin Grammy Awards are adjudicated in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations governing the issuance of non-immigrant visas," the spokeswoman said. The three acts involved are reported to be Ibrahim Ferrer, of Buena Vista Social Club fame, Afro-Cuban jazz star Chucho Valdés and the salsa band Los Van Van. [For more on this, see Exile Community.] (BBC, 9/8/03)

August 8: A top Bush administration official said the Cuban government may have orchestrated a recent boat hijacking to drive a wedge between South Florida's Cuban Americans. "Look at the result, at the impact that it has caused this community," Otto Reich, US special envoy to the Western hemisphere, said in an interview. In the wake of last month's hijacking of the Gaviota, a Cuban government-owned boat, Cuban Americans heaped blame on the Bush administration and Cuban-American legislators for returning the would-be immigrants to the island. "This was a million-dollar operation -- you couldn't buy that kind of discord," Reich said. (The Miami Herald,

9/8/03)

August 11: President George W. Bush will include \$7 million in next year's fiscal budget aimed at strengthening the growing civil society in Cuba. Submitted to the Presidency by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the proposal will be submitted to Congress for appropriation during its next session in October. (El Nuevo Herald, 11/8/03)

August 11: A group of Florida Republican state representatives has drafted a letter warning President Bush he risks losing their support for the 2004 election if he does not adopt a tougher Cuba policy. The letter echoes demands expressed recently by other Cuban Americans: revise current migration policy; indict Fidel Castro for the Brothers to the Rescue shoot-down; ensure that TV Martí is seen by people in Cuba; and increase assistance to dissidents on the island. "We feel it is our responsibility as Republican elected officials to inform you that unless substantial progress on the above-mentioned issues occurs rapidly, we fear the historic and intense support from Cuban American voters for Republican federal candidates, including yourself, will be jeopardized," reads the letter, signed by 13 members of the state's Republican Hispanic Caucus. (The Miami Herald, 11/8/03)

August 11: Two Republican state legislators who signed a letter to President Bush urging him to get tougher on Cuba or face a loss of Cuban American political support said they received phone calls from Bush staffers indicating an eventual positive response. State Representative David Rivera, who helped draft the letter signed by 13 Hispanic lawmakers, said a Bush administration official called him to talk about news reports of the document. Rivera declined to identify the person or the topic, but said, "I am optimistic that positive news is forthcoming on US-Cuba policy." State Representative Marco Rubio, another of the signers, said he also got a call from a White House staffer whom he wouldn't identify. "They said, 'You can be sure the right people, the decision makers, are going to know about this today,'" Rubio said. (The Miami Herald, 12/8/03)

August 11: The United States said Cuba should allow international supervision of its treatment of 75 Cuban dissidents jailed in March and serving long prison sentences, claiming that at least two of them are seriously ill from inhumane treatment. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker asked that organizations such as the Red Cross or Doctors Without Frontiers be allowed to supervise the prisoners' conditions. "The United States once again expresses its deep concern over the ill health and poor treatment of Cuba's political prisoners, in particular" that of journalists Raúl Rivero and Oscar Espinosa, Reeker said. (AFP, 11/8/03)

August 11: Five Cuban immigrants waited at sea without a country and three more sat in jail awaiting word on their destinies. The people, taken into custody as they made a dash for US soil through the Lake Worth Inlet, await word on whether prosecutors will charge the man who operated the boat and whether immigration officials will forcibly return those who never made landfall to Cuba. The three men who made it to Singer Island soil remain at the Palm Beach County Jail, while the three men, one woman and operator of the boat - all of whom never touched soil - are being held on a US Coast Guard cutter at sea. Under the so-called "wet-foot, dry-foot" immigration policy, Cubans caught at sea are kept at sea and generally sent home. Those who make it to land are generally allowed to remain in the US. (AFP, 13/8/03)

August 12: Former USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev will go to Miami to discuss his longstanding interest in Cuba and offer historic perspectives on US policy toward the island at the upcoming Florida National Summit on Cuba. Gorbachev will join a host of Cuban-American and elected leaders from the state of Florida, former American government officials, current members of Congress, heads of the two major international human rights organizations and international representatives to discuss how changing dynamics affect now and future US policy toward Cuba. The meeting will take place in October. (PRNewswire, 12/03)

