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Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Angry demonstrations organized by Cuban authorities are staged outside the homes of dissidents. One of two Cuban ministers of government is "relieved from duty". Permanent commissions of the National Assembly of the People's Power begin preparatory debates prior to the ordinary parliamentary session.

Economy: Cuba's sugar output is headed for another disastrous year. Cuba modernizes its nickel plants.

Foreign Affairs: Fidel Castro meets with more than 20 leaders and high-ranking dignitaries from Latin America and the Caribbean community during the first graduation of students from the Latin American School of Medicine. Cuba and Panama restore diplomatic ties. Fidel Castro and Mexican authorities exchange statements on the smuggling of Cubans through Mexico.

Security: Two delegations of Venezuelan militaries visit Havana. The Venezuelan president says Venezuela would come to Cuba's defense if the United States invades the island.

US-Cuba Relations: A US appeals court overturns the convictions of five Cubans sentenced on spy-related charges. US Defense Secretary accuses Venezuela and Cuba of trying to destabilize Bolivia. Cuba purchases \$30 million in Nebraska agricultural products. Thirty-one Cuban migrants disappear at sea trying to reach the US coast. The Bush administration backs away from claims that Cuba has an offensive biological weapons effort.



Domestic Affairs

August 1: A one-hour selection of the best of Telesur will be broadcasted daily by Cuba's Educational 2 television channel. Telesur, which is short for "Nueva Televisión del Sur" (New Television of the South), intends to face what its director has called "the hegemonic world view of its counterparts in the US and Europe". The satellite TV channel has its headquarters in Caracas, Venezuela. During August, a selection of Telesur programs will be broadcasted in Cuba from 3:00-4:00 p.m. (*AIN, AFP, 1/8/05*)

August 2: Relatives of Cuban dissident René Gómez Manzano, who was arrested after demanding the release of the regime's political prisoners, expressed their concern that he will be charged under a "gag law" carrying penalties of up to 20 years in prison. Jorge Gómez Manzano, René's brother, told the press that the police officer overseeing the case confirmed to him that "the accusation will be in accord with Law 88" or the Law for Protection of National Independence and the Economy, approved by Cuba's rubber-stamp parliament in 1999. If convicted under the provisions of Law 88, Gómez, 61, a lawyer and one of the leaders of the outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society, could be sentenced to 20 years behind bars. (*EFE*, 2/8/05)

August 2: A large security operation was implemented in Santa Clara during the visit of the Secretary for Human Rights and Political Affairs of the European Union's Embassy in Havana to the residence of a member of the opposition. Ms. Silvia Benamu arrived in Santa Clara to meet with a group of opposition leaders while several hundreds of paramilitaries were deployed in the area. Nine human rights activists were intercepted by the paramilitaries while still at home as well as on their way to the meeting. Ms. Benamu told her hosts that she "had not seen such a disproportionate security deployment" in the course of her trip. "I counted no less than four hundred persons and I could photograph some of them," she said. (*Cubamet*, 2/8/05)

August 3: Three dissidents detained in a police roundup last month will be tried on charges of working to undermine Cuba's communist government, a veteran activist said. Dissident attorney René Gómez Manzano, independent journalist Oscar Mario González and political activist Julio César López will face the Law for the Protection of Cuba's National Independence, said Elizardo Sánchez of the non-governmental Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. The three men told relatives they were informed of the charges by Cuban authorities. It was not clear when their trials would begin. The law, enacted in 1999 to rein in the political opposition, carries sentences of up to 20 years. It's the same law that was applied to most of the 75 opponents arrested in a highly publicized crackdown in March 2003. (*AP*, 3/8/05)

August 4: Sponsored by the UN, a Cuban team of researchers has begun the first stage of an urban environmental study in the provinces of Santa Clara, Cienfuegos and Holguín. The study, previously carried out in the city of Havana, investigates such areas as environmental hygiene, water, and biodiversity along with economic, social, historical and population factors. The investigation, structured in three stages, includes a public survey in order to validate results and come up with possible solutions to problems encountered. The end goal of the study is to achieve healthier living conditions and more sustainable urban development with the cooperation of local organizations, state institutions and local populations. (*AIN*, 4/8/05)

August 4: Two teenagers swimming in seas off eastern Cuba discovered a sunken US ship from the late 19th century, possibly a remnant of the Spanish-American War, a maritime expert said. Bronze nails, chains and old-fashioned containers were among artifacts inside the ship, said Nicasio Vina, director of Santiago de Cuba's Investigative Center of Ecosystems and Biodiversity. (*AP*, 4/8/05)

August 5: The European Union's stated commitment to increasing dialogue with all sectors of Cuban society was put to the test in Havana, and the appearance of a pro-Castro crowd outside the bloc's mission prompted EU diplomats to cancel a meeting with relatives of political prisoners. EU officials in Havana said the encounter was called off to avoid any attempts to garner some kind of "political use" from the meeting. Relatives of several dissidents arrested on July 22 came to the EU office in Havana's Miramar neighborhood accompanied by opposition figures Marta Beatriz Roque and Felix Bonne, the leaders of the illegal "Assembly to Promote Civil Society." Minutes later, government supporters also arrived at the doors of the European delegation to insult the dissidents and shout revolutionary slogans. The European officials then decided not to hold the meeting and released a communique in which they expressed their "regret" over what had happened and announced that the visits of arrested dissidents' relatives scheduled for Friday had been cancelled. Several demonstrations by pro-Castro mobs against dissidents also were reported in the cities of Placetas and Santa Clara, in the center of the island. (*EFE*, *El Nuevo Herald*, 6/8/05)

August 5: Key opposition figure Oswaldo Paya, one of the island's highest-profile democracy advocates, denounced what he called an unprecedented "wave of repression" against members of his organization. Over the past year, and especially since January, "the repressive campaign against the members of the MCL and its collaborators has reached a level never before seen," said Paya in a communique released in Havana. He referred to his organization, the Christian Liberation Movement, known by its Spanish acronym MCL. The repression, he added, was being directed at the signers of the Varela Project - a constitutional reform initiative pushed by Paya and signed by about 25,000 people - participants in the National Dialogue, an MCL dialogue process, and the "spring prisoners in Cuba," which is how the MCL leader refers to the dissidents convicted in March 2003. Paya also complained about threats against and the "blackmail" of MCL members, and he said he regretted the deterioration of prison conditions for the dozens of dissidents still being held by the regime. (*EFE*, 5/8/05)

August 6: Ibrahim Ferrer, the mild-mannered singer of the Buena Vista Social Club group that took him from shining shoes to world fame late in life, died in Havana, his manager said. He was 78. The Grammy winner known for his trademark cap and gray mustache died of multiple organ failure after returning ill from a European tour, manager Daniel Florestan said. He was lifted from obscurity by the Grammy-winning 1997 Buena Vista Social Club album recorded by a group of vintage Cuban musicians brought together by Texas guitarist Ry Cooder. Ferrer launched a solo career and released records in 1999 and 2003, winning another Grammy and two Latin Grammys, including one in 2000 for best new artist at the age of 72. During his latest tour in Europe, which took him to the Montreux Jazz Festival, Britain, the Netherlands, Austria, France and Spain, Ferrer sang a collection of boleros he was recording and planned to release next year. (*Reuters*, 7/8/05)

August 6: The blind lawyer and president of the Cuban Foundation for Human Rights, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, was arrested and taken to a police station in the city of Florida, province of Camaguey. González Leiva was taking part of a gathering of 50 activists who were celebrating an assembly to elect the board members of the Foundation. A repressive force comprised of approximately fifty policemen and State Security agents suddenly appeared at the farm where the meeting was taking place. The activist remained under arrest during six hours, and was later transferred to and released in Ciego de Avila. He was accused of committing illegal acts, and was handed an official document forbidding him to ever set foot again in Florida. (*Cubanet, Martinoticias*, 8/9/05)

August 7: Noel Nicola, one of the founders of modern Cuban trova music, died in Havana, the island's state-run media reported. He was 58. Newspapers did not state the cause of death, saying only that the singer and composer passed away. Nicola, who was born in the Cuban capital October 7, 1946, came from a family of musicians. He was composing songs by the time he was 13 years old. His first onstage performance came in 1968, next to Cuban greats Silvio Rodriguez and Pablo Milanés at Havana's Casa de las Americas. The trio and several others founded the modern Cuban trova movement. Modern Cuban trovas recall American protest songs of the 1960s and 1970s that focused attention on social problems through musical storytelling. Among Nicola's most well-known songs are "Por la vida juntos," or "For Our Life Together," and "Es más, te perdono," or "Furthermore, I forgive you." Nicola performed in more than 30 countries in Europe, Africa, and North and South America. He also spent some of his time composing music for movies and the theater. (*AP*, 8/8/05)

August 8: Cuba is experiencing one of its hottest summers in the past half-century, according to the government meteorological institute, which also noted an increase in the surface temperature of the Atlantic Ocean. Last month was the fourth-hottest July since 1951, the official daily Granma reported, citing a report from the institute. Forecasters expect more record high temperatures in August, especially in Cuba's drought-stricken eastern provinces. This summer's combination of soaring temperatures, high humidity and light winds has led to increased discomfort for residents of the Communist-ruled island, made worse by an ongoing electricity shortage blamed for blackouts of up to 10 hours a day in Havana and other cities. (*EFE*, 8/8/05)

August 8: With Fidel Castro officiating, 505 students from 49 nations became the first graduating class of the International School of Physical Education and Sports (EIEFD), the only one of its kind in the world. The noteworthy event was held at Havana's Convention Palace, attended by families of the graduates, diplomats, officials and members of the Cuban Baseball team, gold medal winners at the Athens '04 Olympics. The students from all over the world began studying at EIEFD in September 2000, although the school was officially inaugurated on February 23, 2001. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/05)

August 11: Independent journalist Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero was given a seven-month in prison sentence by a municipal tribunal in the Isle of Pines. Gutierrez Romero had been arrested during July's opposition demonstrations. She was convicted of crimes of resistance and disobedience. During the trial, the independent journalist denounced the violence perpetrated against her by the police on July 14th, and reiterated that she had the right to denounce the abuses she had been subjected to. When the verdict was read, the tribunal pointed out that Gutierrez Romero didn't participate in any of the activities of the revolutionary organizations in the island. The trial took place under a heavy police operative. (*Puente Informativo*, 12/8/05)

August 11: A mob organized by Cuban authorities congregated in front of the home of oppositionist leader Martha Beatriz Roque to impede a meeting of leaders of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. The mob, comprised of mostly the same individuals that gathered days before in front of the home of Humberto Guerra Perruguria, repeatedly pushed Felix Bonne Carcasses so as to impede his entry into the aisle that leads to Martha's apartment. They also impeded the entry to Jacqueline Montes De Oca, not even allowing her to pick up some clothes she had left in the apartment. Cuban political police officials delivered lunch and refreshments to the mob, that for hours yelled out obscenities, many of which were personally offensive, against the dissidents. (*Europa Press*, 11/8/05)

August 12: Supporters of Fidel Castro staged angry demonstrations outside the homes of two dissidents in response to the Cuban leader's call to block opposition activity. About 100 people chanted "Fidel, Fidel" outside the home of leading dissident Vladimiro Roca and prevented members of his Todos Unidos (All United) opposition group from entering the house for a meeting. The angry crowd accused Roca of being a "mercenary" on the payroll of the US government and shouted "lackey" and "worm," frequent epithets for opponents of Cuba's Communist government. "The only meeting here is ours," Juan Laguna, a 70-year-old Communist Party militant. Speakers heckled Roca from a microphone and speaker set up across the street for the rally, which was organized by party officials using walkie-talkies. (*Reuters*, 12/8/05)

August 12: More than 100 people or so railed against government opponents outside the building where Leon Padron and Gisela Padron, wife of jailed dissident Hector Palacios, both live. The demonstrators insulted the democracy advocates with shouts of "sellout," "worm" and other pejoratives. They also sang the praises of Fidel Castro, who has governed for the past 46 years, on the eve of his 79th birthday. Also, Elizardo Sanchez, leader of the illegal Human Rights Commission, said he could not attend a meeting at Vladimiro Roca's house because the mob wouldn't let him through. Sanchez said political repression is increasing in Cuba. "It's the government's way of trying to intimidate not only those of us citizens who have the dignity to say what we think and express our opinions. It's a message of intimidation to the entire population in response to the crisis the country is undergoing," Delgado said. (*EFE, Reuters*, 12/8/05)

August 13: Cuba honored Fidel Castro's 79th birthday, revisiting his nearly five decades in power on the communist island with tributes in state-run newspapers and documentaries. Dozens of Cuban children danced and cut an enormous blue-and-white cake for Castro -- the world's longest-ruling head of government -- while front pages bore his photo and loving words. "We celebrate as your own, with the affection and immense admiration that children feel for the most noble, wise and brave father," a letter to the "Comandante" said on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma. Signed "your people," the letter called the president the "dearly loved Fidel" and highlighted his "special sensitivity for others" and "guerrilla spirit of just ideals." A documentary shown in an Old Havana theater displayed

some of Castro's most impassioned public speeches, from his assumption of power in early 1959, through the Cuban Missile Crisis and fall of the Berlin Wall, to more recent remarks justifying socialism against the threats of capitalist superpowers like the United States. (*Reuters*, 13/8/05)

