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## Research Forum on Cuba

# Chronicle on Cuba

## August 2006

### Highlights

**Domestic Affairs:** In a message to the nation, the Cuban government says that information about Fidel Castro's health condition is a state secret. Under the current situation, leaders of Cuban opposition urge caution and restraint. Public "acts of rejection" against dissidents take place on several spots of the island. Fidel Castro recovers from intestinal surgery, Cuban high-ranking officials say. Ramiro Valdés is named Minister of Communications and Information Science.

**Economy:** Iran and Cuba discuss avenues for bolstering bilateral cooperation in the technical and industrial fields. Cuban authorities announce the island has left behind a serious draught period. Cuba cannot fulfill its goal in house building. Cuban Finance Minister visits Vietnam and China.

**Exile Community:** The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) makes a call for a "non violent" political transition in Cuba. The Democracy Movement urges the US government to let Cuban-Americans come to the island to help with a political transition. The Cuban Committee for Democracy favours dialogue with Raul Castro.

**Foreign Affairs:** During Carlos Uribe's assumption to the presidency of Colombia, Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage meets with high dignitaries and with the secretary general of the Organization of American States. Cuba presents a final draft declaration to the Coordination Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement in New York to be discussed at the 14th Summit of NAM in September in Havana. Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez visits Fidel Castro in Havana. Costa Rican president Oscar Arias urges the Ibero-American countries to support a transition toward democracy in Cuba.

**Security:** After the announcement of Fidel Castro's transfer of power to his brother Raúl, Cuban Armed Forces mobilize and call up its military reserves.

**US-Cuba Relations:** The US president George W. Bush says his government is actively monitoring the situation in Cuba and expresses the US commitment to supporting transition toward democracy in Cuba. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice makes Washington's second appeal in three days aimed at preventing a mass exodus from Cuba to Florida. Michael Parmly, the chief of the US diplomatic mission in Havana, attends a concert in tribute to Fidel Castro on his birthday. Raul Castro says that Cuba would be willing to "normalize relations on an equal plane" with the United States.



## Domestic Affairs

**August 1:** The Cuban government sought to reassure citizens after Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power for the first time in 47 years, releasing a statement from the world's longest-serving head of government saying his health is stable, his spirits good and the defence of the island guaranteed. "The important thing is that in the country everything is going perfectly well, and will continue to do so," said the statement by the elder Castro. It was not known when or where the surgery took place, nor where Castro was recovering. No images of the leader were shown. Castro, 79, acknowledged the that operation was serious, saying "I cannot make up positive news." But he said his health was "stable" and "as for my spirits, I feel perfectly fine," according to the message read on the Cuban nightly public affairs show "Mesa Redonda," or "Round Table," by government journalist Randy Alonso. He apologized for not giving more details, but said the threat posed to his government by the US means his health must be treated as "a state secret," and he called on Cubans to remain calm as they carried out their daily routines. "The country is prepared for its defence," he said, apparently to assure Cubans the island was safe from potential US attack. His brother and designated successor, Raul Castro, remained silent and out of sight, issuing no statements of his own. [[Mensaje de Fidel Castro](#)] (*EFE, Chicago Tribune, AP, 2/8/06*)

**August 1:** The Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, the Cuban government's neighbourhood watch group, stepped up its volunteer night patrols, and the pro-government Rapid Action Brigades — used in the past to handle civil disturbances — was placed on standby. (*EFE, 2/8/06*)

**August 1:** As a show of support, the Cuban authorities organized rallies in several places throughout Havana, including outside Havana's colonial-era customs offices on the shores of Havana Bay. But they were short and low-key by Cuban government standards. The rally outside Customs lasted barely 30 minutes, a crowd of several hundred state workers listening quietly to speeches urging support for Castro and the government. The main newscast on state-run television ran a string of man-on-the-street interviews with Cubans wishing Castro well and professing confidence in the revolution's staying power. The anchor said Castro had the people's "unconditional support." (*EFE, AP, 2/8/06*)

**August 1:** A placard bearing the inscription "Never Caught Off Guard" appeared across from the residence of Laura Pollán, a member of the Ladies in White, a group of relatives of political prisoners. This and two other posters proclaiming "With Our Guard Up" and "Always Vigilant" were put up following the broadcast of a message from Fidel Castro to the people of Cuba. (*Cubonet, 3/8/06*)

**August 1:** Leaders of Cuba's opposition urged caution and restraint. "The dissident community in Cuba is pacifist," said Oscar Espinosa Chepe, an independent journalist and economist. "None of them are calling for protests." Dissidents said they expected the government to be on the defensive, with a high security presence and a low tolerance for political acts. "It's clear that this is the start of the transition," said activist Manuel Cuesta Morua. "This gives Cuba the opportunity to have a more rational leadership" because top leaders will be forced to work together rather than following one man. Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement called for "calm" and for "a change among Cubans". Marta Beatriz Roque, leader of the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society, said the the situation is "irreversible". "I don't think he (Castro) will be in control again", "It's a situation that demands cautiousness and intelligence", Roque said. (*AP, The Independent, EFE, 2/8/06*)

**August 2:** The newspaper Granma, mouthpiece of the Communist Party - the only one allowed in Cuba - ran a big headline reading, "Fidel, get better." It published an array of best wishes and expressions of solidarity received by Castro, who never before in his 47 years of rule had delegated command. Juventud Rebelde, another paper, said in its banner headline: "The Revolution continues." Its summary of messages expressing hope for Castro's complete recovery was titled, "Long life to a unique man." Thousands of workers took part in officially organized "acts of patriotic reaffirmation" to demonstrate their loyalty to the Castro brothers and commitment to the regime. (*EFE*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** The speaker of Cuba's parliament told the press that Fidel Castro, who underwent surgery to stop intestinal bleeding, is "very alive and very alert." In his remarks, parliamentary speaker Ricardo Alarcon said that he met with Castro before his illness was announced and was also in communication with him the day he went into surgery. "I must say that he's perfectly conscious. He's in very good spirits, as always. We talked for over half an hour on many things: what's going on in the world and yesterday (August 1) about the impact that the announcement has had," the official said.

"Of course, he is forced to have a period of rest. He underwent a complicated surgery. And he's in, I would say, a normal period of recovery after an important surgery - that's essentially what I would say - but very alive and very alert, as always, very interested in what's going on around him and around the world," Alarcon said of Castro. During the recovery process Castro "cannot be at the same time holding certain responsibilities," the Cuban official said. (*EFE*, *Reuters*, 1/8/06)

**August 3:** Two days after a statement attributed to Fidel Castro was read out on Cuban television which delegated power to his younger brother, Raúl, the provisional president has still not been seen in public nor addressed the nation. The reason why was unclear. The elder Castro could be reluctant to relinquish power after his 47-year rule, even if it's temporary, or media run by the Communist government could be focusing solely on him out of respect and habit. Raul, who has long deferred to his elder brother, could be keeping a low profile for the same reasons. (*Latin News Daily*, *AP*, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** The highest-profile Cuban democracy advocate who has remained on the island says he hopes for political change, but that it must come about amid tranquility, which should not be disturbed by ardent anti-Castro activists abroad. He also said "the culture of fear" that pervades Cuban society after 47 years of one-party Communist rule prevents everyday citizens from talking about what is going on with Fidel Castro and his brother, but that many are worried about the near future. "We're facing a new experience for Cubans," Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, told the press. For Paya's group, "the view has always prevailed that changes are necessary in Cuba with Fidel (in power) and not waiting for his death, because they are of vital importance for the Cuban people." Within Cuban society, "there's fear of repression because there's a culture of fear that has been established for many years, but there's also a fear of change and real uncertainty about how that change could come about." Paya said support from abroad should contribute to a "climate of peace, harmony and understanding." (*EFE*, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** Prominent dissidents seem just as confused as many of their countrymen about what is happening in Cuba after Fidel Castro ceded power to his brother, Raul Castro, and what it means for them. "At this point, all of this is not having an impact on the dissident movement, none whatsoever," Vladimiro Roca, once one of Cuba's best-known political prisoners, said in a telephone interview from his Havana home. "We just don't know anything. And we have no way to mobilize." Roca said that he had no plans to speak publicly or conduct dissident meetings because there would be "tremendous risks" for anyone who attended. "If the movement was united and was open to everything, maybe this would be an opportunity -- but we have so many differences," Laura Pollán, a well-known human rights advocate, said in a telephone interview from her Havana home.

Pollán is a leader of "The Women in White," a group of political prisoners' wives who march every Sunday in Havana wearing white dresses and each carrying a single flower. Pollán's husband, independent journalist Hector Maseda Gutierrez, is serving a 20-year prison term after being accused of mercenary activity, Pollán said. The announcement of Castro's surgery also placed dissidents in a difficult position because they do not want to be perceived as celebrating his

illness or possible death, Pollán said. "From a human perspective, we have no ill wishes toward anyone," she said. "We don't wish for the death of Dr. Castro, even though he has brought such suffering to us and to the Cuban people." (*The Washington Post*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** If Fidel Castro hands over power to his long time deputy and brother, Raul Castro, the editor of a Cuban Catholic journal has expressed hopes for cautious reforms, perhaps even with the help of Florida-based exiles. "It would be a catastrophe if the successors did not manage to clear up the mess after 47 years of economic mismanagement," said Dagoberto Valdez, chief editor of the critical Catholic magazine *Vitral*. Valdez who also leads a centre for civic education under the auspices of the Bishop of Pinar del Rio, in Western Cuba, has been a long time critic of the Cuban regime. However, he has previously been quoted as saying: "We don't say we're undermining socialism. We say we're preparing people for living in a more democratic society." (*Playfuls.com*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** The house of Dr. Jose Luis Garcia Paneque's wife and four children in Las Tunas, Cuba, was surrounded and attacked by a mob of about 100 persons armed with sticks, stones, and parasols shouting "Get out of here!" "Assassins!", "Terrorists!". For an hour and a half, neighbors, ranging from young children to elderly people, shouted insults at Yamile Llanes and her young children, as well as at seven Catholic young people who were staying at her house while on their way to the Sanctuary of The Virgin of Cobre in Santiago de Cuba. "My seven-year old daughter, Maria, held on to her older sister, and her screams were uncontrollable because she was terrified when a woman shouted that they were going to set the house on fire so that they would do away with the 'worms'", Yamile said. Dr. Jose Luis Garcia Paneque, a Cuban physician and prisoner of conscience, was summarily tried and is serving a 25-year sentence for expressing independent ideas. He remains in "Las Mangas" prison hospital in Bayamo alongside common prisoners. He is suffering from an intestinal disease. (*Medicina Cubana*, 21/8/06)