August 12: A South Florida man the US government says is a Cuban spy will be deported. Juan Emilio Aboy's residency status was already revoked. The Office of Homeland Security made the

final decision to deport him. Officials claim he had links to a Cuban spy network and planned to infiltrate U.S. central command. They also say Aboy lied when he applied for residency. There's no word yet on where Aboy will be sent. (Click10.Com, 13/8/03)

August 13: Democratic presidential contender Howard Dean is proposing to move toward a goal of opening trade with Cuba, while leaving in place sanctions for human rights violations. Dean has run an aggressive grass-roots campaign for Iowa's leadoff precinct caucuses, and he is seeking to build on that effort by linking his rural ties in Vermont to Iowa's heavily agricultural base. (AP, 13/8/03)

August 16: Fidel Castro drew 10,000 people to a Paraguayan stadium for a speech blasting the United States. Castro attended the inauguration of Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte and made his speech just before he was to return to Cuba. Castro, who turned 77, at times looked weary and seemed to struggle for words as he attacked US government policies and sought South American support for his communist state. Turning to the crowd, Castro likened the United States to the "Rome of antiquity" and outlined arguments defending his communist state. (AP, 16/8/03)

August 13: During an interview conducted by Enrique Gratas of TV Network Univisión, US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, said it is time for Fidel Castro to leave Cuba's leadership. "It's time for him to go. It's his 77th birthday and I was hoping, but I knew better, that perhaps he would announce his retirement." Powell added that it's not for the US to install democracy in Cuba: "It is for the Cuban people, as they have increasingly demonstrated to their leaders, who want a better life. There is now an opposition movement in Cuba. People are signing petitions saying give us a chance to honestly determine who should be leading this country". (US Department of State, 13/8/03)

August 14: A Naples rancher, J.P. Wright & Co., announced that it had delivered 148 dairy cattle to the island in what the firm said was the largest successful US shipment of cows to Cuba since the communist revolution. The shipment, the latest of several summer deliveries, raised to nearly 450 the number of US cattle that have been sent to Cuba since Congress in 2000 exempted US food and agricultural products from the overall trade embargo, provided Cuba pays cash. (The Miami Herald, 15/8/03)

August 17: One of Cuba's male gymnasts defected at the world championships after the team competition finished. Michel Brito Ferrer planned to compete in the meet so he could travel to the United States and then defect, according to his uncle, Ramon Ferrer, who lives in Los Angeles. (Sun Sentinel, 18/8/03)

August 18: A second Cuban male gymnast defected at the World Gymnastics Championships at Anaheim, California, joining a teammate who left the Cuban delegation a day earlier. Charles Leon Tamayo joined teammate Michel Brito Ferrer, whose uncle brought Brito Ferrer to his Los Angeles home. (The Miami Herald, 18/8/03)

August 18: A delegation of farmers and businesspeople from the US state of Alabama are in the Cuban capital to become acquainted with trade and commercial possibilities with the island. Speaking with reporters in Havana, Ron Sparks, Alabama's Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries and leader of the visiting delegation, said that they planned to negotiate the sales and delivery of agricultural commodities from Alabama producers to potential customers in Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/8/03)

August 19: The United States dismissed published allegations that a leading Cuban dissident is actually an informant for the communist government, calling them an attempt to divide opponents of Fidel Castro's regime. The State Department implied that the allegations against Elizardo Sanchez could not be trusted, noting that they had been made in a book authored by "Cuban government journalists." "To us, it's another example that the regime is seeking to create

divisions in the opposition by pitting those dedicated to real reform one against the other," spokesman Richard Boucher said. "In so doing, it's trying to distract people from the real problem, which is the Cuban government itself," he told reporters. (AFP, 19/8/03)

August 19: In September, the Bush administration will announce that the signal for TV-Marti will be beamed into Cuba via satellite. The satellite delivery system announcement is an attempt to answer harsh criticism by Cuban exile power brokers and politicians that TV-Marti is a failure. They charge the US Government has been unable to figure out how to penetrate the Castro government's electronic jamming of TV-Marti's over-the-air signal. (NBC, 19/8/03)