August 13: A mob organized by Cuban authorities congregated in front of the home of oppositionist leader Martha Beatriz Roque to celebrate Fidel Castro's birthday. The mob, comprised of mostly the same individuals that gathered two days before in front of Roque's house to prevent a meeting, sang "happy birthday" to Castro and yelled out obscenities to Roque. A woman friend of Roque and her two-years old son were prevented to get to Roque's house by the participants in the demonstration. (*Cubamet*, 14/8/05)

August 15: In Cuba, people are getting divorced for any reason: incompatible personalities, jealousy, conflicts with mothers-in-law, sex, separations due to excessive work or alcohol and even plans to marry a foreigner. This is a fact in Cuba on the threshold of the 21st century. A review of the divorce rate after 1960 shows that separations have been growing over the years. They moved from 3,472 in 1960 to 7,892 in 1964 and exceeded 20,000 in 1969. There were over 30,000 in 1982. The number curtailed until 1986, when they totaled 32,867. The highest figure (64,934) was seen in 1993, when the rate was six separations every 1,000 inhabitants. The latest figures that are available correspond to 2003, when there were 33,851 separations, according to the Cuban Population Yearbook. The island exhibits one of the highest divorce rates in Latin America, it stressed. (*SEM*, 15/8/05)

August 15: Mobs organized by Cuban authorities demonstrated in front of the houses of at least five members of the dissident Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País". Shouting to the dissidents in a threatening and offensive way, the groups blocked off the entrance to the houses, not allowing anybody to enter or leave their homes. Anaika Paneca Román, vice president of the dissident Party, said that a young man arrived in a show of solidarity to her place and was brutally beaten by the mob and arrested by the police. Anaika has a seven-years old daughter who didn't stop crying during the counterdemonstration by Fidel Castro's followers. According to Anaika, parallel pogroms were being held in front of the homes of Raiza Martínez Llerena, Reinel Sánchez Calvo, Antonio Batista, Idalmis Balbuena Santos and Mirta Villanueva Almeida, all members of the Democratic Party 30 of November "Frank País". (*Puente Informativo*, 15/8/05)

August 15: The moderate Cuban social-democratic opposition group Arco Progresista defended dialogue, rejected government-sanctioned harassment of dissidents and warned of the risk of violence on the island. "We clearly and energetically reject the premeditated acts of verbal and psychological violence orchestrated against peaceful men and women," said the group - whose name means "Progressive Spectrum" - in a communique released in Havana. "The Cuban government must not continue overestimating its ability to use coercive measures for social control or calling for the use of violence," said the communique signed by Manuel Cuesta Morua, the organization's spokesman. The Cuban government, the document added, "must seek appropriate formulas to fight in a civilized manner against Cubans' unease and democratic demands." The past few weeks have seen several "acts of patriotic reaffirmation," as the government calls the street demonstrations against dissidents in which hundreds of people have participated. (*EFE*, 15/8/05)

August 17: Cuban dissident Julio Valdes Guevara, the first to be released among the 75 dissidents jailed in a March 2003 crackdown, is asking for international help in convincing Cuban authorities to allow him to emigrate to the United States, his sister said. He has been attempting to emigrate for 13 months. "We are asking for the international community's assistance and solidarity to help us convince the Cuban authorities to allow Julio to leave," his sister, Matilde Jerez Guevara, told reporters. Valdes, 52, was sentenced to 20 years in prison but was the first of a group of 14 dissidents to be released for health reasons on April 15, 2004. According to his sister, Valdes has chronic kidney problems and has been hospitalized twice since his release in the city of Manzanillo, in eastern Cuba, where he lives. (*AFP*, 17/8/05)

August 17: Lawyer René Gómez Manzano, one of 15 oppositionists arrested in July who remain in prison, began a "hunger and thirst strike" in protest for official regulations to family visits, reported opposition leader Marta Beatriz Roque. Roque said that Gómez Manzano's actions were in response to severe restrictions enforced during his conversation with his brother Jorge while the latter was visiting him in prison. (*Notimex*, 17/8/05)

August 19: The Cuban government has confiscated the land where an unprecedented gathering of Cuban dissidents took place earlier this year, an activist said. Felix Bonne and his wife, who hosted the gathering on a lot next to their home, received a letter signed by an official from the agriculture ministry, said Martha Beatriz Roque, who also helped organize the gathering. The letter said the land was not being used sufficiently, Roque said. "We feel even more repressed, more crushed, than usual," Roque told the press. "But we are not going to back off, not one millimeter." According to Roque, Bonne's family will be allowed to continue living in their house next to the lot. (*The New York Times*, 19/8/05)

August 23: Three new additions bring to 87 the total number of radio broadcasting stations operating in Cuba, a cultural medium that was introduced in the island 83 years ago. According to experts, the figure is high for a population of 11.2 million inhabitants, and of particular social relevance, as newspaper and magazine editions have decreased dramatically since the onset of the economic crisis in 1990. (*AFP*, 23/8/05)

August 23: Visiting Havana for two concerts, member Mick Huncknall of the British rock group "Simply Red" described Cuba as "a unique country in the world." Huncknall, the band's vocalist and composer, said he was surprised by the lack of commercial ads along Havana's streets. "It's different to the rest of the world, where all the cities seem to be the same," he added. Simply Red is in Cuba to shoot and record a DVD at the Great Theater of Havana. (*AIN*, 23/8/05)

August 23: The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) celebrated its 45th anniversary and its important contributions to the country and the Revolution. In a message to Cuban women published by Granma daily, FMC president Vilma Espín said the Federation, with over four million members, has actively participated in defending socialism and fighting for gender equality. Espín, 75, the wife of Raul, Fidel Castro's brother and second in command in Cuba's nomenclature, has been the FMC president since its origin in 1960. (*Prensa Latina*, *AFP*, 23/8/05)

August 24: Esther Germán Valdés, wife of political prisoner René Montes de Oca Martija, told the press that Housing Institute authorities ordered her to leave the house where she and her family have resided for more than ten years. A resolution was delivered to Esther stipulating that her Mazorra neighborhood residence would have to be vacated immediately. Esther and her brother had built this house without government assistance on a lot donated by a neighbor. According to Esther, the paperwork for the legalization of her house had already been initiated with the approval of the Housing Institute. (*NetforCuba*, 24/8/05)

August 25: Free universal healthcare has long been Cuba's crowning achievement, but the system is now under fire from Cubans who complain that quality and access are suffering as they lose tens of thousands of medical workers to Venezuela in exchange for cheap oil, which this impoverished country desperately needs. The Cuban doctors program is wildly popular among Venezuela's poor. But Cubans have begun to object that the exodus of their healthcare workers is taking a toll on medical care for Cubans. A 45-year-old nurse in Camaguey province said she has worked without a doctor in her primary-care clinic for more than two years since the physician was transferred to another clinic to replace a doctor sent to Venezuela. The Ministry of Public Health and the Cuban press center did not respond to repeated requests over a three-week period for interviews and data for this story. With 66,567 doctors, Cuba boasts a ratio of 1 doctor per 170 citizens, compared with 1 doctor per 188 residents in the United States, according to the World Health Organization. The emphasis on preventive, personalized care has yielded life expectancy rates almost identical to those in the United States, and infant mortality rates even lower than its northern neighbor's, WHO data show. (*The Boston Globe*, 25/8/05)

August 25: The digital edition of the Official Gazette of the Republic reports that one of two Cuban ministers of Government, Wilfredo López Rodríguez, was "relieved from duty" by the State Council, acting upon a motion by Fidel Castro. By way of explanation for the demotion, a brief decree signed by Castro last May 4, but published this month, indicates that (Lopez Rodriguez) would go on to perform other duties. (*AFP*, 25/8/05)

August 28: While performing in Havana, Simply Red front man Mick Hucknall was forced to defend himself when a crazed fan jumped on stage and attacked him. Hucknall was performing when a man ran on to the stage and tried to punch him, he fought back and ended up pushing the attacker into the orchestra pit. The show was then ended and police arrested the man. Hucknall's manager Ian Grenfell commented: "It was bizarre". "What is so worrying is that we don't know what the man's intentions were. He was a Cuban American in his twenties and he stormed the stage and tried to attack Mick." (*Sound Check Music*, 1/9/05)

August 29: As well as being one of the world's most reproduced, Che Guevara's image has become one of its most merchandised. And Guevara's family is launching an effort to stop it. They plan to file lawsuits abroad against companies that they believe are exploiting the image and say lawyers in a number of countries have offered assistance. "We have a plan to deal with the misuse," Guevara's Cuban widow Aleida March said in an interview. "We can't attack everyone with lances like Don Quixote, but we can try to maintain the ethics" of Guevara's legacy, said March, who will lead the effort from the Che Guevara Studies Center which is opening in Havana later this year. "The center intends to contain the uncontrolled use of Che's image. It will be costly and difficult because each country has different laws, but a limit has to be drawn," the legendary guerrilla's daughter, Aleida Guevara, told the press. Swatch has used Guevara on a wristwatch. Advertising firms have used his image to sell vodka. Supermodel Gisele Bundchen even took to the runway in Brazilian underwear stamped with Che's face. Even Cuba sells Che's image. Postcards and posters of Guevara playing golf at the Country Club shortly after the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959 are popular with tourists. So are Cuban banknotes issued when Guevara was Central Bank governor, simply signed "Che." (*The New York Times*, 29/8/05)

August 29: In Havana, the permanent commissions of the National Assembly of the People's Power began three days of preparatory debates prior to the ordinary parliamentary session for the next six-month period, scheduled to start on September 1st. The commissions analyze such topics as the current epidemiologic situation of the country, the island's vulnerability to natural disasters, as well as the new school year. The meetings are held in different institutions of Havana because the Cuban parliament does not have an official location, added the daily official *Granma*. (*AFP*, 29/8/05)

August 30: Opposition leader Oswaldo Payá called for what he termed as "organic unity" of the dissident movement in Cuba, apologizing to any fellow countrymen that may have been "hurt" by the political discord. "We strive for organic unity, (...) that can only be achieved through dialogue," said the message of the leader of the illegal Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL). He pointed out that it is necessary to consolidate unity among the dissidents' ranks and "we are ready to preserve that unity over and beyond any wounds, passions and errors that may have hurt some of our compatriots." (*AFP*, 30/8/05)

August 31: Cuba's state television programming can now be seen by 18.2 million viewers outside of the country, a top government broadcasting official told lawmakers in comments published in *Granma*. The Cuban Communist Party newspaper said Ernesto López, president of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television, told a parliamentary commission the number was more than double that of last year, when Cubavision Internacional had about 8 million viewers abroad. Cubavision Internacional, Cuba's pro-government station offering news and other programming tailored for an international audience, can now be seen in 20 Latin American nations, as well as in Europe, López said. The institute president said that Radio Habana Cuba, the government's shortwave radio operation, "has fulfilled a relevant informative and ideological-political function" through transmissions abroad in nine languages. (*AP*, 31/8/05)

Economy

August 2: The Austrian cigar company Tabaccoland and Cuba's Habanos S.A., signed a contract for the direct sale of Cuban cigars in Austria. A Habanos source said a Swiss intermediary used to supply Tabaccoland with the brands Cohiba, Montecristo, Bolivar and Romeo y Julieta but was unable to meet the growing demand. This new contract includes the introduction of new brands to diversify supplies. Tabaccoland is a branch of the monopoly Austria Tabak. Since 2001 this company has shared the distribution of 450 tobacco products along with the British group Galleher. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/05)

August 3: Sherritt International Corp., whose interests range from metal mining to energy, in properties from Canada to Cuba and Asia, says its second-quarter profits rose \$1.7-million to \$56-million. "Sherritt's financial results for 2005 will likely continue to be positively affected by relatively robust nickel, cobalt, coal and oil prices and by continuing high levels of global demand for its products," the company said in a release. The oil and gas division is expecting a modest increase in production for the rest of 2005 as a result of higher drilling activity. (*The Globe & Mail*, 3/8/05)

August 4: Hard-pressed Cubans already suffering through frequent and long interruptions in the flow of electricity saw the problem worsen when Antonio Guiteras, one of the nation's largest plants, broke down. In a communique, state-owned Union Electrica explained that the pipeline feeding fuel into the plant's boiler was damaged. Problems in the power network are prompting blackouts of up to 10 hours a day in Havana and other cities around the country. (*EFE*, 4/8/05)