**August 4:** Cuba's Communist leadership launched a campaign emphasizing the revolutionary roots of Fidel Castro's brother and designated successor, attempting to reassure Cubans that the regime remains stable after the leader's hospitalization. "We Cubans are prepared for the defense (...) and Raul is there firmly at the helm of the nation, of the Revolutionary Armed Forces," the Communist Party newspaper *Granma* said. *Granma* recounted Raul Castro's decision to assume responsibility for the disastrous 1953 attack on a military barracks, which launched the Cuban Revolution. Official media continued to line up Cubans expressing confidence both in Fidel's ability to recover quickly and in Raul's competence to govern in the meantime. "Every Cuban trusts Raul, and every one of our leaders," an unnamed woman said on state television news. "We are certain that the revolution will continue." (*AP*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba (COCC) called on its congregation to pray for the recovery of Fidel Castro. In a letter to all Catholics in the country, the COCC asked communities "to offer prayers so that God accompanies President Fidel Castro in his illness and illuminates those who have provisionally received the responsibilities of government." The Catholic hierarchy stated that "the delicate state of health from which the President is suffering (...) constitutes an especially significant moment for our people." "The Catholic Church, as part of this community, shares this concern and the petitions of all its followers," continues the text, at the same time invoking the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre. To the Cuban Patron Saint, continues the communiqué, "We confide everything that concerns us at this time in our country's history with a profound wish for peace and fraternal coexistence among all Cubans." The document, which the COCC asked to be read out on Sunday, August 6, at masses offered around the island, also alerts that the prevailing stability and social harmony in Cuba "cannot be disturbed by any internal or external situation." (*Prensa Latina*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** Cuba's state-run press mocked talk abroad of "transition" of the Communist state due to the illness of Fidel Castro, denying uncertainty among citizens and underscoring what are described as the fine qualities of brother Raul as he stands firmly at the nation's helm. The official daily *Granma* said that Cuba "remains calm". "The incorrectly characterized 'transition' is a word that is not in the vocabulary of Cubans here. For us the news today is about working harder and better to fulfill Fidel's mission," the publication said. The article added that "faced with the frustrated

ambitions against the nation, the treachery and threats, we stand united in a tireless struggle. Countless messages wishing the quick recovery of the commander in chief (Fidel Castro) continue arriving in this country." (*EFE*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** Though there was no official word in Cuba on Fidel's condition, Cuban Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer commented in Guatemala, where he was on hand to inaugurate a Cuba-donated clinic. "Fidel underwent a surgical operation from which he is recovering satisfactorily," Balaguer told journalists in the town of San Cristobal Verapaz in central Guatemala. Balaguer, along with Guatemalan President Oscar Berger, inaugurated a facility for treating eye ailments. The clinic's surgical and other equipment were donated by Cuba, which also is providing its doctors, nurses and technical personnel. When pressed on Castro's prognosis, the Cuban health minister declined to provide details. (*EFE*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** Dissidents in Cuba's eastern provinces said the country's military has beefed up its presence on the streets and is telling citizens they have permission to respond with force against anyone who speaks out against the government. In a series of interviews conducted by phone, dissidents said they are fearful about retaliations against political opponents of the government. "Everybody now knows that that Fidel is ill, but everyone is waiting," said Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, 41, an attorney from the province of Ciego de Avila. "They are wondering what is going to happen. There is a grave silence. It's like being in the centre of a hurricane." Gonzalez, who became blind as a child and went on to study law in Havana, was accused in 2002 of insubordination to Castro and spent more than two years in prison. His case gained international attention after Amnesty International called for his release. (*Gainesville.Com*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** In Banes, in the Holguin province, dissident Guillermo Llanos Ricardo, 30, said the town's only independent library was surrounded by citizen patrol groups checking the identification of anyone seeking to enter. "These are well-known groups that have incited violence against dissidents in the past," he said. Meanwhile, Eliecer Consuegra Rivas, 33, the head of the opposition group Eastern Democratic Alliance in the city of Antilla also in Holguin, attributed the relative calm on the streets to fear of reprisal. He said he has been repeatedly warned not to speak out informally by neighbours and officially by government representatives. (*Gainesville.Com*, 4/8/06)

**August 5:** Official daily Granma ran a series of emotional front-page statements by some of the island's top cultural figures, wishing Castro a steady recovery and pledging loyalty to Castro and the socialist system he created. "This is a delicate moment and it's necessary to prepare, because the enemy might have illusions," Juan Formell, the director of Los Van Van, one of the island's most popular musical groups, said from Japan. "I trust in our Armed Forces, and in our people, Formell said." Folk singer Pablo Milanes, also traveling outside Cuba, said he promised to represent Castro and the Cuban people "as this moment deserves: with unity and courage in the presence of any threat or provocation." (*AP, Prensa Latina*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** Singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez rejected a transition to capitalism in Cuba and said that he would give Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro more than his music, but his own person. Before an audience that included Cuban and foreign reporters gathered at the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), for the release of his CD "Érase que se era", Rodríguez noted that if he liked a transition he would be in the other side and not in Cuba. I'm still in this side and I will continue because I don't care about the transition, Rodríguez highlighted. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** Cuban officials said that Fidel Castro was steadily recovering from surgery and the government was still preparing for its worst-case scenario: an attack by government opponents taking advantage of the leader's health crisis. Vice President Carlos Lage said that Fidel Castro is recovering satisfactorily from surgery and that the communist leader sent his "fraternal greetings" to the people of Bolivia, according to Cuban news agency Prensa Latina. Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon said in comments broadcast by CNN en Español that Castro "remains in stable condition" and "is resting in order to recover as quickly as possible." Culture Minister Abel Prieto said that "there is no

danger of Cuba becoming destabilized. That's all an illusion, craziness, feverish delirium of people who have shown in recent days what little human values they have," a clear reference to Cuban exiles in Miami who this week celebrated Castro's illness. (*AP*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** Independent journalist Santiago Albert DuBouchet Hernández, head of the news agency 'Havana Press', was released after serving out a one-year prison term in the province of Havana. DuBouchet Hernández had been sentenced to 312 days in prison by the Artemisa Municipal People's Court for allegedly resisting arrest. (*Puente Informativo*, 5/8/06)

**August 6:** Elián González, the Cuban boy whose arrival in Miami six years ago set off a custody battle between his father in Cuba and several of his Miami relatives, sent a message to ailing Fidel Castro. "We send you this letter to let you know that we are worried about your health," stated a letter addressed to "grandpa Fidel" and penned by Elián and published in the Communist Youth newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/8/06)

**August 6:** The Ladies in White, comprised of the wives and loved ones of imprisoned Cuban dissidents, asked Raul Castro to give a signal of change on this Communist island by freeing the regime's political prisoners, and they announced that they would continue their peaceful demonstrations. Eight members of the group, which was formed in 2003 after the regime sentenced 75 dissidents to lengthy prison terms, came to the Santa Rita Church in Havana's Miramar neighborhood as they do every Sunday to pray for their family members, and afterwards they marched down Quinta Ave. carrying gladiolas and lilies. With very few other worshippers on hand, the Ladies in White members listened to the Cuban Bishops Conference communique read at the end of the Mass in which the Catholic hierarchy asks Cubans to pray for God to be with Fidel Castro during his recovery from emergency intestinal surgery and to enlighten his brother Raul, to whom Fidel temporarily turned over power for the first time ever. (*EFE*, 7/8/06)

**August 6:** At the colonial-era Catholic cathedral in Old Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega prayed "for the fatherland, for Cuba and those who are leading it (...). Above all, our plea is that nothing breaks the concord among Cubans, nor disturbs the peace among us," Ortega said. "What we are asking our communities to do at this moment is pray," Ortega said. "That is our way of putting the future in God's hands." But his message upset at least one parishioner, reflecting the split between those Cubans who -- at least in public -- say they support the 47-year-old communist system and those who oppose or are frustrated by it. "Things are very bad," said the man, who declined to be identified. He added that Cubans are afraid to express their true feelings because of fear of repression. "They are afraid of a ghost," he said. "This country is being run by a mummy." But others expressed optimism that Castro would recover and that life on the island would improve. (*The Miami Herald*, *Reuters*, 7/8/06)

**August 6:** Organized by Cuban authorities, an angry demonstration (acto de repudio) took place outside the residence of dissident Caridad García Braojo, in the Vedado neighborhood, Havana City. Among the demonstrators were members of the "quick response brigades" and the political police. (*Bitácora Cubana*, 9/8/06)

**August 6:** Castro was remembered by practitioners of Santería, a religion blending African and Catholic beliefs, and in prayers at Protestant churches. "As followers of Jesus of Nazareth, we will maintain our personal and community prayers for the rapid reestablishment of our president's health," the Reverend Raúl Suárez, a Baptist minister and member of the legislature, said in a communiqué. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/8/06)

**August 6:** Dissidents like Oswaldo Paya said Fidel Castro's illness has changed the communist country forever by exposing a system ruled by one man for nearly a half century to the influence of others -- even if only temporarily. In the week since Castro underwent surgery and temporarily stepped down, everyone on the island has been forced to imagine what Cuba would be like without Castro, said Paya. "This temporary absence has made people confront the real possibility of a new Cuba," the well-known activist told the press. He said that possibility could bring out discontent in the system that has been building for years, opening the way for demands for more economic freedoms

and greater political participation. "No one can claim that we'll be able to keep living in the same way," he said in an interview conducted in his Havana living room filled with photographs of Cuban political prisoners and portraits of Jesus Christ. "It's time to consider making Cuba's 11 million people the protagonists," he said. "The lives of 11 million Cubans are more important than the memory of one man." (*AP*, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** Cuba has set in motion a peaceful political succession, dashing US government expectations of chaos following Fidel Castro's hand-over of power to his brother, a leading Cuban intellectual and government member, Roberto Fernandez Retamar, said. "They (the US government) had not expected that a peaceful succession was possible. A peaceful succession has taken place in Cuba," Fernandez Retamar said at a news conference. The writer and member of the Council of State was the first government official to say a succession under Raul Castro was in motion after Fidel Castro relinquished power a week ago following gastric surgery. (*Reuters*, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** The Cuban Workers' Union (CTC) informed that over three million workers have taken part in about 80,000 stop-work meetings to express their support of Fidel Castro, the Communist Party and the Cuban Government. (*EFE*, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** Senior Cuban officials have in the past few days assured Cubans that Fidel Castro, who turns 80 on August 13, is on the road to recovery. The Communist Party newspaper Granma published a poem comparing Fidel Castro to a sturdy Cuban hardwood tree called the caguairan -- known as the axe-breaker because it is so tough. (*Reuters*, 7/8/06)

**August 8:** Veteran Cuban dissident Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, a former Fidel Castro loyalist who was wounded in the 1953 Moncada attack that launched the revolution but was later imprisoned as a dissident, died. He was 79. Clara Villar, a family friend and neighbour of the Arcos family, said Arcos died in Havana at 11:40 a.m. "He was one of the most respected people in the human rights movement in Cuba," said Carlos Menendez, of the Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. The organization traces its roots to the group Arcos led in the late 1970s and 1980s. Menendez characterized Arcos as "moral, selfless and courageous." Arcos had been hospitalized recently for respiratory and kidney problems. Arcos' remains were to be cremated and no memorial service was immediately scheduled, the woman at the mortuary said. (*AP*, 9/8/06)

**August 8:** Hundreds of flag-waving people rallied in Cuba's capital to publicly declare their support for ailing leader Fidel Castro, as assurances he was recovering began to ease Cubans' worries about their long-ruling leader. Cubans gathered in a working-class neighbourhood sang the national anthem and chanted "Long live Fidel! Long live Raul!" in support of Castro and his brother Raul, to whom he has temporarily ceded power. Local Communist officials, meanwhile, made patriotic statements from a sound stage on a tractor-trailer. "We are praying for the life of our commander in chief because we love him," said neighborhood resident Alejandrina Legran. "He's the prince of our people. We owe him our respect and obedience." Juventud Rebelde, Cuba's Communist Youth newspaper, published letters to Castro from children and teenagers across the country. (*AP*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** Cuba's Communist government has signaled a crackdown on the use of black-market satellite dishes, just over a week after ailing leader Fidel Castro temporarily relinquished power to his brother. The Communist Party newspaper Granma warned that the dishes, which many Cubans use to watch Spanish-language television programs from Miami, could be used by the US government to broadcast subversive information. "They are fertile ground for those who want to carry out the Bush administration's plan to destroy the Cuban revolution," said the newspaper, the official voice of the government. Such an article in Granma usually signals that action is on the way. The article also decried the "avalanche" of capitalist advertising in commercial television programs. Since Castro provisionally relinquished power to his brother Raul on July 31 after undergoing gastric surgery, Cubans have been anxious for more information on his condition and the political direction of their country. (*Reuters*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** For dissidents on the island, the uncertainty about Cuba's future since Castro, in a July 31 statement, announced he was delegating power to his brother Raul Castro, 75, has given way to frustration and disappointment. "It is the same government. I believe there is no transition. Simply put, Fidel Castro is sick and has delegated his functions to the number-two," said Hilda Molina, who for the past decade has sought authorization to leave the country. "They say the former ruler is recovering, but we don't know what he is recovering from, we don't know what illness, because it is a state secret," said Marta Beatriz Roque, another leading Cuban dissident. This, she says, has left Cuba in its "usual abnormal normality," with the situation remaining calm but residents in the dark about what is going on behind the closed doors of Castro's inner sanctum. While dissidents are pessimistic that the transfer of power to hardliner Raul will bring about change in the near future, Roque stressed this did not mean the opposition had given up. "We won't move backwards. We remain where we are, with caution. If we did not hope for change, we would not work for it," she told the press. (*AFP*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** Cuban actor Jorge Perugorria, world famous for his starring role in the 1993 Oscar nominated "Fresa y Chocolate", wished a prompt recuperation to Fidel Castro, who recently underwent surgery. Interviewed by *Prensa Latina*, the internationally known actor said that he and the staff presently filming the life of Spanish painter Lucas Fernandez in Spain, are concerned for the health of the Commander-in-Chief. Victoria Abril, Emma Suarez and Joaquim de Almeida, cast colleagues, have commented on Fidel's health and their wishes for his recovery, said the actor. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/06)