August 20: Cuba has told the United States that an Iranian diplomatic facility in or near Havana was the source of the jamming that disrupted US Farsi-language satellite broadcasts to Iran last month, the State Department said. In an unusual display of cooperation between the Cold War enemies, Havana appears to have actually acted on pledges to halt the interference which had prompted a formal protest from Washington, it said. "It has ceased," said Jo-Anne Prokopowicz, a department spokeswoman. After denying that it was responsible for the jamming but pledging to investigate the US complaints in mid-July, Cuba told the United States that it had found the source and had acted to stop it, she said. (AFP, 21/7/03)

August 21: A new group of young people from the United States has arrived in Havana to begin studying medicine in Cuba. Sixteen youth from a number of different US states will study at the Latin American School of Medicine. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/8/03)

August 21: A Cuban general and two fighter pilots have been indicted in the United States in the shooting down of two civilian planes in 1996 over the Florida straits, federal prosecutors announced Thursday. The four men aboard the planes were killed. The three accused men are in Cuba, and extradition is impossible since no diplomatic relations exist between Cuba and the United States. General Rubén Martínez Puente, who was then head of the Cuban air force, and pilots Lorenzo Alberto Pérez Pérez and Francisco Pérez Pérez were named in the indictment. They remain in Cuba. (Houston Chronicle, 22/8/03)

August 21: Cuba signed agreements with Alabama and its port of Mobile to start importing food later this year, adding to a growing list of US states trading with the communist-run island nation. Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries Commissioner Ron Sparks, heading a state delegation to Cuba, called it "the first step toward establishing a permanent trade relation" with Cuba. The president of the Cuban food import agency Alimport, Pedro Alvarez, said Cuba was set to buy \$10 million worth of chicken and dairy products. (Reuters, 22/8/03)

August 23: Fidel Castro predicted that new US government attempts to use a satellite to broadcast TV Martí signals to the island would fail. "I read something about that, and I was laughing," Castro said, answering questions from reporters at a book presentation by visiting Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos. "Up to now, experience has shown that it has gone badly," Castro said of earlier efforts to thwart the Cuban government's jamming of TV Martí's signal. (AP, 23/8/03)

August 23: A third Cuban athlete defected at the World Gymnastics Championships, joining two male teammates who left the Cuban delegation earlier this month. Janerky de la Peña left her team's hotel in Anaheim, attorney Luis Carrillo said. De La Peña was picked up by the uncle of teammate Michel Brito Ferrer. Teammate Charles Leon Tamayo also defected. All three athletes are staying at the Los Angeles home of Ferrer's uncle, Ramon Ferrer. The three are seeking asylum and plan to present themselves to US immigration authorities, Carrillo said. (AP, 24/8/03)

August 25: The United States said it will make it harder for Cuban diplomats in Washington to buy or sell cars, retaliating against them because Cuba imposes similar restrictions on US diplomats in Havana. The State Department said it would bar staff of the Cuban Interests Section at the Swiss Embassy in Washington and their families from buying cars. They would, however,

be allowed to keep cars they already own, import cars from an overseas vendor and buy vehicles from other diplomats or embassies. In a notice published in the US Federal Register, the State Department said the Cuban diplomats may also rent cars from rental companies for up to 30 days, effectively depriving them of the lower rates that might come from long-term leases. "The primary effect of these terms and conditions (...) is to restrict the ability of the Cuban Interests Section and its personnel to purchase, lease, or sell any vehicle in the United States," the notice said. (Sun Sentinel, 26/8/03)

August 25: Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean says he is shifting his views on the trade embargo with Cuba. Speaking to reporters during a four-day national campaign swing, Dean said he supports rolling back the embargo in order to encourage human-rights advancements -- but citing Fidel Castro's recent crackdowns on dissidents, says that in recent months he has become convinced that "we can't do it right now." (The Miami Herald, 26/8/03)

August 27: Politicians who favor a change in US policy toward Cuba are getting new ammunition from the travel industry. Still struggling to recover from the effects of September 11 and the economy's downturn, the travel industry is mounting an aggressive lobbying campaign to get restrictions on travel to Cuba lifted when Congress returns in the fall. The industry argues that the island nation is a potential source of sorely needed revenues that would boost both the travel business and the US economy. (AP, 27/8/03)