August 5: Cuba's sugar output is headed for another disastrous year due to drought and neglect, farmers told the press during a tour of the key sugar-producing provinces of Ciego de Avila, Camaguey and Las Tunas. "There is no cane" or "the sugar industry is a disaster" was just about all anyone had to say about the coming crop due for harvesting from January into May. This year's estimated output of 1.3 million tonnes of raw sugar was the lowest since 1908 and has forced the country to import sugar from Colombia to meet contracts and cover its 700,000 tonne domestic consumption. "The plantations that appear in good shape are only cultivated near the roads so bosses passing by think everything is fine. Go into the plantations a ways and you will see something else," he said. "The problem is these plantations have no real owners except for the state. No one cares," the tractor driver added with a wizard smirk, refusing to give his name. The government has not commented directly on the harvest and future plans, but Castro called the industry the country's ruin earlier this year. (*Reuters*, 5/8/05)

August 8: Cuba and Indonesia have reportedly signed a bilateral co-operation agreement to develop and manufacture the Cuban monoclonal antibody known as 1E10, a vaccine expected to be highly effective against cancer, according to Cuban news agency Prensa Latina. The 1E10 monoclonal antibody, which is currently produced by the Cuban Centre of Molecular Immunology (CIM), recognizes antigens in human melanoma and breast tumors and subsequently inhibits tumor growth, in addition to reducing metastatic lung disease. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 8/8/05)

August 8: The number one unit of the Cuban thermoelectric plant "Lidio Ramón Pérez" in the northeastern town of Felton, Holguín, is now stabilized and assimilated into the national grid. Block 1 was incorporated to the national grid, but had to be withdrawn for adjustments to be made, and was incorporated again. The reincorporation of this power plant represents an improvement in the generation capacity of electric power for the country, because of its capacity to supply 500 Mw with its two blocks. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/8/05)

August 8: Old sugar mills in Cuba are being refurbished in order to allow for the processing of other agro-food products. In the province of Holguín, to the east of Cuba, six of the old sugar mills are being converted into corn silos

and mills. Others, like the "Urbano Noris," also in Holguín, will scale down their sugar cane-processing capabilities, reallocating some areas for seed storage. (*EFEAGRO*, 8/8/05)

August 11: The Cuban government ended a contract with the company administering the island's cruise terminals following remarks by Fidel Castro that cruise ships exploit small Caribbean countries and were no longer welcome in Cuba. A Council of State resolution signed on August 2 and published in the Official Gazette ended a seven-year relationship with the Italian company Silares Terminales del Caribe, which operated in Cuba as a mixed-enterprise business with the island's CUBANCO S.A. Silares will no longer administer docking operations, and ownership of all equipment and infrastructure will revert back to the state, the resolution said. The resolution didn't say whether cruise ships would be able to come to Cuba in the future under different arrangements. The tourism ministry was contacted by the press but made no comment. (*AP*, 11/8/05)

August 17: Cuba increased its food imports to approximately \$1,700 million USD this year to compensate for frequent setbacks in national production. The increase of imports in this sector coincides with difficulties in agro-food production caused by the intense drought that still affects the eastern provinces of the country. (*IPS*, 17/8/05)

August 22: Cuba will modernize its nickel plants in an effort to double yearly production, said sources in the sector. The authorities are planning to step up production from 76,900 tons to 120,000 tons per year, indicated the business weekly *Opciones*. The "René Ramos Latour" plant, in Nicaro, is the oldest of the three existing facilities - it was built 62 years ago - and at present delivers 12,400 tons per year. The "Ernesto Che Guevara" and "Comandante Pedro Sotillo Alba," newer facilities built in 1994 in Moa under the terms of a Cuba-Canada joint venture, produce approximately 31,500 and 33,000 tons per year respectively. (*AFP*, 22/8/05)

August 27: A Cuba-Venezuela joint-venture will finance the construction of a shipyard on the shores of the Venezuelan lake of (west) Maracaibo, for repairs of the fleet operated by state-owned Oils of Venezuela (PDVSA). Irwin Marcano, public relations director of the National Institute of Investments (INC), told the press that the initial capital will be \$6 million USD, 51 % contributed by Venezuela and the rest by Cuba. (*AFP*, 27/8/05)

August 28: Heavy rains and waves from Hurricane Katrina forced evacuations in western Cuba as the massive storm swept northward toward the southern United States, according to local reports. Telephone lines and power transmission were knocked out in many areas in the west hit by the storm and around 8,000 people were evacuated from flood-threatened areas in Pinar del Rio province as Katrina passed to the north. The coastal city of Surgidero de Batabano south of Havana was 90 percent under water, according to Cuban television reports. (*AFP*, 29/8/05)

August 28: The Caribbean Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) said it has begun negotiations with the Cuban government for oil exploration in that country. ONGC Videsh Ltd, the overseas arm of ONGC is in talks with the Cuban government for oil exploration in that country," ONGC chairman Subir Raha told reporters. (*Indian Express*, 29/8/05)

August 29: Cuba purchased 21 generators from a factory in Denmark's northern Jutland, Danish regional newspapers reported. To meet growing energy needs, Cuba acquired 21 generators worth approximately \$26.7 million from MAN B&W Diesel in Frederikshavn. The unusually large order represents more than 20 percent of a year's production of motors at the factory. The generators, which will be used in six new power stations in Cuba, will all be delivered in 2006. The first shipment will be delivered in January. The two sides negotiated the order over the past six months; final confirmation of the order was signed by Fidel Castro. (*Danmarks Radio, Energy Watch*, 29,31/8/05)

August 31: Cuba's coffee harvest got underway with output from the hurricane-damaged crop forecast at less than last year's estimated 180,000 60-kg bags, based on comments from industry sources and state-run media reports. The Agriculture Ministry regularly refuses to comment on the harvest, and the government and state-run media rarely report

the total crop, though provincial information is more frequently available. A rare July hurricane, Dennis, passed near coffee growing areas on the eastern part of the island, and then slammed into the ripening crop in central Cuba "Santiago de Cuba's coffee harvest got underway this week with the crop damaged by drought and then Dennis," state-run television reported. Santiago is one of four eastern provinces which account for more than 80 percent of the crop. (*Reuters*, 31/8/05)

August 31: Managing Director of Cuban Telecommunications Enterprise (ETECSA), Jose Antonio Fernandez, said that 89.6 percent of Cuban telephone lines would become digital in 2005. In his briefing to a special session of a Commission of the National Assembly of People's Power in Havana, Fernandez said that Cuba continues developing public telephone service by increasing payphones from 6,820 in 1994 to 34,125 by the end of the first half of 2005. (*Prensa Latina*, 31/8/05)

Exile Community

August 9: A federal appeals court that rejected the criminal convictions and sentences of five men accused of spying for the Cuban government, was decried in Miami. Radio show host Ninoska Pérez Castellón told listeners on Radio Mambi, 710 AM, that it was "a racist decision" against the Cuban-American community. Manny Vázquez, an attorney and director at the Cuban American National Foundation, a powerful Miami exile group, said he was "disgusted" by the ruling. "It's hogwash," Vazquez said. "The court spent a lot of time picking that jury and the jury was devoid of Cubans. It was a totally fair and impartial trial." The FBI seized coded computer disks containing 2,000 messages among the defendants and their handlers in Havana, prosecutors said. Federal agents also found shortwave radio messages from Cuba warning that René Gonzalez and another pilot should not fly with the Brothers around the time of the shoot-down. Defense lawyers essentially conceded that the five were working on behalf of the Cuban government but said they were simply trying to protect their homeland from exile groups and did not try to gather military secrets. The court ruling dismayed especially the relatives of the pilots from Brothers to the Rescue, an organization that flew small planes across the Florida Straits in search of rafters fleeing Cuba. "We are extremely disappointed," said Maggie Alejandre Khuly, whose brother, Armando Alejandre Jr., was one of those shot down on February 24, 1996 while flying a Brothers to the Rescue plane. "I sat at the trial every day, and I don't think I saw any miscarriage of justice. But we firmly believe and respect the American justice system." José Baulto, head of Brothers to the Rescue, said he didn't believe there was any undue influence on the jurors, none of whom were Cuban American. "I'm very disappointed in their decision. They were convicted by a jury of their peers," he said. "If they are retried, they will again be found guilty." (*Sun Sentinel*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Miami Herald*, 10/8/05)

August 17: The reconstruction of the island, participation in the first stages of the democratic transition and emergency assistance to a society in a precarious state constitute the goals of Cuba Corps, the latest effort by the Cuban exile community to support civil society in the island. "We have set ourselves the task to assist in the reconstruction of civil society," said Olga Nodarse, president of the newly created organization. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 17/8/05)

August 23: Organizers of Miami's book fair defended the event as a universal and tolerant forum, rebutting criticism from some conservative Cuban-exile sectors of the invitation of a Colombian writer who admires Fidel Castro. "The Book Fair is under the umbrella of a US university, which means that it deeply respects freedom of expression. Here, prohibitions are prohibited," said Alejandro Rios, a spokesman for event sponsor Miami Dade College. The controversy arose following the comments of poet Angel Cuadra, president of the Cuban Writers in Exile PEN Centre, an affiliate of London-based International PEN, an international association of writers whose mission includes defending free expression. Cuadra called Restrepo one author "who should never have been invited to Miami." (*EFE*, 23/8/05)

Foreign Affairs

August 1: The European Union has a "positive approach to Cuba" and it is confident that it is moving toward an extensive dialogue with Fidel Castro's government based on "mutual respect," said Great Britain's ambassador to Cuba, John Dew, in an interview. Dew, whose country now holds the rotating presidency of the European Union, told the Cuban Catholic publication Palabra Nueva that the European Union does not see "major long-term obstacles that can prevent dialogue based on mutual respect." "I am optimistic. I think that a good opportunity exists to develop a new dialogue with the Cuban government and with a variety of groups in Cuban society, which is normal in any country. Obviously, for any dialogue to take place, both parties must be willing to move ahead," he declared. Dew, who began his assignment in Havana in October 2004, pointed out that the European countries "are responsible collectively for the majority of Cuba's foreign trade, foreign investment, and foreign tourism." "We have a long-term perception about Cuba." "We want to have a dialogue as extensive and as varied with Cuba as possible, and with the largest number of sectors in Cuban society," the ambassador told this publication of the Archdiocese of Havana. (*AFP*, 1/8/05)

August 1: A Russian official has called the United States' creation of a post responsible for preparing for a change of power in Cuba a resurgence of "imperialist big-stick" policy, and a display of "extreme hostility" to Cuba. "This is another anti-Cuban gesture and a demonstration by US authorities of their extreme hostility to their island neighbor, the victim of almost 50 years of unjust trade sanctions," said Karen Khachaturov, the head of the Russian Committee for Cooperation with Latin America. (*RIA Novosti*, 1/8/05)

August 2: Members from the Canadian World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are contributing to the preservation of the Jardines de la Reina National Park, in southern Cuba. The Canadian team, along with a group of specialists from the Coastal Ecosystem Center from Ciego de Avila province, completed a survey of the flora and fauna in the region. The teams also created a plan, which includes surveillance and environmental education programs for the surrounding municipalities. (*AIN*, 2/8/05)

August 2: More than 300 members of a Latin American solidarity brigade started voluntary work in the town of Caimito, 30 miles from Havana, repairing two school installations. The 12th contingent of the Latin American and Caribbean Brigade is made up of 327 Latin American friends of Cuba from 16 Latin American countries, who will collaborate in the repairing of institutes "Jorge Dimitrov" and "Luis Augusto Turcios Lima". (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/05)

August 2: Bahamas Agriculture and Fisheries Minister V. Alfred Grei began a four day visit to Havana following an invitation from the Cuban government. The minister will meet with agriculture and fishing specialists, researchers and officials during his visit. (*Prensa Latina*, 2/8/05)

August 3: The Mexican government expressed surprise over Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque's earlier statement that bilateral relations will never be normal while President Vicente Fox is in office. The Fox administration believes Pérez Roque "is not contributing to elevating the level of relations between our countries," presidential spokesman Rubén Aguilar said. "Relations are going well. We are surprised at the Cuban minister's statements," Aguilar said. The Mexican press published Pérez Roque's statement in Panama that stressed "the relationship with Mexico is damaged. At present, relations between Mexico and Cuba are not normal." "They cannot be normal, because Mexico's government aligned itself with the maneuvers of the United States at the UN Human Rights Commission," Pérez Roque said, insisting normalization cannot occur before Fox leaves office in 2006. (*El Universal*, 3/8/05)

August 3: A group of 119 Cuban specialists will join the sports cooperation program with Venezuela. The group includes several ex-baseball players that in addition to coaching, hope to play on teams of veterans from the local leagues. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/8/05)

August 4: Cuba maintains extensive friendly relations with more than 800 cities of the world, half of which is in brotherhood with Cuban cities and the rest is about to do so. Julio Espinosa, general coordinator of the Foreign Relations Commission of the National Assembly, highlighted the links with foreign cities. He said that these links are more numerous with Spain for historic reasons, but added that besides Mexico, Italy is also outstanding for its strong friendship. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/8/05)