**August 10:** A deaf adolescent from the Cuban province of Camaguey with pigmentary retinitis received an eye cochlear implant, free in this country. Yaimi Rodriguez Ramirez, 16, has suffered since the age of six months from an infection in the alimentary canal that provoked her hearing problems and later deafness, *Granma* newspaper reported. The girl also suffered from pigmentary retinitis, a visual illness that causes blindness due to the degeneration and death of photo receivers. A medical team from Havana's Cira Garcia Hospital operated the girl. (*Prensa Latina*, 10/8/06)

**August 11:** Prominent dissident leader Oswaldo Paya made a call to "reconciliation and harmony between Cubans". In an op-ed published in a Florida newspaper, Paya said that, "if there is something for which many Cubans have worked and fought for -- including our brothers, the "Cuban Spring" prisoners and all of the peaceful political prisoners -- it is for peaceful changes, for reconciliation and harmony between Cubans". "Those changes and reconciliation are vital needs of the Cuban nation, as well as an obligation that we have for the new generation and for the future of Cuba. These changes can only be defined and led by Cubans themselves, without foreign interference and without exclusion of any Cubans, in a process of dialogue and democratic participation", Paya said. "The role of the European Union, Latin America, Canada, the United States of America and the rest of the world should not be anything else but that which helps contribute toward an environment of peace and calm among Cubans. Any expression and action that presumes to define or decide what must happen in Cuba, or any other exhortations that are not toward calm and peace, can increase tensions, distrust and misunderstandings among Cubans. That is not what Cuba wants or needs", he added. (*Sun Sentinel*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** The country has had no new medical reports on Castro's health, and his younger brother, Raúl Castro, 75, now temporarily at the helm, has not deviated from his customary behind-the-scenes profile, avoiding all public appearances. Cubans are going about their daily routine; although some say it is little more than a superficial normalcy, weighted down by anxiety about the future. "Honestly, to me it looks like people have returned to their day-to-day challenges of survival: their search for ways to supplement their income because salaries aren't sufficient to make ends meet, or to get to the beach for even just one day on their vacation, despite inadequate public transport," said one Cuban journalist, who asked to remain anonymous. In his opinion, the business-as-usual atmosphere owes a lot to the fact that "of all the possible scenarios, the one we're experiencing is the least traumatic." He based his conclusion on official reports regarding Castro's recovery, but also on the smooth and orderly transfer of power to the team headed by Raúl. (*IPS*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** Cuban singer and songwriter Pablo Milanes will dedicate a concert to Fidel Castro on August 17 at the Mexican capital's National Auditorium, organizers of the event reported. Before traveling to Mexico, Pablo, in a message to the Cuban head of State, convalescing from complicated surgery, expressed his commitment to representing him and the island's people "with unity and courage faced with any threat and provocation." Milanes will sing, accompanied by his daughters Haydee and Suylen, songs from the recent CD "Como un Campo de Maiz," Granma newspaper reported. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** The first edition of the Latin American and Caribbean Festival of the Amateur Theater International Association (AITA) started in San Antonio de Los Baños, south Havana. That prestigious institution, catering to independent theater exponents in the region, has called 24 groups and 220 actors and technicians to the event marking Havana's cultural life until August 18. Fernando Rojas, president of the Municipal Culture Centers National Council and organizer of the festival, described it as an unprecedented meeting and confirmed San Antonio de Los Baños and the capital's historic center would be the official venues. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** A Cuban minister said Fidel Castro was recovering as the country, anxious to see him reappear almost two weeks after undergoing surgery, prepared to celebrate his 80th birthday with or without him. "We are waiting for new messages but I can say with complete confidence that he is recovering," said Culture Minister Abel Prieto upon opening a photo exhibit of Castro in Havana. "The people are waiting. Fidel asks us to be patient because what's at stake is more than the health of one person," said Prieto, who sits on the powerful Communist Party Political Bureau. Dozens of musicians will perform on the night of August 12 on the "Anti-Imperialist Stage" opposite the US diplomatic mission on Havana's Malecon seafront boulevard. They plan to play through midnight to sing Castro "Happy Birthday." Neighborhood watch groups called Committees to Defend the Revolution, which play a central role in mobilizing rank-and-file support for the government, called on Cubans to spend August 13 sweeping and cleaning up their blocks. Some Cubans will do what officials termed voluntary work to pay homage to the ailing revolutionary. Sugar industry workers will work four extra hours in cane fields, officials said. Communist youth organizations will man building sites and other workplaces. (*Reuters*, 11/8/06)

**August 12:** Fidel Castro is sitting up, walking, talking and even working to some degree during his recovery from intestinal surgery that forced him to step aside temporarily as president, the Communist Party newspaper said on the eve of the leader's 80th birthday. The report on the front page of Granma was the most optimistic report since the July 31 announcement that Cuba's longtime leader had undergone surgery and was temporarily ceding presidential powers to his brother Raul, the No. 2 in the government. The paper headlined its three-paragraph story "Firm Like a Caguarian," comparing Castro to a hardwood tropical tree native to eastern Cuba. (*AP*, 12/8/06)

**August 12:** According to his wife, Cruz Delia Aguilar, non-violent opposition activist Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara was the target of a public act of "citizen's rejection" carried out by members of the Quick Response Brigades. Nearly 50 demonstrators from the so-called "brigades" stood outside our home, yelling out insults, said Aguilar. Valdés Guevara, 52, a former prisoner of conscience from the Group of the 75, is currently at home under the terms of an extrajudicial license because he suffers from a chronic renal condition. For months the authorities have denied him authorization to leave the country. (*Cubanet*, 15/8/06)

**August 13:** Fidel Castro, who turned 80, released his first message to the Cuban people since undergoing surgery for intestinal bleeding and turning power over temporarily to his brother. In a message to the Cuban people accompanied by photos and carried by the online edition of the Juventud Rebelde newspaper, the Cuban leader said his condition was improving but his recovery would not be quick and everyone should be prepared for possible "adverse news." The statement, however, provided no specific details on the medical condition of the Cuban leader. Havana has said that Castro's condition is a "state secret" and has not published any medical updates or prognosis on his condition. "Saying that the stability of the condition has improved considerably is not inventing a lie. Asserting that the recovery period will be short and there is no risk would be absolutely incorrect," Castro said in his message to the citizens of the island

which was accompanied by four color photographs of the Cuban leader wearing a track suit in the red, white and blue of Cuba's flag. [\[Message to the People of Cuba\]](#) (*EFE*, 13/8/06)

**August 13:** Fidel Castro's younger brother, Raul, made his first public appearance as Cuba's interim president. Raul received Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez at Havana airport. Cuban state television images showed Chavez arriving in Havana to visit his political ally Fidel Castro on his 80th birthday. No comments were made to the press. (*Reuters*, 13/8/06)

**August 13:** In an effort to prevent any dissident activities on the day of Fidel Castro's birthday, a mob of communist militants besieged the home of former political prisoner Minaldo Ramos Fernández, also the headquarters for the "Comision Nacional Cuba", a civil organization that promotes peaceful civil disobedience in the island. "The mob in question surrounded my home for over twelve hours, not allowing anyone to enter the house and prevented me from going out of the house, stating that they were not going to allow counterrevolutionary activities on Castro's birthday", Ramos Fernández said to the independent press. (*Puente Informativo*, 17/8/06)

**August 14:** Cuba's Communist daily Granma published new photographs of ailing leader Fidel Castro, showing him in bed on his 80th birthday during a visit with his brother Raul and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The official Granma newspaper posted the six photographs on its online edition, one day after the Communist Youth newspaper Juventud Rebelde published the first images of Castro since the Cuban leader announced two weeks ago he had undergone intestinal surgery and was temporarily ceding power to Raul, the defense minister and No. 2 in the government. In all of the most recent pictures, Castro is in bed, wearing what looks like a red sweatshirt. In a seventh photograph, Raul Castro is shown embracing Chavez when he arrived in Havana. It was the younger Castro's debut appearance as acting Cuban president. "An Unforgettable Afternoon Among Brothers," Granma said of the afternoon visit by Chavez, who is Castro's closest friend and political ally in Latin America. (*AP*, 14/8/06)

**August 14:** Cuban state television aired the first video of Fidel Castro since he stepped down as president to recover from surgery, showing the bedridden Cuban leader joking with his brother and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Castro appeared tired and pale, yet alert in the videotaped encounter, speaking quietly but clearly enjoying himself as he chatted with Chavez, his close friend and political ally. Acting president Raul Castro was also present for the encounter on his brother's 80th birthday. As the men bantered back and forth, Castro's voice was inaudible. He was later shown in animated conversation with Chavez, but music played over his words. The videotape showed the friends sharing a snack and looking at an album of photographs showing them together — including one from a trip Castro took to Venezuela during an earlier birthday. Sentimental music accompanied the footage, which lasted about 10 minutes. The televised footage — released after still pictures of the same encounter were published in the Communist Party daily Granma— appeared aimed at dispelling any lingering doubts about Castro's recovery from intestinal surgery. Cuban officials have not released details of his condition or disclosed where he is being treated. (*AP, EFE*, 15/8/06)

**August 15:** A Dengue outbreak that the Cuban authorities have maintained under wraps has resulted in at least 20 fatalities while dozens more have been hospitalized, leaving several hospitals in Havana struggling to cope with the epidemic. The most serious cases of this particular strain of Dengue, known as Type Four or Dengue hemorrhagic fever are being treated at the Pedro Kouri Hospital, attached to the Tropical Medicine Institute, where some fifty people have been admitted with symptoms of the disease. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 15/8/06)

**August 15:** Famous Cuban sports commentator Eddy Martin died in Havana. Martin had suffered serious injuries in a car accident. Although the 77-year-old journalist and radio and TV presenter underwent weeks of intense medical treatment, he could not overcome the results of the crash between his car and a bus. Cuban radio and television recalled Martin's work, well-known both in the island and the international sports world. (*Prensa Latina*, 15/8/06)

**August 15:** Cuba's ruling Communist Party vowed that the revolution launched almost 48 years ago by the now 80-year-old and ailing Fidel Castro would continue under the leadership of his brother Raul. The statement, published by the state-run newspaper Granma, came after Cubans saw the first photographs and video footage of the communist strongman since he announced on July 31 that he had undergone intestinal surgery and ceded power to Raul Castro, 75. Rolando Alfonso, who heads the Communist Party's ideological department, wrote in Granma that Cubans were ready to defend the revolution "under the guidance of the party" and "the firm leadership of Raul." "Recover, commander," he said in reference to Castro, adding: "Our people are guarantors, and you know it, that the revolution is here to stay." (*AFP*, 15/8/06)

**August 16:** The promotion of actions to support the Latin American regional integration will be the focal point for delegates at the 19th Congress of the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC), to be held September 24-27 in Havana. CTC International Relations Secretary Leonel Gonzalez said that a commission specially designed to address the topic will propose initiatives which support talks and promote awareness of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a regional integration effort launched by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as an alternative to the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and free trade agreements between the US and individual Latin American countries. The CTC congress will include political and ideological working sessions and will address issues such as the defence of socialism, union training policies and performance. (*ACN*, 17/8/06)