August 27: The US Coast Guard said that it repatriated 33 Cubans caught at sea as they sought to flee the country to the US, most of them aboard an overloaded go-fast boat. The Cubans were taken to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, aboard a US vessel, the US Coast Guard said. (The Straits Times, 29/8/03)

August 27: Former President Jimmy Carter has endorsed the nomination of Cuban opposition leader Oswaldo Payá to receive the prestigious Prince of Asturias Award for Concord. The award is given by the Prince of Asturias Foundation, established by the Spanish monarchy, to recognize those who contribute to fraternity, the struggle against injustice and the defense of liberty. "Oswaldo Payá is a man of courage who speaks out for all Cuban citizens to have a voice in their country's future," Carter said in a written statement issued from Atlanta. "His leadership of the Varela Project and Christian commitment to human rights deserve international recognition." (The Miami Herald, 29/8/03)

August 28: The first Conference on travel between the United States and Cuba will take place in October at the Mexican resort of Cancun, in the southeastern state of Quintana Roo, Cuban tourism officials said. The restrictions on travel to Cuba by US citizens will be discussed and the need for joint efforts and exchanges of ideas on improving the situation will be addressed at the meeting, which will also discuss the possibility of organizing expositions on Cuba's tourist destinations. (Xinhuanet, 28/8/03)

August 28: An American Indian group awarded its highest honor for exceptional warriors to Fidel Castro -- the first time that the "Eagle Feather" has been bestowed on a non-native of the United States, a Cuban news agency reported. Daniel Cheng Yang, leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM) youth group, presented the award to Castro in Havana, along with a declaration honoring "the man who represents respect, success, honor and bravery," Cuba's official National Information Agency said. During his visit, Cheng also condemned the US economic blockade against the communist-governed island and expressed the Indian organization's solidarity with five Cuban spies held in US prisons, the news agency said. (The Miami Herald, 29/8/03)

August 28: The Bush administration plans to announce in the next few weeks a new set of Cuba initiatives to undermine the regime of Fidel Castro, the State Department's senior diplomat on Latin America said. "We are reviewing where we are in meeting the president's commitment to promote democratic change on the island," Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, said in an interview. "Right now we are doing an inventory, looking for concrete,

specific, achievable objectives," Mr. Noriega said. He refused to specify what the package would include, but said his office was in consultations with other parts of the government including South Florida's representatives on Capitol Hill, trying to find ways promote change in Cuba. (The Washington Times, 29/8/03)

August 29: California businessmen and Cuban officials signed an agreement in Havana that will soon allow sales to the island of \$10 million in food products and medical equipment. The document was signed by Barry Sedlik, CEO of the World Trade Center Association Los Angeles/Long Beach, and Pedro Alvarez, director of Cuba's state-owned Alimport. In a press conference, Sedlik said he was focusing especially on gradually increasing mutual exchanges with Cuba. (EFE, 29/8/03)

August 31: After months of planning, football teams from Bonita Vista and La Jolla high schools finally set foot on the tarmac of Havana's Jose Martí Airport. Their arrival marked the beginning of a stay that will culminate in the first American football game played in Cuba since 1958. (Union-Tribune, 1/9/03)

August 31: The Coast Guard said it repatriated 34 Cuban migrants who were picked up at sea in two separate incidents. All the migrants were taken to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba. The first group of three migrants was spotted on a raft about 60 miles south of Key West. The second group of 31 migrants was found on a boat 21 miles southwest of Elbow Cay, Bahamas. Three people suspected of smuggling in the second group were being processed by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Coast Guard said. (The Miami Herald, 31/8/03)

August 31: Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, a Democratic candidate for president who has campaigned heavily in Florida for cash and votes, appeared to shift his stance on the trade embargo with Cuba, telling a national television audience that he now supports keeping sanctions in place. Kerry's remarks, delivered on NBC's Meet the Press, seemed to contradict statements he made during a 2000 interview with The Boston Globe that a reevaluation of the embargo was "way overdue" and that the only reason Cuba has been treated differently than China and Russia is the "politics of Florida." Kerry called that "an honest statement," but when NBC's Tim Russert asked whether he endorsed lifting sanctions he replied: "Not unilaterally, not now, no." (The Miami Herald, 1/9/03)