August 4: The European Commission (EC) affirmed that "frequent" contact is maintained with Cuban dissidents. According to the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, the Human Rights Working Group, comprised of representatives of the European embassies in Havana, met frequently with local opposition leaders between April and June. (*Notimex*, 4/8/05)

August 4: World Council of Churches (WCC) Secretary General Samuel Kobia said that the US embargo on Cuba should be lifted immediately. Kobia, whose visit at the invitation of the Cuban Council of Churches is winding up, said there is absolutely no justification for continuing the US embargo, and criticized President George W Bush's measures curtailing travel to Cuba. The WCC leader said his interview with Fidel Castro was very positive. During his meeting with Castro, Kobia expressed his concern about the need to build more temples in Cuba, as well as having access to the media in order to disseminate the mission of the church. Kobia also held a meeting with the Catholic Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega. (*Prensa Latina, La Jornada*, 5/8/05)

August 4: The Government of Ecuador announced the shipment to Cuba of a food donation to assist the victims of hurricane "Dennis." The Department of Foreign Affairs indicated that the aid consists of "non-perishable food" obtained through donations from several private companies and with the support of the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP), which facilitated the collection of the products. (*EFE*, 4/8/05)

August 5: Several conferences by Foreign Affairs Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, People's Power National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón, and Foreign Deputy Minister Rafael Daussá stand out among the many activities the Cuban young delegates are holding to prepare for the 16th World Festival of Youth and Students Venezuela will host on August 8-15. The 1,500-strong Cuban delegation, which is considered multinational because it encompasses one hundred youths from Third World nations, will be one of the largest at the festival. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/8/05)

August 8: The case of the Yucatan Peninsula fishermen imprisoned in Cuba for the last two months remains uncertain, since Mexico has not been informed of the legal process they are facing. On this matter, the president of the Human Rights Commission of the State of Yucatan (Codhey), Sergio Salazar Vadillo admitted that it is not known what will be the fate of Jimmy Enrique Fuentes, Juan Ramón Barco Rivero, and Luis Nicolás Chan Campos, arrested in early June for alleged human trafficking. (*Progreso*, 8/8/05)

August 8: Two Cuban citizens remain in custody at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport, in Paris, after communicating to the French government their wish to request political asylum. The organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) confirmed the identity of one of them, 42-year-old Eliécer Carlos Pereira, an oppositionist linked to the independent press inside the island. The other person detained is Arelys Souchay, who claims to be a member of the Cuban Liberal Democratic Party. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 9/8/05)

August 10: Amnesty International expressed its deep concern about the possibility that fifteen people, who remain in detention following a recent government crackdown on dissidence in Cuba, may be "subjected to harsh or disproportionate prison sentences solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly." In a statement, AI condemns the detentions, and demands from Cuban authorities the release of all political prisoners. [[Cuba: No Dissent Allowed](#)] (*Europa Press*, 10/8/05)

August 10: Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi said in Tehran that his country and Cuba have obtained favorable achievements in various areas as agriculture, biotechnology and industry. He made the remark in a meeting with the outgoing Cuban Ambassador Jose Ramon Rodriguez, reported the Information and Press Department of the foreign ministry. (*IRNA*, 10/8/05)

August 10: As librarians from around the world gather in Oslo for the opening of the conference of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), a new "cold war" controversy is erupting over Eastern European demands for a resolution condemning the persecution of independent librarians in Cuba. The mood of revolt was expressed in a statement by the Estonian Library Association, which declared its support of the independent library movement in Cuba, and protested against the persecution and repression of independent librarians by the "anti-democratic [Castro] regime." Officials from the Polish Librarian's Association have said they will introduce a resolution regarding human rights violations in Cuba. For more than a year the Cuban issue has ignited a controversy within the normally placid world of librarians, where Cuban delegates to IFLA have said that previous IFLA statements condemning the suppression of intellectual freedom in Cuba were lies inspired by CIA-paid Western librarians. (*Friends of Cuban Librarians*, 10/8/05)

August 11: New Mexican ambassador to Havana, José Ignacio Piña Rojas, announced that one of the goals of his mission in the Island will be to cement a migratory agreement to resolve the situation of the 1,500 Cuban illegal immigrants that arrive in Mexican territory every year. Among the "important and delicate" matters that the new ambassador will have to deal with is that of the Cuban debt to Mexico's National Foreign Trade Bank (Bancomext), estimated at approximately \$400 million USD. Piña Rojas will also strive for the reinforcement of the commercial ties between both nations, following a 60 % decline last year. As well, the new Ambassador has instructions to request information on the case of Carlos Ahumada, said presidential spokesman Rubén Aguilar. (*El Informador, Grupo Reforma, Boston Globe*, 11/8/05)

August 11: Cuba's foreign minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, suggested in a speech to the World Festival of Youth in Caracas, Venezuela, that the 34-country Organization of American States, headquartered in Washington, D.C., should be "blown up." "As a priority of our anti-imperialist struggle -- we must oppose the mechanisms of imperial domination in the region: The OAS must be blown up in pieces," Pérez Roque was quoted by news agencies. (*La Tercera, DPA*, 12/8/05)

August 12: Dominican Leonel Fernandez, thanked the Cuban government for the scholarships provided to 96 young Dominicans, who recently graduated from the medical school in the island. In statements to the Cuban press, the Dominican president said allowing young people from the Dominican Republic and other Latin American nations to study in Cuba was a gesture of solidarity and highlighted how expensive it is to study the subject in other countries. (*AIN*, 12/8/05)

August 12: Nine Cubans aboard a small boat reached the Atlantic coast of Honduras but intend to continue their trip to the United States. The "balseros," seven men and two women, came ashore 300 km to the north of Tegucigalpa, after 13 days at sea. (*AP*, 12/8/05)

August 14: A book coming out in Colombia about Pablo Escobar, based on revelations by his erstwhile lieutenant, says the slain king of cocaine enjoyed the collaboration of Cuba's Fidel Castro in the shipment of tons of drugs to the United States. John Jairo Velasquez Vasquez, known as "Popeye" and considered "the man closest to" Escobar, says the links between the late drug kingpin and the Cuban leader were forged in the 1980s in Sandinista-ruled Nicaragua. The former leader of the Medellin cartel "always looks for ways to get his drugs on U.S. streets, by way of non-allied governments or enemies of the United States," according to excerpts from the book published in the magazine "Semana". In Cuba, an agreement was reached allowing Escobar to move large quantities of cocaine over two years from the Colombian port of Buenaventura to the Mexican coast. Once in Cuba, the shipments were placed under the

control of the Cuban military. Army General Arnaldo Ochoa and Interior Ministry Colonel Tony La Guardia were responsible for the operation on the Cuban end. Velasquez said that after the Cuba route was discovered by US authorities, who seized a large shipment of cocaine, Castro ordered "a farse of an investigation" of Ochoa and several others. After a show trial on corruption and drug trafficking charges, Ochoa and La Guardia, along with two others, were executed by firing squad in 1989. (*EFE*, 14/8/05)

August 14: Mexico will not intervene in a possible process of political transition in Cuba, confirmed the new Mexican ambassador to Cuba, José Ignacio Piña Rojas. "Obviously, we are interested in what happens in Cuba, but just as we are with any other country in the world," he stressed and added that a change of government with its own specific characteristics in any country does not affect bilateral relations with Mexico. (*El Universal*, 14/8/05)

August 14: The Canadian group Medical Equipment Modernization Opportunity (MEMO), is packing some of the 300 used computers it received from St. Joseph's Care group, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre and a local citizen for shipment to Cuba. Gary Cooper said there's one big problem with the health-care system on the island nation. "The equipment they are using dates back to the 1950s and '60s," says Cooper, who belongs to the Thunder Bay group that last year brought millions of dollars worth of medical supplies from closed city hospitals to the communist state. The new packing was done by youth from Nipigon's St. Mary's Church in a holding area at the former McKellar hospital site. Enough supplies for between three and five ocean-going containers are stored there, including more than 100 manually operated hospital beds, operating room tables, and freezers and refrigerators donated by the public. (*The Chronicle Journal*, 14/8/05)

August 15: The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Cuba will issue a joint stamp in order to foster bilateral cooperation, the Iranian ambassador to Cuba announced. "In a meeting with Alberto Perez Romero, the director of Cuba's State Post Company, Iran and Cuba reached an agreement on the issue in order to promote cultural and postal cooperation between the two countries," Ahmad Edrisian said. "The project was welcomed by the Cuban official, and he also called for the establishment of trilateral ties between Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela in light of the extensive postal cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela," he added. (*MNA*, 15/8/05)

August 15: A group consisting of at least 20 Cubans plans to visit Paraguay in September with their own communication equipment. It has been reported that the mission is designed to provide medical and social assistance to poor communities of the interior of the country. In justifications given at the Paraguayan Embassy in Havana, they contended that the pieces of equipment are portable and that they are designed "to navigate" through the Internet to enable them to closely follow events affecting Cuba. Intelligence agents are, however, suspicious that their intentions might be different because there are no mechanisms in place to closely and duly monitor the activities the islanders will carry out in the country, as well as that of hundreds of others that are reportedly already staying in Paraguayan territory. (*ABC Color*, 15/8/05)

August 16: The global alliance Action by Churches Together (ACT) has been busy helping victims left homeless in the Granma region of Cuba after Hurricane Dennis ravaged the island between 7 and 9 July. ACT has been working to re-house approximately 700 homeless, many of whom continue to shelter temporarily in schools and other public buildings after their houses were partially destroyed in the violent winds. José Marin, the liaison officer for religious matters, accompanied a delegation of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) – a member of ACT International – to the region. In total 23,000 roofs in Granma province were partially or completely ruined by the hurricane. An impressive 7,000 have already been repaired. (*Christian Today*, 16/8/05)

August 15: The Government of Honduran President Ricardo Maduro will not name a new ambassador to Cuba, it was reported in Tegucigalpa. The Government of Cuba designated Dr. Alberto González Polanco as its ambassador in Honduras, whereas Tegucigalpa will maintain in Havana a representation of lesser status. (*ACAN-EFE*, 16/8/05)

August 17: Fidel Castro is worried about the impact Brazil's political crisis might have on the "continuity" of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's administration, according to the Brazilian ambassador to Cuba, Tilden Santiago. The allegations of corruption involving the PT [Workers' Party] and the federal government are, the ambassador says, being "strongly" felt around the island. "He (Castro) holds President Lula in high esteem, above all because he sees Lula as the Latin American political figure who most contributes to the integration of the continent. He has already told me so several times. So on Fidel's part, there is a strong preoccupation with the importance of the Lula administration's continuity," he said. "Since the crisis, he and other Cuban authorities have told me so." (*BBC*, 18/8/05)

August 17: The government majority within the Finance Commission of the National Assembly of Venezuela authorized the Ministry of the Interior and Justice to finance an overhaul of the national system of citizen identification, with the help of the government of Cuba. The Venezuelan government clarified that this "technical project will be carried out under the terms of the agreement of collaboration signed by the authorities of the Cuban Ministry of Information Technology and Communications and of the Ministry of the Interior and Justice of Venezuela," and that it is a part of the so-called Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). (*El Nacional*, 18/8/05)

August 18: The Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonzalves, arrived in Cuba to attend the first graduation of the Latin American School of Medicine. Gonzalves arrived at the invitation of Fidel Castro and was welcomed at the Jose Marti International airport by Marta Lomas, minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation and Deputy Foreign Minister Rafael Daussá. (*AIN*, 18/8/05)

August 18: Bolivia's Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) leader Evo Morales highlighted the first graduation from the Latin American School of Medicine in Cuba as proof of the island's policy of solidarity. Morales told the press he regretted not being able to attend the graduation ceremony due to MAS electoral campaign obligations, as he has to take part in the candidate selection process. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/8/05)

August 19: Fidel Castro received Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonzalves to talk about an ophthalmic assistance program for the Caribbean currently in progress, called "Vision Now". Gonzalves told the press he had a meeting with Castro, in which they exchanged on how to improve and extend the program and its benefits in Latin America, and discussed other education and political issues in the region. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/8/05)

August 20: Fidel Castro met with more than 20 leaders and high-ranking dignitaries from Latin America, the Caribbean community and other guests to the first graduation of students at the Latin American School of Medicine. Castro welcomed Hugo Chávez Frías, president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the Prime Ministers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonzalvez; Antigua and Barbuda, Baldwin Spencer; St. Kitts and Nevis, Denzil Douglas; Dominica, Roosevelt Skerit; Alejandro Serrano, vice president of Ecuador; and ministers from Barbados, the Bahamas, Guyana, Belize, the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guatemala and Surinam. The guests also included Daniel Ortega, former Nicaraguan president; Shafik Handal, the former presidential candidate of El Salvador; and Lucius Walker, director of Pastors for Peace. (*Granma Internacional*, 20/8/05)