**August 17:** With members of the diplomatic corps and opposition leaders in attendance, Cardinal Jaime Ortega officiated a mass in memory of the dean of Cuban dissidents, Gustavo Arcos Bergnes, who passed away on August 8. In the ceremony, Arcos's wife was accompanied by members of the Ladies in White, European diplomats and the head of the US Interests Section in Cuba, Michael Parmly. Also present were, among others, opposition leaders Oswaldo Payá, Martha Beatriz Roque, Vladimiro Roca, Hilda Molina and Oscar Espinosa Chepe. (*EER*, 18/8/06)

**August 17:** The leader of the moderate opposition's umbrella organization Arco Progresista, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, warned against the danger that the dynamics of the clash between the positions of the governments of Cuba and the United States poses for the Cuban people. In a press release, Cuesta points out that "Cuba is in danger," and warns that the risk the country is facing can affect "not just the present and future of the nation but of all Cubans as well, particularly those who reside on the island." (*EFE*, 17/8/06)

**August 18:** Fidel Castro is recovering gradually, acting President Raul Castro said in an interview published, in his first statements since he took over from his ailing brother last month. Raul Castro, 75, said his brother's improvement had been "progressive." Fidel Castro's physical and mental strength have helped his "satisfactory and gradual recovery," he said. "As a matter of fact, I am not used to making frequent appearances in public, except at times when it is required," Raul Castro told Granma, speaking from his office at the Ministry of Defense. He said many of his activities as defense minister were best kept out of the public light, adding, "Moreover, I have always been discreet, that is my way, and in passing let me clarify that I plan to continue that way." [[Ningún enemigo podrá derrotarnos](#)] (*Reuters*, 18/8/06)

**August 18:** At half a dollar per minute of use and 150 to 200 dollars in the black market for the phone itself, cell phone service is prohibitively expensive for the average Cuban. The two entities selling cell phone service on the island, Telcel, and Secom, only offer it to foreigners and to Cubans who are specifically authorized to have the service. In any case, the service must be paid for in dollars; pesos are no good here. Yet, with scarce land lines and often little hope of getting one, some Cubans who have access to dollars sometimes take a chance on a cell phone. A young couple who gave up waiting for a land line recently decided to obtain a cell phone. They managed to find someone who sold them the unit, with the condition that should there be a problem with the phone, they need to go through the rightful owner to obtain service. Still, they say, it's hard to pay that much money and be constantly at risk that the line could go down and they would lose their investment. Also, they point out, not everyone has a friend or relative abroad who will send the required hard currency. (*Cubanet*, 18/8/06)

**August 19:** Cuban dissidents differed in their reactions to the first public statements from Raul Castro since he took over as provisional leader of Cuba. For Vladimiro Roca, founder of the illegal opposition group All United, the interim leader's statements are "more of the same; it's repetition, it doesn't contribute anything new to the national situation." "They authorized him (to give the interview); without getting Fidel's order, he wasn't going to speak," Roca told the press. "To date there's not one thing that shows that (Raul Castro) is in charge of the country, not the least sign of change," he said. By contrast, Manuel Cuesta Morua, leader of the moderate dissident organization Arco Progresista, said that "we are already seeing an acting head of state." "We're seeing the second step that confirms that the succession is for real and that strangely he's trying to legitimize himself to the United States with this call for them to respect what is established in the Cuban constitution, which is the same as calling for them to respect the succession," he said. Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who was jailed along with 74 other democracy activists and independent journalists in the spring of 2003 but later released for health reasons, said it is "desirable that in future statements (Raul Castro) expresses the interim government's position regarding the measures to take with regard to the current worrying problems in Cuba." Laura Pollan, a member of the Ladies in White, which comprises relatives of the 75 imprisoned Cuban dissidents, said that the wives of the jailed opponents of the regime believe that "the Cuban problem should be solved by Cubans." "We ask (Raul Castro) to make a goodwill gesture, so that the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement is celebrated in a more euphoric manner, and release the prisoners and return them to our homes," said Pollan. (*EFE*, 19/8/06)

**August 19:** Ramon Castro, the older brother of Fidel Castro, said his more famous sibling is steadily improving after intestinal surgery that has left their younger brother Raul temporarily in charge of the country. "He's much better," Ramon Castro said of Fidel. "He works savagely and that has a cost." Ramon Castro, who turns 82 in October, is a lifelong farmer who has stayed out of national politics. He indicated he had not yet read his brother Raul's interview with the Communist Party newspaper *Granma*, which was published the day before. The eldest Castro brother spoke at the international airport awaiting the arrival of Florida cattleman John Parke Wright IV, with whom he has formed a strong friendship during the American's frequent visits to the island. (*AP*, 20/8/06)

**August 19:** Cuban author Jorge Angel Perez won the Julio Cortazar Ibero-American Prize for Short Stories in a contest involving 414 works submitted from writers in 18 countries. The jury, made up by Cuban writers Francisco Lopez Sacha, Alejandro Alvarez and Margarita Mateo praised the story for its "precise, but at the same time daring, understanding of the genre; the mastery of expression; the high quality reached in establishing the atmosphere, setting and characters; and the artistic solution of a metaphor that enshrouds the coded message of the story and conversely underlines the obvious tale of a contemporary situation." (*Granma*, 19/8/06)

**August 21:** A photographic exhibition centered on the figure of Fidel Castro was inaugurated in Havana. The exhibit "I Sing to Life" features the work of local photographers including Alberto Korda; Liborio Noval; Chinolope; Osvaldo Salas and Alex Castro, son of Fidel; as well as works by foreign artists such as Cándido Mayo, from Spain; Pedro Valtierra, Mexico; and Sven Creutzmann, from Germany. (*EFE*, 21/8/06)

**August 22:** Activist Martha Beatriz Roque has an unusual request for the Cuban government: stop the harassment or send her back to jail. The former political prisoner, who has opposed Fidel Castro for 17 years, says she can no longer endure the threats and insults by government supporters, who yell at her when she walks down the street, slip menacing notes under her door and last weekend banged a pistol against her window in the middle of the night. "This life has become just about impossible," Roque, one of Cuba's most high-profile dissidents, told the press in her small Havana apartment. "I would rather be behind bars than dealing with this constant harassment." Roque said harassment has been steady since July 31, when Castro announced he was ceding power to his younger brother while he recovered from stomach surgery. Every time Roque opens her door, she's greeted with a huge portrait of Castro, hung by his supporters. "This has been an offensive with no end," she said. Roque says she suspects that state security agents are among her new neighbors. "Put me in a prison cell, where no one can bother me," said Roque, who sent letters to the island's Justice and Interior Ministries in May asking the government to either stop the aggressive acts or put her back in jail. Earlier this month, the Justice Ministry told her the issue did not fall under its jurisdiction and that she should

contact the attorney general's office. She's deciding whether to do that or, instead, to launch a protest outside government offices in Havana's Revolution Plaza. (*AP*, 23/8/06)

**August 22:** Over 3,907 national and international physicians were graduated in simultaneous acts throughout the country, with a main ceremony at the Victoria De Giron Medical Institute. In the ceremony in this capital, Public Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer Cabrera addressed those graduating, terming the school emblematic for the history of this humanitarian profession in the country. In the recently concluded 2005-2006 academic year, 1,593 foreign students from 26 nations and 2,314 Cubans concluded their medical studies, in which they received solid training in the country's 21 medical schools. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/8/06)

**August 22:** Cuba's health minister said in Havana that Fidel Castro, the Communist longtime leader sidelined by intestinal surgery, is recovering "to be able to continue permanently in the front line of combat." Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer, one of the inner-circle party stalwarts serving as top aides to Raul Castro as he temporarily holds the reins of state, commented at a graduation ceremony for doctors. "Though Fidel is absent because he's recovering, he is here because his ideas, concepts, principles and the heart of the ideology of the Cuban revolution are here," said Balaguer. (*EFE*, 23/8/06)

**August 22:** Fidel Castro is relaxing for the first time in his life as he recovers from intestinal surgery free of his excessive workload, his older brother, Ramon Castro, said. Castro handed over the reins of power to his younger sibling Raul Castro on July 31 after undergoing emergency surgery to stop intestinal bleeding attributed by the Cuban authorities to his workaholic pace. "He is better. The problem was resolved quickly," Ramon Castro told the press. "He is relaxed, resting." Ramon Castro, the farmer in the family who has kept out of politics, said Fidel Castro was enjoying some downtime since ceding the presidency provisionally to his younger brother. "He is happy because he is free. For the first time in his life he has handed over the job to Raul," Ramon Castro said. Asked whether his brother would attend the summit of the Nonaligned Movement that Cuba will host from September 11 to 16, Ramon Castro, who will be 82 in October, said, "Sure, he is already feeling like a lion." (*Reuters*, 23/8/06)

**August 22:** Thirty members of different opposition organizations visited the independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas at the hospital, in the city of Santa Clara, where he is in serious health condition due to a seven-month hunger strike in demand of free access to Internet for all Cubans. Idania Yanes Contreras, national coordinator of the Feminist Movement "Marta Abreu" (MFMA) said that Fariñas "didn't say a word during the visit". "He only opened his eyes for a few seconds and his face looked very swollen", Yanes Contreras added. (*Cubanet*, 29/8/06)

**August 22:** More than 500 social and education building works will soon be inaugurated in Cuba, Otto Rivero, vice president of the Council of Ministers, reported. Of that number, over 100 educational centers, including the Informatics Technical Colleges in eastern Guantanamo Province, will be finished before the beginning of the forthcoming academic year. Rivero noted the remaining social works should conclude by December 2, the 50th anniversary of the landing of the Granma expedition led by Fidel Castro. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/8/06)

**August 22:** Government repressive forces and the Quick Response Brigades resorted to violence to suppress activists from the Independent Movement "Alternative Option" (MIOA) during a fasting ceremony in which the dissidents were demanding that the Cuban authorities release all political prisoners. About 40 government enforcers gathered outside the human rights group's head office in Pedro Betancourt, Matanzas and blocked all access to the venue while yelling out threats. Several activists were arrested. (*Cubanet*, 23/8/06)

**August 28:** Tropical Storm Ernesto drenched eastern Cuba, then aimed north toward the warm waters of the open Caribbean sea and Florida. Thousands were evacuated ahead of the storm in Cuba, where the communist government regularly undertakes mass evacuations before tropical storms and hurricanes to minimize injury and loss of life. There were no reports of damage. Cubans moved cattle to higher ground, tourists were evacuated from hotels in the

southeastern province of Granma and baseball games, including a pre-Olympic qualifier between the United States and Mexico, were rescheduled for earlier in the day. Train service across the country was also stopped while the storm passes. In a four-hour period, the storm dropped 3.3 inches of water in the province of Guantanamo, authorities said. (AP, 29/8/06)

**August 29:** Raul Castro said his brother Fidel Castro's recovery from gastrointestinal surgery was "gradual and satisfactory," the official newspaper Granma said. The statement on Fidel Castro's health came during a meeting between Raul Castro and visiting Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal, the daily said. Raul Castro, 75, informed Bilal of his 80-year-old brother's "gradual and satisfactory recovery," since he was operated on late last month and handed the reins of power to his younger brother. He also said "absolute tranquility reigned" in Cuba and that the entire population was behind the decision "to significantly raise the war capacity and disposition" of Cuba's armed forces. (AFP, 29/8/06)

**August 30:** Cuba is the second country in the world, after France, to develop a vaccine against five diseases for children, to be applied nationwide starting September 1. Dr. Miguel Angel Galindo, head of the National Immunization Program, informed that Cuba will include the combined vaccination in the Ministry of Public Health's effort to combat diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenzae type B. Under the name Heberpenta, this product of Cuban biotechnology is certified by the National Center for the Control of Medications and will be administered to babies of two, four and six months old. (ACN, 30/8/06)

**August 30:** The unannounced fumigation of Mexico's dugout area by zealous Cuban health workers during an Olympic qualifier with Puerto Rico briefly stopped the game when surprised players ran out onto the field. "We started smelling something strange and we all got out before we started to feel sick," said Jose Reyes of the Mexican team. Fumigators working for Cuba's Public Health Ministry have been canvassing the capital in recent days in a campaign to wipe out mosquitoes that can carry dengue, a mosquito-borne virus found in tropical and subtropical regions. Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage said that Cuba is taking all possible measures to reduce the existence of Aedes Aegypti mosquito, transmitter of dengue fever. "We have two challenges ahead: an urgent one, which is to reduce the existence of Aedes Aegypti to zero; and a second one, which is to analyze how we can avoid the appearance of dengue again". "We need to go to the roots of this", Lage added. He also commended the will and cooperation of the State and the population, and noted the problem will not be solved simply by fumigating. (CNN, AFP, Prensa Latina, 31/8/06)

**August 31:** A dissident journalist who refused to eat solid foods for nearly seven months in his demand for full Internet access for all Cubans ended his hunger strike, his mother said. His mother, a retired nurse, said that "I saw he was in very bad shape. He was not going to be able to stand more than 72 hours in that state" and after talking by telephone with dissidents Bertha Antunez and Martha Beatriz Roque, and with neurosurgeon Hilda Molina, they managed to convince Fariñas to abandon his hunger strike. Fariñas decided to end the strike itself "but not his demands on the government, which he will keep alive in other ways, starting the moment he finishes his recovery," according to a communique released by the banned Assembly to Promote Civil Society headed by Roque. Cuba's communist government has not commented on the case. (EFE, AFP, 31/8/06)

**August 31:** In the first Cuban government change since Raúl Castro began ruling the island a month ago, a well-known hardliner and reputed rival was named minister of communications and information science. The Council of State led by Castro -- who replaced his brother, ailing 80-year-old Fidel Castro, at Cuba's helm as he recovers from intestinal surgery -- announced that Ramiro Valdes would replace Ignacio Gonzalez Planas as minister for computers and communications. The politburo of the Cuban Communist Party recommended the appointment approved by the 31-member council, an official statement said. The appointment of Ramiro Valdés was viewed by most Cuba-watchers as significant because of his perceived rivalry with Fidel Castro's brother, and because it gives him control of the flow of information in and out of the island. The two are reported to have clashed often and in 1985, Valdés was dismissed as minister and member of the Cuban Communist Party's ruling Political Buro, and faded away from the public spotlight. No official reason for his dismissal was ever given. The appointment, experts said, also may point to a more subtle significance: Cuba's increasing economic ties to China. Valdés has made several trips to China, including one in which

he accompanied Raúl Castro. The younger Castro is believed to look positively on Beijing's system of an open economy with tight political controls. (AFP, *Prensa Latina, Granma, The Miami Herald*, 31/8/06)

## Economy

**August 2:** Canadian companies are keeping a close eye on the temporary power shift in Cuba, but experts say little will change in the short term and US policy is likely to have a greater impact in the long run than a new leader. Canada is the Caribbean country's fourth-largest trading partner, and businesses from travel agencies to meat exporters will be monitoring any developments after an ailing Fidel Castro transferred his duties to his younger brother Raul. For us, it's business as usual," said Michael Minnes, spokesman for Sherritt International Corp., a natural resources company that's the largest foreign investor in the country. "We see Cuba as having a competent and capable government in place and we believe that they're doing what they need to do to manage the situation." Other Canadian companies are more reticent about their business in the country amid fear of reprisals from the US government. An Industry Canada spokeswoman would not immediately provide names of firms operating there. She said the information is confidential and companies typically don't discuss their involvement in Cuba. Sherritt's Cuban operations, meantime, continue to benefit from high commodity prices, Mr. Minnes said. The company, which will release its quarterly financial results today, plans to expand its metal, oil and power enterprises in the country. (*Globe and Mail*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Sherritt International Corp. has reported a 6.5 per cent increase in second-quarter earnings on an eight per cent revenue decline as strong prices for nickel and cobalt were undermined by lower volumes. Sherritt said it had its best-ever sales of coal, oil and power, but consolidated April-June revenue was \$296.9 million, down from \$322.5 million a year earlier. The diversified resources company, active in Canada and Cuba, said net earnings of \$57.2 million, 36 cents per share, compared with a year-ago profit of \$53.7 million, 29 cents per share. (*Canadian Press*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Commercial ties between Spain and Cuba "will remain excellent regardless of future developments on the island," asserted Fernando Puerto, director of International Relations for the High Council of Spanish Chambers of Commerce. According to Puerto, Spain has to make the best of "its excellent position and reinforce it" in the face of the island's current economic boom, spurred by Chinese credit and Venezuelan fuel oil. (*EFE*, 2/8/06)

**August 6:** Military enterprises now control an estimated 90 percent of Cuba's exports and 60 percent of its tourism revenue, and employ 20 percent of state workers. "The military's job is to make money," said Frank Mora, a professor at the National War College in Washington. "Power in Cuba is not just a question of who holds the guns, although that helps. More important is who controls what is profitable." In the early 90's Raúl Castro formed GAESA, or Business Administration Group, the FAR's holding company for the Defense Ministry's economic interests. At the helm was Colonel Luis Alberto Rodríguez, Raúl's son-in-law, known as a Raúl loyalist and sharp businessman. Based on the fourth floor of the Armed Forces Ministry, GAESA did \$1 billion in business in 2000 alone through a long string of GAESA-owned companies, experts say. The FAR's powers extend well beyond GAESA, however. Half of the now 20 members of the politburo are active military officers, and generals are in charge of several ministries, including sugar and fisheries. By 1996, Mora said, the FAR was generating enough revenue to pay half of its own budget. (*The Miami Herald*, 6/8/06)

**August 9:** Iran and Cuba discussed avenues for bolstering bilateral cooperation in the technical and industrial fields. Cuban Minister for Basic Industries Yadira Garcia Vera, during a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Havana Ahmad Edrissian, outlined the two countries' cooperation in the field of electricity and in the oil and cement industry in past years and expressed her country's readiness to further promote mutual cooperation in the future. Tehran and Havana

have ample grounds for cooperation, Garcia said, and expressed Cuba's interest in expanding cooperation with Iran in various areas. (*IRNA*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** Cuba left behind a serious draught period, thanks to favourable rains in the last months that have contributed to increasing water levels to 73 percent of the total capacity. In the period between June and July it rained the most, being one of the most humid periods in the last five years, after a long and harsh drought, considered the worst in 100 years. The country has 224,636,594 cubic feet of water in reservoirs, a situation that allows comfortably carrying out its production plans and guarantee water consumption by the population. The provinces most favored by the recent rainy season were central Sancti Spiritus and eastern Camaguey, Holguin, and Las Tunas, Granma daily reported. Those with more water in reservoirs are Santiago de Cuba at 95 percent, Guantanamo and Cienfuegos 91 percent, and western Pinar del Rio at 90 percent. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/06)

**August 14:** Gary Rodríguez, head of the Bolivian Institute of Foreign Trade (IBCE), said that, apart from 5 thousand dollars' worth of bilateral trade posted in 2005, nothing has been imported from Bolivia by the Cuban market. The IBCE indicated that this drop would cast doubt on the efficiency of the Peoples' Trade Agreement (TCP), signed by all three countries last April in Havana. (*EFE*, 15/8/06)

**August 16:** The Cuban government said that it has built 67% of the total number of residences scheduled to be completed by late 2006. According to the official newspaper Granma, the government is planning to build 119,000 private residences by the end of 2006, down from the 150,000 target announced in September 2005. Cuba has a housing deficit in excess of half a million residences and, according to official studies, 43% of all available housing is in bad repair. (*Reuters*, 16/8/06)

**August 17:** Cuban Finance Minister Georgina Barreiro Fajardo concluded a visit to Vietnam, which was termed very positive for its exchange and future perspectives. "Talks took place frankly in an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation. They were always on the alert to give us all the information we need," the minister told Prensa Latina. Barreiro arrived in Hanoi on August 15, accompanied by deputy ministers Alejandro Gil and Jose Eloy Llaguno, to fulfill an intensive two-day working agenda. The aim, she said, was to learn the strategy of development of three issues: budget control, the tax system and the treasury. Vietnamese Finance Minister Vu Van Ninh welcomed the Cuban delegation, and expressed his willingness to strengthen and expand working relations. The Cuban official, Gil and Llaguno flew to the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, an important industrial zone. Then, the visitors will go to Shanghai, relevant financial center, and finally to Beijing. The aim of this visit, said the minister, is to revise aspects of the Finance and Prices Ministry and the role played in all cooperation programs we have with China. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/8/06)

**August 17:** The Cuban Minister of Finances Georgina Barreiro arrived in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou on the first stop of a work visit and exchange of experiences with the Asian nation. The minister is accompanied by the vice ministers Alejandro Gil and Jose Ely Llaguno, and will go to economic centers of Guangdong province, an important industrial center of the southern part of the country. "The objective of our stay is to strengthen ties between the Cuba Finance Minister and the China Treasury Department," Barreiro said. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/8/06)

**August 17:** Long held in check by Fidel Castro, Cuban entrepreneurs ranging from plumbers to pizza makers hope to enjoy some slack while his brother Raul is in charge. But the self-employed tradesmen and owners of family businesses in the communist-run country do not expect Cuba's economy to embrace the private sector overnight. "Paladares," family restaurants that can only seat 12 people at a time, and bed-and-breakfast inns still face multiple restrictions, heavy taxes and a constant threat of losing their licenses even though they have been allowed for more than a decade. "Raul could continue opening up the economy. We want less state control," said Gilberto, a book seller in central Havana, displaying a photo of Fidel Castro prominently on his stall. Raul Castro supported economic reforms in the early 1990s and is said to favor a Chinese path. As defense minister, he introduced Western management practices in

the armed forces, which now run Cuba's most efficient and profitable companies. ``They say Raul is more open. The truth is nobody knows what is going to happen here," said the owner of a paladar in the converted garage of a house who asked not to be named. The numbers of self-employed have declined since peaking at 209,606 in January 1996, shrinking to 166,700 at the end of 2004, according to official figures. (*Reuters*, 17/8/06)

**August 21:** Cuba is optimistic that better weather, improved organization and higher prices will bring a recovery in coffee production from last season's record-low crop, industry sources and local media said. Coffee picking is gradually getting underway in Cuba's eastern mountains, where 85 percent of the crop is grown. "If there isn't a hurricane again this year, we are going to harvest coffee for real," a farmer in the mountains near Santiago de Cuba said in a telephone interview. "We have had perfect weather, a lot of rain but not too much. I'm going to pick three times what I did last year," he said, asking not to be named. There was similar optimism in Guantanamo province, last year's top producer, accounting for 70 percent of 2005 exports. (*Reuters*, 21/8/06)

**August 19:** Cuba's largest citrus orchard expects output at near capacity of 600,000 tonnes of oranges and grapefruit during the 2006-2007 harvest, following a difficult prior season due to a hurricane and drought, official radio reported. Radio Rebelde said the 23,000 hectares state-run Jaguey Grande orchard, the largest contiguous planting of citrus trees in the world, "at this moment has a yield of 25 tonnes per hectare, the highest in the country," for an estimated final output of 575,000 tonnes by the time picking ends in June. Output at the orchard in western Matanzas province fell by at least 50 percent last season when Hurricane Dennis in early July downed the ripening grapefruit and also damaged orange groves. (*Reuters*, 21/8/06)

**August 24:** According to the Cuban electrical company, there was an interruption in the high tension line that links the province of Matanzas with the power station located in Havana. The incident provoked a power outage that blacked out Havana City and Pinar del Rio and a large portion of Havana Province. The reestablishment of electricity in the western provinces took place in four hours. Power service has been markedly improved in 2006 compared to previous years before a new energy saving and generation plan was put in place. (*Periodico 26*, 25/8/06)