August 20: A Latin American medical school created as a regional initiative in 1998 after two hurricanes devastated Caribbean and Central American nations graduated its first class. Students at the school come from Latin American, Africa and the United States. Most come from low-income families and receive a free education on the condition they return home to serve their communities after graduation. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro handed out diplomas to several of the 1,500 graduates. "This graduation was just a dream nearly seven years ago," Castro said at the ceremony. "Today is proof of the capacity of human beings to reach the most lofty goals." Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, Panamanian President Martin Torrijos, Ecuadorian Vice President Alejandro Serrano and the prime ministers of St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, and Antigua and Barbuda, were present at the ceremony. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*The New York Times*, *EFE*, 21/8/05)

August 20: Cuba and Panama restored diplomatic ties, one year after they were broken off in a dispute sparked by the decision by Panama's previous president to pardon four Cuban exiles accused of trying to assassinate Fidel Castro. Castro and Panamanian President Martin Torrijos looked on as a document was signed in Havana declaring normal relations "inspired by the spirit of fraternity that has always linked these two countries." Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez was witness to the ceremony. Chavez, Torrijos and other regional leaders traveled to Havana to attend the first Latin American Medicine School graduation. (*The New York Times, Prensa Latina, 20/8/05*)

August 20: Outgoing Cuban Ambassador to Tehran Jose Ramon Rodriguez met with Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in the Iranian capital. Presidential Office Media Department said that Ahmadinejad called the Tehran-Havana ties excellent, brotherly and growing. "Our relations with Cuba are strategic and deep-seated and our people follow the news on Cuba with great interest and are sensitive in developments in the region," Ahmadinejad said in the meeting. Iran and Cuba signed a comprehensive document for bolstering bilateral cooperation, in Havana, in January. According to the document, Iran and Cuba would expand cooperation in various commercial, banking, agriculture, health and cultural fields. (*IRNA, 22/8/05*)

August 21: Cuba and Venezuela have sealed a commitment over the next 10 years to restore the sight of millions of Latin Americans who lack the economic resources for an operation, as part of the extension of the "Mission Miracle" program throughout the region. This was announced by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez during edition No. 231 of the popular television space "Aló Presidente," transmitted from the Sandino municipality in the extreme west of the island's Pinar del Río province. Christened the "Sandino Commitment", the program proposes to attend to 600,000 patients per year in the Cuban facilities involved in the mission and in Venezuelan health centers to be brought into the humanitarian project, including military hospitals. (*Granma International, 21/8/05*)

August 22: Two Cubans who entered Paraguay and got settled in Caaguazu Department reportedly gave weapon training to residents in the area, specifically to peasants and militants of the Free Fatherland Party (PPL). Investigators of the Antikidnapping Police Division discovered strong evidence of the presence in the area of two Cuban citizens who gave military training to peasants in several districts of Caaguazu Department. Investigators conducted searches in Caaguazu and Canindeyu departments after the body of Cecilia Cubas was found at a house in the Mbocayaty neighborhood of the City of Nemby. One of them said: "In conversations with local residents, we learned about the presence of foreigners in the area. Residents first told us that these men were Colombians, but later they confirmed that the foreigners were Cubans." (*ABC Color, 22/8/05*)

August 23: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez left Cuba after a four-day visit during which he attended the graduation of the first class from a regional school of medicine and joined with his friend and mentor Fidel Castro in blasting US "imperialism." But in remarks to reporters before his departure, the Venezuelan uncharacteristically passed on an opportunity to take another verbal shot at Washington, saying he was unconcerned about right-wing televangelist Pat Robertson's on-air suggestion that the US government assassinate Chavez. Venezuela's president placed no importance on the preacher's statements and said that "I was working late with Fidel and this morning also. We were doing the accounts of PetroCaribe, a proposal for regional integration for supplying fuel." "That is much more important," he said, adding that "what someone said over there (in the United States) (...) doesn't matter to me." With regard to the controversy, Castro said, "I believe only God can punish crimes of such magnitude. I always say that God is helping Chavez and his friends." (*EFE, 23/8/05*)

August 23: The government of Honduras has asked Cuba to bring home some of the more than 200 Cuban doctors who have been working in this country in recent years, saying the emergency that prompted their "importation" has passed, local media reported. Newspapers cited Foreign Minister Mario Fortin as saying that Honduras no longer needs so many Cuban doctors, though the country could use additional anesthesiologists and nurses. "We have already notified the government of Cuba that the circumstances in which the convention was adopted have changed," Fortin said. He referred to a pact that includes a scholarship plan for Hondurans to attend a medical school on the Communist-ruled

island, from which 215 of them graduated last week and where another 215 are still pursuing their studies. The accord, signed in the wake of Hurricane Mitch's devastating passage over Central America in November 1998, also involved deployment of Cuban physicians to poor regions of Honduras, whose health-care system is inadequate. (*AFP, EFE*, 23/8/05)

August 23: The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria will provide Cuba with millions of dollars over the next three years to help improve quality of life and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS and to reinforce efforts to prevent the spread of the disease. The 14.6 million dollars to be contributed by the fund between 2005 and 2008 "entails direct benefits for the community," said María Julia Fernández, a Cuban woman who has been living with HIV - the virus that causes AIDS - for almost 20 years. A specialist at the National Centre for the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV/AIDS, with many years of experience as a community health counsellor, Fernández now devotes all of her energies to providing support for individuals diagnosed as HIV-positive, she told IPS. The Global Fund will provide Cuba with a total of 26.1 million dollars over the 2005-2008 period, reported Raffaella Garutti of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who is responsible for overseeing the project's execution. Garutti told the press that the Cuban initiative is considered the best "of all the projects supported by the Fund in 133 countries." (*IPS*, 23/8/05)

August 24: Twenty-five prospective teachers from Antigua will shortly be off to Cuba for training. The move is part of a new government initiative to source trained teachers at lower cost. Deputy Chief Education Officer Reginald Peterson said that while the programme offered locally at the Antigua State College is of a high standard, the opportunity to send potential teachers off for training under the current agreement with Cuba offers greater benefits to both the students and the Ministry of Education. (*Antigua Sun*, 24/8/05)

August 24: The Committee to Protect Journalists is deeply worried about the health of imprisoned journalist Adolfo Fernández Saíñz, who began a hunger strike to protest the mistreatment of another imprisoned dissident. Fernandez Saíñz began the strike on August 19, after learning that imprisoned dissident Arnaldo Ramos Lauzurique had been beaten by a prison officer two days before and later placed in a punishment cell, according to his daughter, Joana Fernández Nuñez. He will continue his hunger strike until Ramos Lauzurique is taken out of the punishment cell, she said. Fernández Saíñz, 57, one of 24 independent Cuban journalists now imprisoned, is currently at the Holguín Provincial Prison in eastern Holguín Province, hundreds of miles from his home in Havana. (*CPJ Press Release*, 24/8/05)

August 24: Uruguayan airline Pluna will be transporting to Cuba 53,000 visually-impaired patients from Venezuela and several countries of the Caribbean to undergo surgery in the island, reported in Caracas the vice-president of the state Venezuelan airline Conviasa, Gerardo Cabañas. A Pluna Boeing 737-200 will take the patients from Caracas, Santo Domingo, Puerto España, as well as Aruba and Curazao to Havana, where they will be operated on to restore their sight. This effort is part of a regional initiative by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez to conduct this type of operations in the Caribbean island. (*AFP*, 24/8/05)

August 25: Senegalese Jacques Diou, FAO Director-General, has arrived in Havana at the invitation of Cuban government for a working visit. Diou thanked the Cuban government for the invitation and the cooperation the island has shown with the world organization, at the bilateral level and in South-South cooperation. (*Prensa Latina*, 25/8/05)

August 25: Over the past two months, Venezuelans' opposition to the country adopting the Cuban system as an example of government has increased, reversing what had been a trend of "acceptance" of the Havana government model since 2002. According to the recent Omnibus opinion poll conducted by Datanalisis, 76.3% of Venezuelans reject the National Executive's taking Fidel Castro's regime as a model. The criticism comes from sectors that identify with President Hugo Chavez as well as from inhabitants who oppose him or who consider themselves not politically aligned (the neither-nor sector). The opinion poll reveals that 60.6% of "pro-government" people have a critical

position on the Cuban issue. This perception is repeated in 97.5% of the citizens who oppose President Chavez and 78% of Venezuelans who do not identify with any political group. (*El Universal*, 25/8/05)

August 25: The Committee to Protect Journalists released a statement denouncing that the Cuban government jailed a second independent journalist who covered an unprecedented opposition meeting in May. Albert Santiago Du Bouchet Hernandez was arrested on 6 August, tried three days later and handed a one-year jail term without the knowledge of his family, who found out about his detention only after he smuggled a note out of prison. He joins 24 independent Cuban journalists jailed for their work. He is director of the independent news agency Havana Press, which sends reports to the Miami-based website Nueva Prensa Cubana. (*BBC*, 25/8/05)

August 26: Fidel Castro made a special appearance at the TV program Round Table, in which he dealt with the tragic death of 31 people when the speed boat in which they were traveling on capsized. Castro quoted from the Mexican press that has reported on how an organization, linked to Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and based on the state of Quintana Roo, carries out smuggling operations. Boat supply centers operate in Grand Cayman, Honduras and Port Juarez. Cubans are smuggled into the latter and placed in safe houses. Those who do not have enough money to pay are then used to sneak drugs into the US in the case of men, while the women are forced to become prostitutes in Cancun, Castro said. Castro slammed the Mexican authorities for being tolerant. He said that from 2001 to 2004 only 8 Cubans were repatriated and barely 16 in 2005 out of a total of 300 who are in custody in immigration centers in Mexico. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/8/05)

August 29: The Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, said that the US justice system should extradite Cuban anti-Castro firebrand Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela by way of contribution to the antiterrorist war. "I hope political criteria do not prevail that result in the circumvention of obligations incurred in the war on terrorism, because there could not be any plausible explanation for any decision that would hinder this process," affirmed Insulza in a program on state TV channel Venezolana de Television. (*Europa Press*, 29/8/05)

August 29: The Salvadoran president Antonio Saca said that the "super-puppet of the United States" label given him by Fidel Castro constitutes "an affront" to the people and the government of El Salvador. "The statements of President Castro, of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, are an affront to the people of El Salvador, they are an affront to the government of El Salvador", Saca told the press. Castro had said in Havana that the Salvadoran government, which supports with troops the United States war effort in Iraq, is a "super-puppet" of Washington, and praised Schafik Handal, historical leader and parliamentary representative of the Frente Farabundo Martí (FMLN), a former Salvadoran guerrilla organization and currently a left-wing political party. (*AFP*, 29/8/05)

August 29: South African Mpumalanga's department of health and social services is reconsidering its Cuban medical student programme. Spokesperson Mpho Gabashane said the programme wasn't always financially viable and that only 12 of the 23 students sent to Cuba in 1997 and 1998 were working at state hospitals in the province. "It's still early, but a decision has to be made if the programme will continue or not," he said. He said 10 of the 13 students in the 1998 group had to be brought back before they could complete their studies after concern was raised about the selection process. Gabashane said the department had failed to prepare the students sufficiently for their trip. He said one of the students was sent back to South Africa because he took a photo of a naked woman. "Some of the students thought they were going to a country like England, or a democracy. Now, we show students videos of Cuba and teach them about the country's laws," he said. (*News24.Com*, 29/8/05)

August 29: Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called on the European Union to make "any softening in the EU stance on Cuba strictly conditional on the release of the independent journalists imprisoned in Cuba." RSF said in a letter to the British presidency of the European Union that continuation of the suspension of the sanctions "would violate the Common Position adopted by the European Union in 1996, which aims to 'encourage a process of transition to a

pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" in Cuba. [[RSF's letter to the British Presidency of the EU](#)] (*EFE*, 29/8/05)

August 30: Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez affirmed that his government would be ready to collaborate with Cuba to fight Mexico-based human trafficking networks that smuggle Cuban illegal migrants out of the island if the Cuban authorities make an official request. "We would gladly work with the Cuban authorities, to see how we can also help fight the trafficking of Cuban citizens," said Derbez. The Foreign Minister was responding to questions regarding accusations made by Fidel Castro, to the effect that in Mexico operates a Cuban-immigrant trafficking network, run by radical anti-Castro elements from Miami and tolerated by the Mexican and American governments. (*AFP*, 30/8/05)

August 30: Dissidents from around the world gathered in the Polish port of Gdansk, where Lech Walesa urged them to follow the freedom-fighting example of Solidarity, the trade union he helped transform into a pro-democracy powerhouse 25 years ago this month. As part of nationwide celebrations of the first Solidarity strikes against Poland's communist regime, Mr Walesa welcomed activists from as far as Cuba, Burma and the Middle East. "The struggle for liberty employed by the brave Polish people (...) is a source of inspiration in this tragic era that we Cubans are enduring," Oscar Espinosa Chepe, an independent journalist and economist sentenced to 20 years in jail in his native Cuba, said in a message to the conference. (*Irish Times, Swissinfo*, 31/8/05)

August 30: A court in Montpellier, France, over-ruled an order for the deportation of a Cuban couple in consideration of "personal safety risks to which (these two persons) are exposed" in Cuba. Walfrido Rodríguez, member of the National Civic Movement of Cuba, declared to have left the island with his wife Margarita Santana in an attempt to reach Spain via Moscow, to escape police persecution in Cuba. (*AFP*, 30/8/05)

August 31: Kim Jong-il, general secretary of the Korean Workers' Party and chairman of the National Defence Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Supreme People's Assembly, received a congratulatory message from Fidel Castro Ruz, first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, president of the Council of State and president of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the opening of diplomatic ties between the two countries. (*KCNA*, 31/8/05)

August 31: Honduran President Ricardo Maduro announced that the 300 Cuban doctors currently working in this country will remain for one more year, although the agreement on health care cooperation between Tegucigalpa and Havana will be reviewed. "The Cuban doctors will remain. This is in response to the general opinion of the Honduran people, and that I myself share, that they are doing a good job," Maduro said. The president indicated that the decision was made by a commission comprised of, among others, the Medical School of Honduras. (*AFP*, 31/8/05)

Terrorism

August 5: In a few years, Pentagon officials said, the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, will have undergone a radical transformation. The sprawling detention site known as Camp Delta, with its watchtowers, double-wide trailers housing rows of steel cells and interrogation rooms will be mostly demolished. Instead, a sharply reduced inmate population of those the military considers the most hard-core will inhabit two nearby hard-walled modern prisons. The newest of those, which is still under construction, is modeled on a modern county jail in Michigan and is designed to counter international criticism of Guantánamo as inhumane and, to some, a symbol of American arrogance. The population will be reduced to 320, the capacity of the permanent prison buildings. (*The New York Times*, 6/8/05)

August 6: Colombia is demanding that Ireland hand over three Irish Republican Army-linked fugitives convicted of supporting terrorism in this South American country. The trio unexpectedly turned up in Ireland after eight months on

the run. Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley and James Monaghan disappeared in December after a Colombian appeals court reversed an earlier acquittal and sentenced the men to 17 years in prison for training guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. It had been thought they were hiding in Cuba or Venezuela. (*AP*, 6/8/05)

Security

August 2: Fidel Castro presided over the graduation ceremony of the Venezuelan military in Havana, in which he highlighted the timely value of the Bolivarian Revolution. The Cuban leader spoke at the "Libertador Simón Bolívar" Venezuelan Army Academy's 46th graduation ceremony, whose graduate officers elected him their patron. In the closing speech, he stressed the Bolivarian revolution has arrived at just the right moment to contribute to the second and definitive independence of Latin America, as Simón Bolívar dreamed. The ceremony took place at the Council of State where the statesman personally delivered the diplomas to each of the 75 graduates. By decision of the Cuban Council of State, the Venezuelan graduates, presided over by director of the military academy, Brigadier General Carlos Antonio Centeno Mena, received the Combat Brotherhood Medal. Castro was presented with a replica of a Venezuelan Navy submarine and batons used by the generals of that country, and then left with the Venezuelan military delegation, who were accompanied by close family members. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/05)

August 8: A delegation of high-ranking Venezuelan military officers, the second one in a week, arrived in Havana, where it will remain until August 15, informed the Ministry of the Armed forces of Cuba (FAR). The delegation from the Air War College was led by Division General Roger Cordero Lara, general commander of the Venezuelan Air Force. (*AFP*, 8/8/05)

August 8: Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez said that the US government, which "won't stop caressing the idea of invading Cuba or invading Venezuela," should be warned of the consequences. "If someday they get the crazy idea of coming to invade us, we'll make them bite the dust defending the freedom of our land," Chávez said to applause. He spoke during the opening ceremony of a world youth festival bringing together student delegations from across the world and convened under the slogan "Against Imperialism and War." The Venezuelan leader said "socialism is the only path," and told the students the collective goal is to "save a world threatened by the voracity of US imperialism." (*AP*, 9/8/05)

August 11: Fidel Castro welcomed in the Palace of the Revolution the delegation of the Air War College of Venezuela, made up of officers who graduated from that institution's 35th Air Force High Command and Staff Officer Program, who are currently visiting the island. (*Granma, AFP*, 12/8/05)

August 21: Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro extolled the work of the Venezuelan army servicemen who built a community in Sandino, a community in Cuba's most western province of Pinar del Rio, for families affected by recent hurricanes. Hugo Chavez met with the young soldiers and army high ranking officers before the "Alo Presidente" television program he traditionally hosts live in Venezuela, but this time was broadcast from Sandino together with Fidel Castro. Members of the Simon Bolivar international rescue brigade and humanitarian aid built 150 houses, which had been donated by Venezuela, in collaboration with workers and people from Sandino. The delegation accompanying Chavez was composed of ministers and top military officers, a police commissioner and the chiefs of the Army and the Navy. (*Prensa Latina*, 22/8/05)

August 21: Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, who often accuses Washington of plotting to overthrow his populist government, said Venezuela would come to Cuba's defense if the United States invaded the communist-run island. Chavez spoke for five hours on his weekly Venezuelan television show broadcast live from the town of Sandino, 160

miles west of Havana in westernmost Cuba, where Venezuelan troops built 150 prefabricated houses after Hurricane Ivan last September. "We want peace (...) We will do everything humanly possible to avoid an imperialist aggression. But if it occurs to some madman, he will find these young men (Venezuelan soldiers) and us in command defending the independence and sovereignty of this land," Chavez said. (*The New York Times*, 21/8/05)

US-Cuba Relations

August 1: Cuba's communist government is bristling over President Bush's efforts to hasten its downfall by appointing a "transition coordinator" to prepare for a post-Castro Cuba. "Once again Bush is rudely meddling in Cuba's internal affairs by appointing one of his men to publicly coordinate subversive actions against the island," the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said. The Bush administration named Caleb McCarry to the State Department post of Cuba transition coordinator, a position created last year as part of a strategy to prepare for what it hopes will be a move from communism to democracy. (*Reuters*, 1/8/05)

August 1: A humanitarian group that travels each year to Cuba to protest the US economic blockade returned to the United States without incident, organization officials said. Members of Pastors for Peace had prepared for their belongings to be confiscated or to even be arrested after returning through Mexico from Cuba, said spokeswoman Ellen Bernstein. The group skirts US travel restrictions to the impoverished island by flying from Mexico. When the group crossed the Hidalgo/Pharr International Bridge into Mexico on July 21, US Customs officials seized 43 boxes filled with computer and other electronic equipment. The items were seized because the group did not obtain a license from the US Department of Commerce to export the equipment. (*AP*, 1/8/05)

August 2: Cuba praised the value of the verdict from the UN Group for Arbitrary Detentions on the arrest and sentences against five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. Attorneys Roberto Gonzalez and Roberto Davalos said the prestigious UN panel conclusion, issued on May 27, renders the arrest and sentences against the "Cuban Five" illegal because of the evident political interests involved and violation of US and international laws. Among the violations lie solitary confinement, the manipulation of the Act for the Protection of Classified Information, and holding the trial in an adverse environment like Miami that led the prosecutors to declare them a threat for national security in 2001. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/05)

August 3: "Young Rebels", a short documentary about the growing hip-hop movement in Cuba, directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, follows five hip-hop groups as they struggle to put together the ninth annual Havana Hip-Hop Festival. Whether because of government censorship or simple lack of means, most of these artists can perform and record their music only in cramped family apartments, hunched over their computers, as relatives burst in to complain about the noise. The festival, a yearly outdoor concert in Almendares Park, is their one chance to reach large audiences, including record companies and foreign media outlets. The film traces the increasingly bitter division between commercially successful groups that have recorded and traveled outside the country under the auspices of a government ministry, the Agency of Rap, and the more subversive acts that have remained underground, loosely banded into a group known as the Youth Cultural Association. The film, which opened in Manhattan, concludes with a too-short sequence featuring the performances at the festival itself, which include a lesbian feminist collective called Krudas, or Raw Girls, and all-male groups with idealistic names like Hermanos de Causa (Brothers of the Cause) and Familias Cuba Represent. (*The New York Times*, 3/8/05)

August 4: Amidst the anxiety of his relatives and faced with the possibility of repatriation, a captain in the Cuban State Security service who escaped from the island on a boat along with another 27 people, remained aboard a US Coast Guard vessel. According to his wife's testimony, 39-year-old Guillermo Alfonso Alfonso, an officer with the Cuban

Ministry of the Interior (MININT) since 1983, exited the island from the north coast and was intercepted the next day by a US Coast Guard patrol, when the longboat in which he was traveling ran out of fuel. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/8/05)

August 5: The US authorities granted visas to the three daughters and the wife of Ramón Labañino Salazar, who is one of five Cuban citizens currently serving lengthy prison terms in the United States. Since he was convicted in 2001, Labañino has not received family visits in spite of reiterated requests to the US authorities from his wife, Elizabeth Palmeiro. (*World Data Service*, 5/8/05)

August 5: The US Coast Guard has intercepted 1,524 Cuban migrants at sea so far this year -- more than the total for any single year since more than 37,000 migrants rode the waves to South Florida in the 1994 rafters exodus. US officials say the increase in the number of Cuban migrants stopped at sea is relatively small -- only 25 more people so far this year than during all of last year. Last year's figure of 1,499 was the largest yearlong tally since 1994. The trend suggests that the 2005 total will be considerably higher by year's end than for 2004. Figures for Cuban migrant interdictions compiled in fiscal year format -- October 1 to September 30 -- appear more impressive: 2,027 so far this fiscal year compared to 1,225 in fiscal year 2004. By July 29 of the 2004 fiscal year, 1,068 Cuban migrants had been intercepted. (*The Miami Herald*, 5/8/05)

August 5: Three children and their father were returned to the US by Cuban authorities. On July 27, Foreign Affairs Canada, akin to the US State Department, was told a Canadian father and his three children had disappeared from the US. Two days later, the Canadian embassy in Havana learned that three Canadian children had arrived in Cuba with their father and without travel documents. Cloe Rodrigue, a spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs Canada, said her office then worked with Cuban authorities to ensure the children's safety and swift return. Canadian embassy workers, helped by Cuban officials, approached Mel Dressler's catamaran, docked in Puerto de Vita on the Cuban coast, and removed the children from his care. The youngsters were flown to Montreal, where their step father Richard Subbio met them. Then all four returned to Philadelphia. Dressler, meanwhile, sailed to the Bahamas, after being told he would be arrested in Cuba. He faces a bench warrant in Philadelphia, and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's office charged him with child concealment, a third-degree felony that carries a maximum five-year sentence. According to Committee for Missing Children representative David Thelen, Cuba has been more helpful in international child custody cases since the return of Elián González in 2000. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/8/05)

August 6: A ship that docked in Havana contained 93 cows from three states, including 40 heifers from Vermont and Maine. It was the second shipment of Vermont cows. The first shipment arrived last month. The arrival marked the culmination of an effort begun nearly 18 months ago by Lt. Governor Brian Dubie, who traveled to Cuba on a trade mission and returned with letters of intent to buy 100 cows, 2,000 bushels of apples and 3,000 metric tons of powdered milk. (*AP*, 7/8/05)

August 9: Cuban-American leaders in Congress are expressing outrage that the governor of Nebraska, David Heineman, will lead a trade delegation to Cuba in the immediate wake of crackdowns on dissidents and as leaders of the island's pro-democracy movement encounter greater repression from Cuba's communist dictator, Fidel Castro. They are urging the governor, who is seeking to establish a long-term trade relationship with the Cuban government, to mitigate the effects of his trip by visiting with dissidents, advocating the release of political prisoners, and urging free elections on the island during his stay in Cuba. Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Mario Diaz-Balart, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, all Republicans of Florida, sent a letter to Mr. Heineman denouncing his willingness to visit Cuba and trade with Mr. Castro's regime in the wake of recent crackdowns on the island's dissident movement. "Your decision to travel to totalitarian Cuba at this time demonstrates a profound insensitivity toward the suffering of the Cuban people and to the fact that Cuba is one of only six remaining state sponsors of terrorism in the world today," the representatives' letter stated. (*New York Sun*, 10/8/05)

August 9: In a startling setback for prosecutors in a politically charged case, a US appeals court overturned the convictions of five Cubans sentenced in 2001 to long prison terms on spy-related charges. Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González, René González, Gerardo Hernández and Ramón Labañino were convicted in 2001 after US agents dismantled a Cuban spy network called La Red Avispa, the Wasp Network. In a unanimous decision, a three-judge panel of the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta ruled that the five Cubans were unfairly tried in Miami because of community prejudice, extensive media coverage and prosecutors' inflammatory remarks. Although none of the jurors was Cuban-American, defense attorneys argued that Miami's anti-Castro atmosphere ensured their clients would be railroaded into prison sentences ranging from 15 years to life. Leonard Weinglass, an attorney for one of the defendants, described the appeals court decision as "remarkable" and "courageous." Defense attorneys said they would seek bail for their clients, who they argued should be freed pending a new trial. Paul McKenna, Hernandez's attorney, said it was too early to say where the new trial would be held but prefers any place other than Miami. "It really can't be held in the Southern District of Florida," McKenna said at a joint news conference with other defense attorneys. Federal prosecutors in Miami had no immediate comment on the court's decision, which is likely to be appealed. [[US Court of Appeals Ruling for the 11th Circuit](#)] (*Chicago Tribune, BBC, Reuters, EFE, 10/8/05*)