**August 27:** The upcoming sugar cane harvest could see a yield greater than last year's, thanks to the increased availability of fertilizers and more rainfall, Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro said. Improved conditions have sparked optimism, though the productive potential of sugar cane plantations is still greater than expected output, newspaper Granma reported. Rosales said that an upcoming evaluation in September will determine a more exact estimation of sugar cane production and the strategy to be followed during the harvest. He also announced that processing of cane could begin before January at some sugar mills. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/8/06)

**August 29:** Eighteen-wheelers stacked with hundreds of Chinese-made Haier fridges stopping door-to-door in the remote Cuban countryside and on city streets have been as common a sight as Cuban military transports. An estimated 300,000 households, in a country of 11 million people, are replacing aging appliances -- all in the name of an effort to lower the country's total energy use. The replacements are mandatory, and many people have had to take out loans from government banks to pay for the new appliances. "Don't think that because we're in a socialist regime that the fridges are free," said a religious leader in a coastal city. ``Actually, they're quite expensive. I'm paying the equivalent of \$286. My wife and I make about \$25 a month. So, like most people, we're financing it over a 10-year period at 10 percent interest." The government in March bought 300,000 of the energy-efficient fridges from China under a deal to assemble them in a Cuban plant. Late last year, one million color televisions were bought under the same plan and, soon, so will air-conditioners and electric stoves, rice cookers and fans. For now, the five-foot-tall Haiers have made their appearances in some homes where, mostly because of endemic poverty, there may have not been new appliances in half a century. (*The Miami Herald*, 29/8/06)

**August 30:** Cuba is testing wind as a source of electricity at the Aeolian Demonstrative Park in Turiguano Island, Ciego de Avila province. Granma daily reported that two towers, 11,083 feet above sea level, is supplying 2,248 people with electricity produced by the north winds. Engineer Adonis Perez Lorenzo, in charge of the two turbine engines, said this first program will counterbalance rising oil prices and depletion of world oil reserves, as well as raise awareness of this renewable alternative energy source. (*Prensa Latina*, 30/8/06)

August 30: As Cuban leader Fidel Castro convalesces in Havana and brother Raul rules temporarily, experts say another man may hold Cuba's future in his hands: Hugo Chavez. The Venezuelan president is propping up the Cuban economy by giving it nearly 100,000 barrels of oil a day virtually for free, according to experts. At today's prices, the subsidy could exceed \$2 billion this year, nearly half the \$4 billion to \$6 billion that Moscow once pumped into Cuba per year. But Venezuela's contributions to the Cuban economy don't end there. It has bought nearly half of the island's aging Cienfuegos refinery and is reportedly providing \$300 million to \$500 million in credit for a number of projects that range from housing to electricity. Venezuela also has opened a shipyard with Cuba in the South American nation's city of Maracaibo and sent thousands to Cuba for eye and other surgeries. Venezuela claims that Cuba pays for the bulk of the oil shipments with an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 medical personnel, sports trainers and teachers deployed in Venezuela to help the poor. But analysts say the deal amounts to a giveaway. "If Castro dies tomorrow, who is going to pay for all those barrels?" asked Jorge Pinon, a former Amoco executive who studies energy issues for the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies. "If tomorrow Juan Lopez is president [of Cuba] and he wants to forget about this little guy (...) then Chavez can say, 'I am stopping delivery of this, and by the way, you owe me X.' And the next day, the airplanes in Cuba would stop flying, the tourist taxis and buses would stop hitting the highwax." (*McClatchy-Tribune Business News*, 30/8/06)

### **Exile Community**

**August 1:** The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) claimed to be ready to provide assistance during a "non violent" political transition in Cuba. Alfredo Mesa, the Foundation's director and spokesman said that, for the time being, the situation in the island is very confusing and that it would be best to analyze in detail whatever little information comes out of Havana. "But we now remind the Cuban people that we are willing to support a non violent transition," he indicated. (*EFE*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Jorge Mas Santos, chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation, said there were still those in Miami who talked of reclaiming what was lost in Cuba. "You have people who lost a farm and now say they want their cows back," Mr. Mas Santos said. "Forget it. The cow is dead." But he said there was a strong feeling among young, educated professionals like himself that they could share their expertise and aspirations with their counterparts in Cuba. He said the Castro government had long portrayed him and his colleagues as "Mafiosos" –the "Cuban mafia", the Cuban government calls them-who wanted to take over, but Mr. Mas Santos bluntly dismissed that notion. "Cuba can give me nothing," he said, "but what we have here, we can give to Cuba. Look at the miracle of South Florida. Yes, we can rebuild roads and buildings. But what we have to do is touch the hearts of Cubans and help them smile and dream again; to propel them into the future, and not relive the past. That is our generation's gift." (*The New York Times*, 3/8/06)

**August 2:** The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) asked the Cuban Army to facilitate the step towards democracy by seizing the opportunity presented by the current political juncture in the island to establish an interim civic-military government and prevent a transfer of power to Raúl Castro. The CANF proposed that all political prisoners be released and "free, multi-partisan and transparent" elections be conducted within a "reasonable" period of time. Pepe Hernández, president of the Foundation, claimed to have received messages from Havana, "coming from both the military and the civil hierarchy," that hint at the existence of internal differences within the government. (*Europa Press*, 3/8/06)

**August 2:** The only place in Cuban Miami, it seemed, not abuzz with the excited chatter of exiles was the small pharmacy owned by Juanita Castro, Fidel Castro's sister. "I have differences with my brother, ideological and political," said Juanita, who owns the Mini Price pharmacy at 2671 SW 27th Ave. and has largely shied away from the often contentious nature of exile politics. The 73-year-old Castro emphasized she had nothing to say about her 79-year-old brother, his illness or the state of affairs in her homeland. "I'm not going to be making any declarations about that," she said. "I never listen to the radio. There is so much hatred in this community. And they will say that all Castros are the same," she said. "And that is a lie." While she is no fan of her brother's politics and chose to live her life in exile, she said she had mixed feelings about the hordes of celebrators who took to the street the night before, leaning on car horns well past midnight. "This is a spectacle, all this happiness," she said, shaking her head. "Los lazos de sangre son fuertes" (the ties of blood are strong), she said with a shrug. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** Exile leaders in Miami were calling on the US President to support Cubans living in the US, by easing travel restrictions to Cuba. Ramon Saul Sanchez, leader of the Democracia movement, urged the US to allow Cuban-Americans to travel freely to help Cuba re-define its future. "No one on earth should have the power to tell a citizen of a country that he or she cannot return to his or her homeland," Sanchez said. Sanchez, backed by other exile leaders, spoke at the Versailles restaurant. His concern was echoed by patrons of the restaurant, who believe they should be a part of any New Cuba. "If we had a solution in Cuba where the Castro brothers were out of the picture," Esteban Bobo told CBS4's Art Barron, "those restrictions would have to be eased, because we are a country of law; this is not a kingdom." (*CBS4News*, 3/8/06)

**August 5:** Some Cuban exiles, seizing on the unprecedented transfer of power in Cuba, called for the US government to do more to encourage a democratic transition on the island. William Sanchez, an attorney for the Cuban-American non-profit Democracy Movement, urged Bush to tell Cuba to set an elections timetable and let Cuban-Americans come to the island to help with a political transition. The Cuban government used such statements by what it calls the "terrorist mafia" in Miami, as well as Bush's call for democratic change on the island, to justify its fears of an invasion. (*Canadian Press*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** Buoyed by Fidel Castro's illness, members of Orlando's Cuban community in Florida plan to walk the streets to express their support for a democratic Cuba. Rene Plasencia, producer of the Fiesta Medina and Festival Calle Orange, which attracts thousands of Hispanics to downtown every year, is calling on fellow Cubans and supporters of the exile community to march for freedom in the island nation. It's not clear how many of the roughly 31,000 Cubans in the Metro Orlando area will participate, but organizers expect to lead the crowd, starting at 10 a.m. from City Hall, to Lake Eola for speeches, flag-waving and music. (*Orlando Sentinel*, 5/8/06)

**August 6:** Fidel Castro's exit from the world stage has the potential to shake up decades of Republican dominance among Cuban-American voters. South Florida's large Cuban-American population has long been one of the party's most loyal constituencies. At least eight in 10 of Florida's nearly half-million Cuban-American voters backed President Bush in 2000, when he won the state by just 537 votes, although a survey after the 2004 election showed a slip. Republican Senator Mel Martinez, a Cuban American, acknowledged that a Castroless Cuba could pose new complications for the GOP. "I think there'll be change and I think there'll be challenges," Martinez said. He added, though, that any changes would be years away, when a democracy is restored in Cuba. "It'll be a lot more complicated to make the case. It won't be just a simple one issue where the Democrats have abdicated the field, really, on foreign policy. I think there'll be more of a challenge because the issues will be more varied." "Republicans have had a lot of bark and no bite, but the bark has been enough," said Joe Garcia, a former executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation and director of the New Democrat Network's Hispanic Strategy Center. "Once Castro is gone, you can bark all you want, but Castro's not there. You've got to develop a more realistic agenda that's in tune with the Cuban-American reality." "Cuban Americans will still be analyzing the positions taken by the parties and candidates after a post-Castro Cuba," said Representative David Rivera (Republican-Miami), a former Republican Party of Florida

strategist who two years ago publicly warned the White House to crack down on Castro or suffer an erosion of support at the polls. (*The New Herald*, 6/8/06)

**August 7:** Damian Fernandez, the Cuban-born director of Florida International University's Cuban Research Institute, cautioned against assuming that all of the original exiles are hard-liners or extremists. The truth is much more nuanced, he said. The first arrivals -- many of whom are now either dead or old and weary -- were driven by "a very deep, affective, emotionally charged crusade against what they perceived to be the evil represented in Fidel and communism," said Fernandez. Their fight was almost a family feud, as many members of the community came from the same left-of-center political current as Castro before he turned communist. There is a paradox in that the Miami exiles are the leading voice demanding Cuba be isolated through US economic and political sanctions and yet are more engaged with the island than any other community in the United States, Fernandez said. "We are perceived as supporting isolation and disengagement. We are engaged on a daily basis; we send money, we call, we travel, we send packages. We're informed." (*Reuters*, 7/8/06)

**August 8:** With Fidel Castro convalescing from intestinal surgery, a multi-layered community of Cuban immigrants eyes possible political change on the island. Gone are the days when Cuban-Americans could be expected to speak with one voice. "We're not monolithic," said Silvia Wilhelm, founder of the Puentes Cubanos organization that sponsors humanitarian exchanges with Cubans. "It's very much divided, very confused, but I think the majority of us all want to end this nightmare. There may be different strategies, but I think people want some peace here. People are very, very tired." (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/8/06)

**August 11:** Investigators from the Southern Florida special antiterrorist unit interviewed the former-director of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) who weeks ago revealed his involvement in alleged plans to use military action to eliminate Fidel Castro. Sources indicated that the cross-examination of José Antonio Llama, A.K.A. "Toñín", is part of an inquiry launched by the South Florida Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), following the activist's confession regarding the creation and financing of a secret paramilitary arm of the Foundation in 1992. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** A lot more than the treacherous Florida Straits separates Miami's Cuban exiles from their homeland just 90 miles off the southern tip of Florida. But the handover of power by ailing Fidel Castro has many thinking about change on the communist-ruled island and the day, perhaps soon, when barriers between Cubans and staunchly anti-Castro Cuban Americans may finally come tumbling down. "In the long run it's going to be impossible to separate South Florida from Cuba, the links are too strong," said Anthony Maingot, a Caribbean expert and sociology professor at Florida International University. "I have absolutely no doubt that Cubans will go back," said Maingot, predicting many exiles would return to Cuba to live after Castro's long rule comes to an end. But a 2004 poll by Florida International University showed that most exiles -- who may not be welcome back on the island -- would probably never return to Cuba to live. Even if it changed to a democracy, nearly 67 percent said they were unlikely to consider a permanent return. That total was even higher than the 60 percent who said they favored military action, by the US government or Cuban exiles, to overthrow Castro. Cuba and Florida could eventually have "highly integrated economies," said Javier Corrales, an associate professor of political science at Amherst College. "But a lot depends on whether Cuba becomes a hospitable place, politically and economically." If there is a true democratic opening in Cuba, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, an exile and Republican congresswoman from South Florida, said booming tourism and new business and franchise opportunities could lure many Cuban emigres back to stay. (*Reuters*, 11/8/06)