August 10: Cuba said that it was a "happy day" on the island after a US federal appeals court decided to throw out convictions and sentences for five Cuban intelligence agents. A statement on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma called the ruling "ethical" and urged Cubans to be patient as the men, known locally as the "Five Heroes," prepare for a new trial. "The wait has been long (...) and there's no doubt that it will continue to be so," the newspaper said. "It is not easy to overcome a wall of prejudice and blasphemy created over 45 years." (*AP, 10/8/05*)

August 10: Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcón called on the US government to release five accused Cuban spies serving long prison terms after a federal appeals court threw out their convictions and sentences. Alarcón applauded the ruling that said the men's trial in Miami wasn't fair and impartial because of community prejudice and extensive media coverage. He insisted the men be liberated while awaiting a new trial. "What the US government should do is grant them freedom immediately," Alarcon told Granma International, the Communist Party's weekly newspaper distributed overseas. "If they want to accuse them of something else, then accuse them, present evidence, and search for an impartial tribunal." (*CNN, EFE, 10/8/05*)

August 11: Cuba's parliamentary speaker accused the US government of illegally keeping five Cuban men behind bars, saying they should be freed after a US appeals court threw out their convictions on spying charges. Flanked by the men's relatives, Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcón held up a copy of the 93-page ruling by the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, and called it "an exceptional document." "Two days have already passed and those five compatriots remain illegally locked up in maximum-security prisons," Alarcón said at a news conference with the men's relatives during a visit to Venezuela. He called the Miami trial that ended in convictions a "farce" and said the new decision revoking their prison sentences means the Cubans are being held "hostage" without cause. "At this time, they aren't guilty of anything," Alarcón said. (*AP, Prensa Latina, 12/8/05*)

August 11: The US Foreign Claims Settlement Commission has established a second Cuban Claims Program to receive claims of US citizens or corporations against the Government of Cuba for previously undjudicated losses of real and personal property taken after May 1, 1967, chairman Mauricio Tamargo announced. In the earlier Cuban Claims Program, completed on July 6, 1972, the Commission certified 5,911 claims to the US Department of State. Any new claims certified as valid by the Commission will be added to those already certified in the previous program. Although there are no funds currently available to make payment on any American claims, the certification of the Commission's findings to the Secretary of State will be used as a basis for future negotiation of a claims settlement with the Government of Cuba. (*US Newswire, 11/8/05*)

August 12: Miami's top federal prosecutor says he will retry the five accused Cuban spies whose 2001 convictions were just overturned by a federal appeals court -- most probably next year in another city. But US Attorney R.

Alexander Acosta is weighing another potential legal move: challenging the stunning decision by the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta. Legal experts said the three-judge panel cited so much overwhelming evidence -- including a court-approved, pre-trial survey showing widespread community prejudice toward the five Cuban defendants -- that there is nothing factually for prosecutors to challenge. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/8/05)

August 14: Fidel Castro marked his 79th birthday with relatives of five Cuban agents whose convictions on spying charges were overturned, and he spoke to two of the men in US prisons, official media said. "The best they could do would be to set you free," the Cuban president told one of the five agents, Gerardo Hernandez, at the Lompoc prison in California, according to the official daily *Juventud Rebelde*. Hernandez was speaking to his wife by phone when the Havana gathering fell silent so Castro could address him, the newspaper said. Castro later spoke to another of the agents, Antonio Guerrero, in the same manner, the paper reported. Guerrero is imprisoned in Florence, Colorado. Castro said the ruling was "a victory for the truth in the best tradition of the North American people," and had made his 79th birthday the most memorable, according to the report in *Juventud Rebelde*. "Stay firm. You are heroes among heroes," the paper quoted Castro telling Hernandez. He also promised to continue to mobilize Cubans and the international community in their defense. Cuba has organized defense committees for the five around the world and made their freedom a cause celebre at home. (*Reuters*, 14/8/05)

August 14: A Cuban national detained by immigration officers last year on suspicion of being involved in the torture of Fidel Castro's political foes has been released, but may still face deportation. Luis Enrique Daniel Rodríguez was from an immigration facility in Bradenton on Florida's Gulf Coast, where he had been held for months, his attorney, Leonardo Viota Sesin, said. Sesin said he was not sure why his client was freed. Dean Boyd, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman in Washington, said Daniel Rodríguez was released because of a Supreme Court ruling that prohibits the indefinite detention of foreign nationals whose countries refused to readmit them. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/8/05)

August 14: A trade delegation led by Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman arrived in Havana with hopes of clinching deals to sell beans, corn and wheat to the island during its four-day mission. Heineman immediately entered a meeting at the Havana airport with Pedro Alvarez, the chairman of Cuba's food-import company, Alimport, to start discussing business. "Our focus is on agricultural trade, particularly dry beans," Heineman told reporters in brief comments. "Nebraska has many high-quality agricultural products, and we are looking forward to opportunities to open trade with Cuba." (*AP*, 15/8/05)

August 16: Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman secured a deal for his state to sell \$17 million in farm goods to communist Cuba, starting with the first US shipment of great northern beans to the island since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959. Cuba said it will make the purchases, which also include corn, wheat, and soybeans, within the next 18 months. "I know that Nebraska farmers and ranchers will be very happy with this agreement," Heineman told a press conference in Havana's historic Hotel Nacional. Heineman led a 10-member trade delegation including Agriculture Secretary Greg Ibach and representatives of the Nebraska Farm Bureau and the state's corn and wheat boards. (*AP*, *CNN*, 16/8/05)

August 16: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accused Washington's leftist foes Venezuela and Cuba of trying to destabilize Bolivia, embroiled in indigenous revolts that have overthrown two presidents in two years. "There is certainly evidence both Cuba and Venezuela have been involved in the situation in Bolivia in unhelpful ways," Rumsfeld told reporters while flying to Paraguay on an official visit. He gave no evidence to support his claim. (*The New York Times*, 16/8/05)

August 16: Coast Guard officials said that 234 migrants from Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti have been repatriated after they were stopped at sea on boats headed toward the United States. The total number of Cubans stopped at sea this year is increasing -- 1,856, the largest number intercepted in a single year since 1994, when 37,191

Cubans were stopped during the rafter exodus. According to a Coast Guard statement, its vessels returned 100 Haitians, 121 Dominicans and 13 Cubans. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/8/05)

August 17: US Congressman José E. Serrano criticized US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's statements made during the Secretary's recent visit to Paraguay. Congressman Serrano called Rumsfeld's comments "baseless". "Secretary Rumsfeld is following the careless and dangerous line that this administration has always held on Cuba, though now they have added Venezuela to their equation" said Serrano. "For the past five decades we blamed Cuba every time impoverished people in Latin America were upset with their governments and did something about it. Now the formula is that Cuba and Venezuela are to blame," he said. (*Venezuelanalysis.com*, 17/8/05)

August 17: Two well-known Cuban opposition leaders met with Senator Arlen Specter, chairman of the United States' Senate Judiciary Committee, to brief him on recent official actions against members of Cuba's dissidence. The outlawed Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) stated that Marta Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca met the Republican senator from Pennsylvania at the residence of James Cason, Chief of Mission of the US Interests Section in Cuba. Roque, the APSC's principal leader, and Roca, who heads the All United movement, were both targets of recent "acts of repudiation" in front of their homes by supporters of the Cuban Government, an APSC press release stated. The press release indicated that during the meeting "both opposition leaders informed the senator about the most recent wave of repression unleashed by the government against members of Cuba's democratic opposition, of which they personally were victims." (*Netfor Cuba, AFP, Notimex*, 16/8/05)

August 17: Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter was in Havana trying to meet with Fidel Castro. Specter's spokesman, William H. Reynolds, confirmed that Specter was in Havana in hopes of meeting with Castro -- although it was a bit uncertain whether he succeeded. The excursion to the Cuban capital was a side trip on a visit to the region that also took him to the US military base at Guantanamo Bay, where suspected terrorists are held. He returned to Havana and went to Venezuela. Reynolds said Specter met two or three times in the past with Castro; the senator and Castro talked previously about drug interdiction. "I don't know the specifics of why he went down this time," Reynolds said. Reynolds at first said Specter "met with Castro." In a subsequent conversation, Reynolds hedged that, saying that there was "an attempt to try to get them together" but that he could not confirm whether a meeting had actually occurred. (*The Washington Post*, 17/8/05)

August 18: Nicanor Duarte, president of Paraguay, defended the relations of his government with Cuba and Venezuela to Donald Rumsfeld, US defense secretary, according to Paraguayan Defense Minister Roberto González. A communiqué read out by González, affirmed that Duarte highlighted to Rumsfeld the total educational support his country receives from Cuba, as well as the economic benefits of the energy agreements signed with Venezuela. "At the same time we agreed on the need to build a united South America, with greater political power in world decisions, especially in the economy, finances, the distribution of information and knowledge," according to the text, circulated a day after Rumsfeld's official visit to Asunción. (*Granma*, 19/8/05)

August 19: Crew members aboard a US Coast Guard cutter stationed at Fort Myers Beach had busy days when they encountered 33 would-be Cuban immigrants and three suspected smugglers during routine patrols southwest of Fort Myers. "We had them all up forward at the bow of the ship," said Lt. J.G. Pate, who alerted news media to the accomplishments of his crew of nine plus four more Coast Guard staffers who joined in the patrol. The crew came across 16 Cubans in a homemade metal-and-fiberglass boat; took 11 Cubans from the cruise ship Navigator of the Sea, which had found them in a rubber raft north of Havana; picked up a solo Cuban found near Key West by a boat called the Matagorda; found five more immigrants near the Marquesas. Those Cubans were in a 10-foot wooden boat they were trying to row after tossing the engine -- presumably not working or out of fuel -- overboard. The would-be immigrants were brought aboard one or two at a time, frisked for weapons and given food, water, blankets and medical attention, Pate said. The Cubans were transferred to the Coast Guard cutter Hawk, which took them to Bahía de Cabanas in Cuba. (*News Press*, 19/8/05)

August 21: The "Fat Albert" blimps that broadcast TV Martí to Cuba and scanned the Florida Straits for drug smugglers are skinny now, ruptured by the unforgiving winds of hurricane season. The \$3 million blimps that hovered over the lower Florida Keys were torn apart July 9 in 46 mph winds during Hurricane Dennis, US government officials confirmed. That means TV Martí's 31 ½ hours of weekly programming have been slashed to fewer than 10 hours broadcast by satellite and the US military's flying radio stations known as Commando Solo C-130s. Few people watch the U.S.-government station's programs because Cuba jams the signal. And critics say that the fact it took the US media more than five weeks to notice the blimps were missing proves the station has no impact. (*DPA, The Miami Herald*, 21/8/05)

August 21: Fidel Castro and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez made a joint television appearance overnight in which Chavez accused Washington of destroying the world. The two Latin American leaders, wearing olive military uniforms, talked for five hours and 40 minutes in a special broadcast of Chavez' weekly radio and television show, "Hello Mr. President," from Cuba's western Pinar del Rio province. "US imperialism represents the greatest threat weighing on the world," Chavez said, calling the United States the "great destabiliser" and "the destroyer of the world." Taking a sarcastic tone, Castro told Chavez: "You already know, we cannot make a student study because that would be destabilising, we cannot invite patients to get medical care because that is destabilising." The Foreign Ministers of both countries were in attendance, as well as Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista former president, Daniel Ortega, and former Salvadoran guerrilla leader Schafik Handal. (*The Australian*, 22/8/05)

August 22: Cuba will purchase \$30 million in Nebraska agricultural products in the next year and a half, Governor Dave Heineman said. The news came less than a week after Heineman secured a deal for Nebraska to export \$17 million in agricultural goods to the communist nation, starting with the first US shipment of great northern beans to the island since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959. Heineman said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's food import company Alimport, contacted Nebraska officials soon after they returned from Cuba and expressed interest in making more purchases. (*AP*, 22/8/05)

August 23: Cuba accused the United States of having a strategy to protect terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, for whom Venezuela has filed for extradition, and of not releasing the five Cubans whose sentences were overturned by a court two weeks ago. In a statement to the press, Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's parliament, said that part of that maneuvering is the hearing set for August 29 during which a judge in El Paso, Texas – where Posada is being held – will hear arguments for and against his deportation. "What has the United States done with Venezuela's application? Evidently nothing. Three months ago now, they should have sent him to a federal court, not before a so-called immigration judge. It is all part of a scandalous maneuver not to extradite him," he said. (*Granma International*, 23/8/05)

August 22: The US Coast Guard searched for 31 Cubans reported missing at sea after their boat capsized between Florida and Cuba. Three survivors were plucked out of the water by the crew of a merchant ship about 30 miles north of Matanzas, Cuba, and told their rescuers their speedboat had overturned with 31 other people aboard, the US Coast Guard said. The survivors were taken ashore in Cuba and Cuban authorities alerted the US Coast Guard. Search crews found a capsized boat in the area but had not found any more survivors. A Coast Guard spokesman said he did not know whether any passengers had life vests or if the voyage was a migrant smuggling attempt. (*The New York Times*, 22/8/05)

August 22: A shipment of 200 wheelchairs repaired and refurbished by inmates at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola left for Cuba. The wheelchairs will be given to those in need as part of the Joni and Friends program. Angola is the first US state prison to participate in the effort. Joni and Friends was started in 1979 by Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic. Her Wheels for the World project has provided more than 20,000 refurbished wheelchairs to more than 60 countries. (*The Baton Rouge Advocate*, 22/8/05)

August 25: The US Coast Guard has given up a search for 31 Cuban migrants missing at sea for over a week since their overcrowded speedboat capsized between Cuba and Florida. Coast Guard aircraft and vessels had searched more than 26,000 sq km of ocean - an area about the size of Massachusetts - for survivors of the shipwreck, since three people were rescued by the crew of the merchant ship Antigua-flagged Melfi Habana. The US Coast Guard learned, through an exchange of search and rescue information with Cuban border guards, that as many as 14 people were initially able to cling to the hull of the vessel when it reportedly capsized on August 16, while up to 20 others drifted away. Eleven people reportedly drifted away as they lost their hold on the capsized vessel, leaving the three people who were rescued. They were reportedly wearing life jackets that allowed them to float until the Melfi Habana rescued them. (*AP, US Fed News, 25/8/05*)

August 25: The US government has requested the Atlanta Court of Appeals for an extension of the deadline, so that prosecutors have more time to appeal the panel's unanimous decision of August 9th that reversed the convictions of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US. According to the verdict of the US Court of Appeals 11th Circuit in Atlanta, prosecutors had 21 days to appeal its ruling. The White House, acting on behalf of the Miami Attorney's office, has requested 30 more days, till September 29th, so the Miami attorneys make their case. (*Prensa Latina, 25/8/05*)

August 25: Four decades after Fidel Castro's government had apparently seized all foreign-owned properties in Cuba, it now turns out that a US telephone company retained some 400 acres of land in and around Havana until just two years ago. News of the surprising landholdings came after Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide -- owners of the Sheraton hotel chain -- filed a complaint with the US Justice Department for \$63 million worth of land it said the Cuban government seized in 2003 from a Starwood subsidiary. Starwood's land was owned by Radio Corporación Cubana (RCC), a company established in Cuba in 1922 as a subsidiary of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. In 1998, Starwood acquired ITT's ownership of RCC. RCC used the land for a transmitting station, buildings and equipment needed for international telephone service until 1992, when Hurricane Andrew knocked out the Florida side of the phone service. The property remained largely unused until 2003, when both the land and RCC were seized. Castro nationalized virtually all foreign-owned properties in 1960, from land to sugar mills to factories. (*The Miami Herald, 25/8/05*)

August 25: US producers and Cuban officials reported that US rice shipments to the island have plunged by half this year with Washington's tightening of already limited trade between the two countries. According to US producers, only 90,000 metric tons of US rice so far had been exported to Cuba this year, compared with 172,000 metric tons in 2004. "Unfortunately, our trade with Cuba has fallen over 50% in 2005 because of the stringent export restrictions imposed by the US government," said Lee Adams, USA Rice Federation chairman during a visit to Havana with a delegation from the Arlington, Virginia-based trade group. Increased measures by US President George W. Bush's administration "have shown that the United States markets are totally insecure about our country," said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. (*Dow Jones Newswires, 25/8/05*)

August 26: Cuba blamed the US government for the deaths of 31 people who authorities believed perished in the Florida Straits when their overcrowded boat capsized during an apparent smuggling trip to the United States. "We blame the United States for the deaths of 31 people, almost certain that all have died," Cuba said in an official statement published on the front page of the Communist Party daily Granma. "We call again on American authorities to end the contraband of people, organized and financed from that country, and eliminate the murderous Cuban Adjustment Act" [[Official Statement](#)] (*CNN, 26/8/05*)

August 26: The US Interests Section in Havana, the American mission in Cuba, rejected the Cuban government's statement blaming the US for the disappearance of 31 Cubans at sea, calling it "a cynical attempt to deflect blame from itself." "Those who died did so fleeing Cuba's political repression and government-inflicted impoverishment," the Interests Section said in a statement distributed to international journalists. (*The New York Times, 26/8/05*)

August 26: Fidel Castro claimed that US policies were responsible for the latest tragedy to befall Cubans trying to reach American shores -- 31 people believed killed in the Florida Straits. The Cuban are missing and feared dead after their overcrowded boat capsized, officials said. Fidel Castro appeared on state-run television to point the finger at an American law that allows Cubans to apply for permanent residency if they reach the US, saying it encourages dangerous, illegal migration. "Lives have been lost for the last 40 years since they created that law," he said, referring to the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act. "This policy is absurd." (*The New York Times*, 26/8/05)

August 26: Cuba's food importing monopoly said it would purchase 130,000 tonnes of US rice in the coming months, putting 2005 imports of the US grain above last year's 172,000 tonnes. "Beginning in September we will purchase 100,000 tonnes of paddy rice and 30,000 tonnes of milled rice," Alimport Chairman Pedro Alvarez told a Havana news conference, adding all contracts would be signed in the next few days. A group of rice producers, led by the trade association, USA Rice Federation, arrived in Cuba concerned that the 90,000 tonnes of rice sold to Cuba so far this year was 50 percent below last year's January-August level. "With this agreement we will purchase more US rice than last year," Alvarez said, adding Cuba appreciated the rice federation's opposition to the US embargo. (*Reuters*, 26/8/05)

August 27: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez urged Americans with eye problems to visit Caracas' embassy in the United States, saying Venezuela and Cuba are ready to treat them. Chavez and Fidel Castro, who relish pointing up shortcomings in the US health care system, met in Cuba, where they touted their "Miracle Mission," a plan to treat millions of Latin Americans for eye diseases over the next 10 years. Chavez said 150,000 US citizens could be treated per year. "In Venezuela and Cuba, we are willing to bring American men, women and children to get eye treatment," the leftist president said in his weekly television show "Hello Mr. President." "We already talked about this with Fidel Castro," he said. (*AFP*, 28/8/05)

August 29: A US immigration judge ruled that if an asylum-seeking former CIA operative from Cuba is deported, he would be sent to Venezuela -- where he has been charged in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner -- and not returned to his Communist homeland. Representing US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, attorney Gina Garrett-Jackson asked for Posada to be extradited to Venezuela because he holds citizenship there, adding that at least "initially," return to that nation would pose no danger to the 77-year-old. Judge William Lee Abbott agreed that Venezuela would be the destination country, unless witnesses called before the court can show that sending him to the South American nation would represent a risk to Posada's well-being. The decision by Judge William Abbott came in advance of a hearing on the asylum application of 77-year-old Posada Carriles, which was expected to last three to five days. Posada, who has admitted working against Fidel Castro and to a role in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, has been wanted in Venezuela since escaping from prison there in 1985. (*The New York Times*, *EFE*, 29/8/05)

August 29: In Florida, six people were charged with trafficking in protected species of migratory birds, after one man was caught with two rare Cuban songbirds hidden in his underwear at the airport, officials said. The suspects, named in a 21-count indictment unsealed, were charged with illegally dealing in protected species of migratory birds, including indigo and painted buntings, blue grosbeaks and Northern cardinals. The six sold the birds, violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the US Attorney's office said. Among the suspects was Giraldo Wong, who prosecutors said was discovered with two Cuban grassquits in his underwear at the Miami International Airport after he returned from Cuba in May. (*The New York Times*, 30/8/05)

August 30: The Bush administration backed away from claims that Cuba has an offensive biological weapons effort, acknowledging in a report to Congress that "there is a split view" among intelligence analysts on the question. The report says instead that Cuba has the "technical capability" to pursue biological weapons research and development because of its advanced pharmaceutical industry. But it leaves open the critical question of whether it has done so. The State Department report apparently marks the first time that the US government has publicly softened its earlier charge, which has been controversial from the outset. [[US State Department Report](#)] (*The Miami Herald*, 31/8/05)

August 30: An anti-Castro militant initially refused to answer questions from US immigration attorneys at his deportation hearing, but later acknowledged using several aliases and passports with different names. When first asked about a series of aliases, including "Bambi," Luis Posada Carriles invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. After consulting with attorneys, Posada acknowledged using aliases and passports with various names as he traveled among Latin American countries and the United States. Government attorneys presented a copy of a passport with the name Franco Rodriguez Mena that they said was used to enter the United States in April 2000 at Miami. After initially refusing to identify the photograph in the passport, Posada said it was possible he used the passport, although he said he could not specifically remember that one. An ex-CIA operative, Posada denied that he tried to assassinate Fidel Castro. He also denied he had arranged a 1997 series of Havana hotel and restaurant explosions. (AP, Reuters, 31/8/05)

August 30: Nobel prize winners, singers and novelists, more than 600 intellectuals and artists overall, called on the United States to free five Cubans jailed for spying in Florida. In an open letter to US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, they said a ruling overturning the Cubans' convictions meant that the five should be released after seven years in US prisons. "At the present time, considering the nullification of the sentences, nothing justifies their incarceration," the letter said. "We are demanding their immediate liberation." Five Nobel prize winners, including South Africans Nadine Gordimer and Desmond Tutu, signed the letter. So did singer Harry Belafonte and actor Danny Glover, frequent critics of US hostility toward Fidel Castro's government. Other signatories included MIT linguist Noam Chomsky and rock singer Manu Chao. The letter was given to reporters at a news conference by Cuban writer Roberto Fernandez Retamar as part of a campaign by Cuba's government to win freedom for the five men. (Reuters, 30/8/05)

August 30: In early July, Rolando Sarabia, 23, one of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba's leading dancers, sneaked across the border into the United States in the way, he said, that so many Cubans do: "Walking, walking, walking." His is the latest in a wave of defections that have hit the brilliant but beleaguered Cuban national ballet company since 2002. Critics have called him the "Cuban Nijinsky" and compared him to the young Mikhail Baryshnikov. Mr. Sarabia said his decision to leave Cuba was purely artistic, spurred, he added, by the refusal of Alicia Alonso, the general director of the Ballet Nacional, to allow him to accept a principal dancer contract with the Boston Ballet in 2003. "Artistically, they shut the door on me," he said by telephone from Miami. "I am now making a new life." (The New York Times, 31/8/05)

August 31: Cuban artists recently nominated for Latin Grammy awards said they hope the US government will grant them visas in time to attend the November 3 ceremony in Los Angeles. In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult for Cuban musicians to obtain US travel visas, with 48 such visa requests denied in less than two years, Cuban authorities said at a news conference organized for the Grammy nominees. "The last group to appear in the United States was that of (Juan) Formell in November 2003," said Jorge Gonzalez, vice president of the government's Cuban Music Institute, referring to the popular group Los Van Van. Those nominated for Latin Grammy awards this year said they had begun the visa process, starting with asking the awards program organizers for a "letter of invitation," which is needed to request the US visas. (AP, 31/8/05)

August 31: An anti-Castro militant accused of illegally entering the United States withdrew his request for asylum. A lawyer for Luis Posada Carriles, Matthew Archambeault, told Immigration Judge William L. Abbott that his client, a former C.I.A. operative, decided to withdraw the asylum request to avoid embarrassing the American government. Some questions about his background that government lawyers asked Mr. Posada "may step in areas sensitive to the US government" and other governments, Mr. Archambeault said. Mr. Posada's lawyers said they would now focus on trying to prevent his deportation to Venezuela. (AP, 31/8/05)

August 31: Anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles may not be deported to Venezuela, where he fears he would be tortured, if his plea for protection in the United States fails. The judge overseeing his asylum and deportation trial in El

Paso said that on the face of it, Posada had presented enough evidence to persuade him that he could qualify for a form of US protection. But Judge William Abbott said he would defer a ruling. "He has made a prima facie case," Abbott said. Unless Judge Abbott changes his mind, the striking development in immigration court could allow Posada to stay in the United States -- although he could be subject to indefinite detention. Posada's attorneys argue that he qualifies for the protection, known as "deferral" of deportation, under terms of the Convention Against Torture, widely called CAT by immigration lawyers. "If Adolf Hitler applied for CAT, this court would have to grant deferral," Abbott said. "Not that your client is like Hitler," Abbott added quickly, noting that no matter how terrible a deferral applicant's criminal or terrorist past is, it does not disqualify him from the benefit if he can show likely torture in the country to which he is expelled. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/9/05)