**August 13:** South Florida's Cuban exile community used the report in Cuban official press with Fidel Castro's note and pictures to criticize the island's government. "Sadly, Granma's optimism of Fidel Castro's health is in sharp contrast to political prisoners who are rotting in Cuban prisons for simply disagreeing (with him)," said Alfredo Mesa, spokesman for the Cuban American National Foundation. "Dead or alive, change in Cuba must come now. The era of Fidel Castro must end." (*Reuters*, 13/8/06)

**August 15:** Refusing to dialogue with Fidel or Raúl Castro "is like being mute," said the leader of the Cuban Committee for Democracy, Alfredo Durán, in a press interview. Sheer logic tells you that "the Cubans who are going to take the fate of Cuba in their hands cannot share the views of the historical leaders from the Sierra Maestra," said Durán. "Cuban socialism needs to be complemented with the word "democratic". When the predominant figure of Fidel Castro is no longer in the picture and they are faced with a big void that none of them can fill, that word is going to come up," he predicted. (*Notimex*, 16/8/06)

**August 15:** About 50 Cuban migrants are being detained indefinitely at the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, according to an exile group in Miami. Federal officials confirmed the number. One migrant has been held for nearly two years; another, age 10, has diabetes. The Cubans were picked up at sea at various times trying to reach the United States, according to the exile group, Democracy Movement. Normally they would have been returned to Cuba. But after interviews aboard US Coast Guard cutters it was determined that those migrants appeared to meet the standard of having a well-founded fear of persecution if repatriated and, therefore, were diverted to Guantanamo, the exile group said. The exile group said Cubans can be held at the base until the United States can find a third country that will take them. Ramon Raul Sanchez, who heads Democracy Movement, said at least one Cuban has been held at the base nearly two years, and recently staged a hunger protest over US immigration policy. A State Department spokesman referred CNN's questions to Homeland Security, which did not immediately respond. (*CNN*, 15/8/06)

**August 16:** The Comandos F-4, a paramilitary group of Cuban exiles based in Miami, said the only way to achieve change in Cuba was through arms. Now that it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that Fidel Castro is still alive, and that even though he has handed over command to his brother Raúl the state appears able to function in the same way as before, Miami-based exiles have begun venting their disappointment and demanding urgent action. The US, however, appears to be urging caution and is exceedingly unlikely to endorse any adventurism. The Comandos F-4, described as a "terrorist" organisation by Cuba, said it had training camps in Paraguay and, interestingly, Venezuela and was ready to "support militarily" its compatriots on the island. "Fidel Castro has not left us any other option, given that his reaction to all peaceful action has been to send people to prison" Rodolfo Frometa, the commander-in-chief of the group, said. (*Latinnews Daily*, 17/8/06)

**August 16:** Following Fidel Castro's provisional transfer of power to his brother Raúl, some Cuban exile groups admitted that it would be best to show restraint and patience in a future process of transition in Cuba. Diego Suárez, the director of the Council for the Freedom of Cuba, one of the main Cuban exile organizations in Miami, said that "the change is coming" and "there is no need to despair." However, Angel Desfana, the president of Plantados, maintained that "it is not a matter of patience, but of urgency." (*EFE*, 16/8/06)

**August 20:** A pair of Cuban-American opponents to Fidel Castro's rule hope a database they are compiling will provide an accurate record of how many have been killed by the regime. Maria Werlau, 46, a former banker living in Chatham, New Jersey, and Armando Lago, 66, a half-paralyzed economist in Coral Gables, Florida, say their eight-year-old Cuba Archive project has already compiled 9,000 reports of people killed during Castro's 47 years running Cuba. The reports, many of which they say have been confirmed, involve more than 5,000 killed by firing squad, mostly in the immediate years following Castro's 1959 rise to power. Werlau and Lago say roughly 2,000 others died in prison, some executed, some perishing in accidents never explained. On top of that, there's an estimated 77,000 people who have died trying to flee Cuba, according to Castro critics. Werlau and Lago also hope to include the roughly 3,000 people who died in the violence before the 1959 revolution, including those killed by the forces of dictator Fulgencio Batista. (*AP*, 20/8/06)

**August 21:** The political situation in Cuba will continue along the same lines that Fidel Castro has imposed, in spite of his illness and even though he will be unable to return to power exactly as before, Cuban journalist and poet Raul Rivero asserted. Rivero, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for publishing articles that undermine the "independence and territorial integrity of the Cuban State" in foreign print media, said that there is not much possibility of change on the island. He said that Fidel Castro would no doubt be unable to exercise power the same way he had

before his illness. "We cannot give any assurances, however, because this is a crooked government. But the fact that Castro himself announced that he was delegating powers to his brother Raul and has allowed himself to be photographed could be telling us that nothing will be the same as it was," he said. He expressed regret, however, that there is no sign of opportunities for change in Cuba, inasmuch as the people who now have power represent the most orthodox group that wants to keep the same structures that Fidel Castro has used. "This is a group that controls the army and the Interior Ministry. It is also the group that controls the structures of the party in the provinces, something that is never mentioned but is important," he noted. (*Notimex*, 21/8/06)

## **Foreign Affairs**

**August 1:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, a close anti-American ally of Fidel Castro, said he was worried about the health of the Cuban leader, who has undergone surgery for intestinal bleeding. "With my heart, I wish that President Fidel Castro will quickly recover to always stay with us," Chavez said at a meeting of Vietnamese businesses during an official visit to Hanoi. He then raised his fist and shouted: "Long live Fidel Castro!" Chavez said Venezuelan officials had contacted Havana the moment they heard news that Castro had undergone surgery and provisionally handed over power to his brother Raul, his designated successor. "In regards to a government leader, such an announcement is a concern," Chavez said. "We have contacted comrade Castro's office in Havana and after receiving the news directly we left the hotel with our concern lessened. "Doctors prescribed that an absolute rest for several weeks must be taken," said Chavez, who was speaking on the last of his two-day visit to Vietnam. (*Reuters*, 1/8/06)

**August 1:** Chinese President Hu Jintao sent a message of good wishes to Cuban leader Fidel Castro following his operation to treat an acute intestinal problem. On behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Chinese government, the Chinese people and himself, Hu, also General Secretary of the CCP's Central Committee, offered his sincere condolence to Castro and wished him a quick recovery. (*Xinhua*, 1/8/06)

**August 1:** Bolivian President Evo Morales sent a letter to his counterpart and political ally Fidel Castro hoping for Castro's fast recovery. "We are sure that with the strength that you have always showed us, you will overcome this critical moment, and will continue struggling from the antimperialist trench", Morales wrote. (*AP*, 1/8/06)

**August 1:** Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a long-time friend of Castro, said in Brasilia Cubans alone should decide on a possible presidential successor. "The succession process is a decision the Cuban people will have to make," Lula told reporters, adding Castro may recover and "the situation may not be as bad as it appears." (*Reuters*, 1/8/06)

**August 2:** The European Union forwarded a short and terse get well wish to recovering Fidel Castro, adding however, it hadn't yet made any plans for dealing with a post-Castro Cuba. "There are no plans," said EU spokesman Pietro Petrucci. "We wish that President Fidel Castro and Cuban democracy (have) a quick recovery, that's all we can say." (*AP*, 1/8/06)

**August 2:** Cuba turned back at least four foreign journalists who tried to enter the island to cover Fidel Castro's health crisis and has been denying or not replying to other foreign media's requests for reporter visas. The four -- three from US media and a South American -- were on a commercial flight from Panama to Cuba but were turned back at the Havana airport and were forced to take the return flight to Panama, one of the journalists said. Cuba also has been denying or not replying to foreign media requests for journalists to cover the story of Castro's surrender of power, officially temporary, after he underwent surgery for gastrointestinal bleeding. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Canada's policy of diplomacy and engagement with Cuba is not likely to change under Stephen Harper's government, even as Fidel Castro's continued leadership of the tiny Caribbean country is in doubt, experts say. Harper may be ideologically inclined against Castro's Communist regime, but changing Canada's long-standing diplomatic relations with Cuba to better align with US policy would be risky, said Hal Klepak, a Cuban expert and history

professor at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario. ``For Harper, it would be a no-gainer," Klepak said from Havana. ``(Former prime minister Lester B.) Pearson was keen as mustard to please the Americans on Cuba, but made no headway. The Mulroney government came in with the same idea, and once again ran up against public opinion." John Kirk, a professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax, expects Ottawa's traditional stance on Cuba will continue because it can also be held out as an example of a Canadian policy independent from the US. (*Canadian Press*, 3/8/06)

**August 2:** Cuba accused Israel of being a "terrorist state" for its attacks against Lebanon. In an official note, the Cuban government accused the United States of being the military and economic support of Tel Aviv. It also accused the European Union of being Washington's "lackeys". "They have been accomplices of the Empire, with very seldom exceptions, promoting soft statements from the other side of the Atlantic", the note said. [[Declaración del MINREX](#)]

**August 3:** Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay is underlining that Canada has its own mind about how to deal with Cuba. It was the first official comment the Canadian government has made on the situation there since Fidel Castro became ill and signed power over to his younger brother Raul. "Canada has always taken a sovereign, independent position vis-a-vis our relations with Cuba, and we'll continue to do so," MacKay said at the Conservative caucus meeting. "One of the goals that countries do share is to see a functioning democracy in Cuba." MacKay said that all that's left to do now is wait to see what unfolds. "Everyone is waiting in anticipation to see whether the health of Mr. Castro will improve. Many countries now are waiting to see if there will be some sort of mass exodus from Cuba, there's no way to predict if that will happen at all." (*Canadian Press*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** At a moment in Cuban history -- with long-time strongman Fidel Castro in a sickbed and transferring his power to his brother -- foreign journalists are being shut out of the Communist island. Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa) reported that more than 150 foreign journalists trying to enter Cuba with tourist visas have been turned away at the Havana airport since the government announced Castro had internal bleeding and faced "complicated surgery." Journalists need a work visa to work legally in Cuba, and a spokesman of the government-controlled International Press Center told dpa there would be no exceptions. Like many countries, the communist state, which has a tight control on news and information, demands that foreign media seek proper journalists visas and accreditations. "Whoever violates these rules, either intentionally or not, will be barred from entering the country," the state news agency Prensa Latina reported. (*AP, Reuters*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** The New York City-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) urged Cuba to let foreign journalists into the country. "We call on Cuban authorities to let journalists do their work without harassment or obstruction," Americas program coordinator Carlos Lauria said in a statement. "It is critical that foreign journalists be allowed into Cuba to report the news on the handover of power by Castro, a story of global importance. We are also troubled by reports that Cuba is denying requests for journalists' visas." (*CPJ Press Release*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) wished Fidel Castro a speedy recovery calling him "a friend of all the poor developing countries striving for a better life for their peoples." In a letter sent to Havana from CARICOM headquarters, the Caribbean governments also expressed their confidence in General Raul Castro's ability to take on the new responsibilities, reported the Jamaica Observer. "President Fidel Castro, our friend, will be in our prayers," reads the letter sent by Denzil Douglas, the prime minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis and current CARICOM chair. (*Granma*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** Panama's Anti Corruption Prosecutor Mercedes De Leon ordered trial of several ex officials for possible participation in terrorist Luis Posada Carriles illegal departure from the country. In a statement to La Prensa daily, De Leon said that Posada Carriles departure from Panama "was made in such a way it could be considered a crime." De Leon asked for the opening of criminal charges against ex Justice Minister Arnulfo Escalona, ex National Police Chief Carlos Bares, and ex Migration Deputy Javier Tapia. The Public Ministry official noted the loss of the document in which ex Minister of Government and Justice Hector Aleman sent his opinion for the pardon given the terrorists. De

Leon's decision was taken after a comprehensive investigation requested by Panama's Twelfth Penal Court. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** The Spanish government reiterated its wishes of a speedy recovery for Fidel Castro, who announced that he must rest following surgery. Spanish Government Vice President Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega told Spain's National Radio from Peru that the Executive hoped for a quick recovery of Castro. She also ratified that the Cubans are the ones to decide about their future. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement expressing its most energetic condemnation of the "cowardly, despicable and criminal Israeli attack on July 30 against the Lebanese village of Qana," which resulted in at least 60 civilian casualties. The Foreign Ministry statement, published by Granma newspaper, says that the barbaric act of state terrorism, in which 34 children including 15 with mental and physical disabilities were killed, is part of the aggression launched by Israel against Lebanon over the last 23 days. (*ACN*, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** Guatemalan President Oscar Berger and Cuban Public Health Minister Jose Ramon Balaguer opened a modern ophthalmologic hospital, the first of its kind in Central America. The eye care center, located in the northern municipality of San Cristobal, Verapaz, was named after the Cuban patriot Jose Joaquin Palma, a revolutionary that fought in the island's wars of independence from Spanish colonial rule and who lived in Guatemala during different periods of his life. "I want to convey to the Government and the people of Cuba my most sincere gratitude for the medical aid," President Berger said in his speech. (*Granma*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** The Brazilian daily Folha de Sao Paulo reported that President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva had been informed by Cuban authorities that Castro had cancer and might not be able to return to office. "Cuban authorities told the president and the Workers Party (PT) that the dictator has cancer and that even if he recovers he might not return to power," the newspaper reported, without revealing its sources. Folha de Sao Paulo said that "word from Havana received confidentially indicates that Castro is very ill." Lula was deeply moved and asked his supporters to keep quiet about the matter, according to the daily. The Brazilian government later denied that it had been informed by Havana about Castro's health. "The president of the republic, who is following the situation of the Cuban president's health through the Foreign Ministry, was at no time informed by Cuban authorities or any other source about the supposed diagnosis," Brazilian presidential spokesman Andre Singer said in a communique. (*EFE*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** Panamanian First Lady Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos visited Havana's modern Ramon Pando Ferrer Ophthalmology Institute. Fernandez toured the premises and chatted with workers and patients. She took time to speak with several Panamanians awaiting eye surgery at the center. The eye care facility has been entrusted with the scientific supervision of Operation Miracle, an eye surgery program that is helping millions of poor Latin Americans recover their sight. From late 2005 to date, more than 3,000 low income Panamanians have received free eye operations in Cuba. The Panamanian first lady spoke highly of the program and said she was grateful for its contribution. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/8/06)

**August 5:** Former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega joined other revolutionaries and leftists in wishing Fidel Castro well, traveling to Havana to offer his support while Cuban officials said the leader is recuperating well after intestinal surgery. "I am sure that we will soon have Fidel resuming his functions and leading his people," Ortega, a leader of the Sandinista revolution and current presidential candidate in Nicaragua, told Cuban state media after arriving in Havana. (*AP*, 7/8/06)

**August 5:** Colombia's largest rebel group also expressed its solidarity with Fidel Castro. "We hope you'll recover in the shortest time possible," the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia said in a statement. (*AP*, 7/8/06)

**August 6:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said Fidel Castro was out of bed and talking following his surgery. "How are you, Fidel?" Chavez said during his weekly TV and radio program, suggesting he believed the Cuban leader

was watching. "We have reliable information of your quick and notable recuperation." "Fidel Castro, a hug for you, friend and comrade, and I know you are getting better," he added. Speaking by phone with Bolivian President Evo Morales later during the program, Chavez said Castro was bouncing back quickly. "This morning I learned that he's very well, that he is already getting out of bed, he's talking more than he should -- because he talks a lot, you know. He has sent us greetings," Chavez said. (AP, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** Malaysia's prime minister wished Castro a swift recovery and said he looks forward to seeing him at a summit in Havana next month. "I am pleased to hear your operation has been successful and that you are responding well to medical treatment," Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in a statement carried by Malaysia's national news agency, Bernama, from the capital of Kuala Lumpur. Abdullah said he hopes to meet with Castro during a meeting of leaders of mainly developing countries of the Nonaligned Movement that Cuba is hosting September 11 through 16. Malaysia has held the rotating chairmanship of the 116-member Non-Aligned Movement since 2003, and is to hand over the reins to Cuba next month. (AP, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** Cuba's allies urged the United States not to interfere with the communist country during Fidel Castro's absence from power. "We demand that the government of the United States respects Cuba's sovereignty," said a letter released at a news conference in Havana by 400 leftist intellectuals and human rights activists. "We must prevent a new aggression at all costs." The letter was signed by Latin American leftists and numerous Nobel Peace laureates, including former Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and activist Rigoberta Menchu of Guatemala. (AP, 8/8/06)

**August 7:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage met in Bogota here with the Prince of Asturias Felipe de Borbón, and the heads of state of Chile, Michelle Bachelet; Paraguay, Nicanor Duarte; Ecuador, Alfredo Palacio; and the Dominican Republic, Leonel Fernández. Lage also met with the vice presidents of Venezuela, José Vicente Rangel and Bolivia, Alvaro García Linera; the secretaries of the Ibero-American Summit, Enrique Iglesias, and the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza. All these public figures were in Bogotá for the inauguration of re-elected Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, beginning his second term (2006-2010). (*Granma International*, 8/8/06)

**August 7:** Colombian President Alvaro Uribe voiced concern with the health condition of Fidel Castro and wished him a speedy healing. At the interview Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage, who attended President Uribe's re-election ceremony, Lage said Fidel is having a satisfactory recovery and will soon reassume his duties as statesman. (*Prensa Latina*, 8/8/06)

**August 7:** The president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, cancelled a scheduled meeting with Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage in Colombia. The Costa Rican leader had declared that during the conversation with Lage he would send Raúl Castro the message that if he were to inherit power, he should look for a "transition." "Obviously, (Lage) had been informed of what I wanted to speak to him about because he said he would not discuss this topic, so I cancelled the meeting," said Arias. (EFE, 8/8/06)

**August 8:** Cuban and Algerian sports authorities will sign in Havana an action program for the years 2006-2007. Yahia Giudoun, Algerian Minister of Youth and Sports, arrived to Havana and will carry out a broad program on the island culminating with the signing of the accord. (CAN, 8/8/06)

**August 8:** The press freedom and journalists' rights organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) asked for a "gesture of mercy" for reporters in Cuba from Raul Castro, who has exercised power provisionally there since the sudden serious illness of his brother Fidel last week. In a communique, the Paris-based RSF said it was waiting for a "gesture of mercy" from Raul Castro regarding the 23 journalists imprisoned on the Communist island since the anti-opposition crackdown in 2003, adding that it was "urgent" for the provisional leader to react on the matter. RSF also noted that the Cuban regime is the second largest jailer of journalists in the world, after China. (EFE, 8/8/06)

**August 8:** Sandinista leader and former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said that Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who last week relinquished power temporarily while recovering from surgery, "is already active" and taking a hand in official matters.

Ortega, his leftist party's candidate for president in Nicaragua's November 5 election, said Castro has been talking to friends on the telephone. Speaking by phone from Havana to a Managua radio station owned by one of his sons, the Sandinista leader gave no indication as to when Castro will appear again in public. Some anticipate an appearance by the long-time Cuban autocrat on Sunday, which will be his 80th birthday. "One must take into account that he (Castro) was subjected to an operation for which anyone needs a period of recuperation. "The important thing is that he is in a gradual process of re-establishment, of recovery," the Nicaraguan said. (*EFE*, 8/8/06)

**August 9:** Caribbean leaders, even from nations that had Cold War differences with Cuba, sent get-well-soon messages to Castro. "We pray for President Castro and we wish him God's blessings," said Prime Minister Kenny Anthony of St. Lucia. The friendly relations stem in part from small-state admiration for Castro's defiance of the United States, which also has strong ties throughout the region. But there's also gratitude for Cuban assistance, in medical care and education, to Caribbean nations despite the communist government's financial struggles. "Cuba has been a long-standing friend to the entire Caribbean," said Barry Collymore, spokesman for Grenadan Prime Minister Keith Mitchell. (*AP*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** Brazilian intellectual and theologian Frei Betto asserted he is flying to Cuba to join its people in prayers for the swift recovery of Fidel Castro. The author of "Fidel and Religion" said he wants to be with the Cuban people to pray for the health of Fidel. He added that all Latin Americans should mobilize against the new US menaces on the island and its intentions to increase violations of its sovereignty. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** Hollywood actor Benicio del Toro, Oscar winner of the best supporting role in Steven Soderbergh's film *Traffic*, demanded respect for Cuba's sovereignty. Del Toro, of Puerto Rican nationality, joined his voice to over 2,500 academics and artists from dozens of countries that reject US interference in the Caribbean island's affairs. This film star visited Havana several years ago along with cinema director Soderbergh and producers of *Traffic* on the occasion of the premiere of this movie in the island. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** Archbishop Giulio Einaudi, who was apostolic nuncio in Cuba from 1980 to 1988, said that a political transition could take place on the island nation without recourse to violence. Speaking to the Chilean daily *El Mercurio*, the archbishop explained, "A non-violent transition is possible, depending on how this matter is handled. Personally I think it can take place through normal channels after so many years of revolution." "If the international community will approach Cuba through dialogue, the situation can evolve in a very positive way," he stated. He also referred to the transfer of power from Fidel Castro to his brother Raul, saying he "should be capable of leading the country towards peaceful and normal progress." The interim leader's "limitation could also be its strength," Archbishop Einaudi continued, "as he was at Fidel's side during all these years. Thus he knows the situation completely. It depends on how he will handle matters in this period of transition, which we don't know yet if it will be one of transition. It depends greatly on him and precisely on the powers he may choose to employ." Nevertheless the archbishop said it was too early to talk of a post-Fidel period. "We cannot say that a truly post-Castro era has begun, as it is possible he will improve and return," he maintained. (*CWNews.com*, 10/8/06)

**August 9:** Costa Rican President Oscar Arias said that Cubans should decide who will rule the island once Fidel Castro is no longer in power. "After 47 years, wouldn't it be more convenient to see what the Cuban people want?" asked Arias, who received the Nobel Peace Prize as president in 1987 for his work as a mediator in Central America's civil wars. (*The Washington Post*, 10/8/06)

**August 10:** Through the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC), former Czech president Václav Havel and former Spanish prime minister José María Aznar have called upon the international community to continue

to exert pressure on Fidel Castro's regime until "truly democratic changes" take place in the island. For the ICDC, Fidel Castro's transfer of power to his brother Raúl does not represent a "significant transformation" of the totalitarian rule that Cubans live under. (*Europa Press*, 10/8/06)

**August 10:** Mexican conservative leader Felipe Calderón sent Fidel Castro a letter wishing him a speedy recovery. In a press release, his office informed that Calderón personally delivered a letter with his best wishes at the Cuban embassy. (*AP*, 15/8/06)

**August 10:** In what appeared to be one of his usual rhetorical flourishes, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said that Fidel Castro was in a "great battle for life." "From here, let's pray to God for Fidel and his recovery, and he's fighting a great battle," Chavez said in a televised speech from the eastern state of Anzoátegui. Chavez said he had received a message from Castro "that filled me with more optimism, with more faith." "Among other things Fidel told me (...) 'I keep saying Chavez, God help Chavez and his friends,'" Chavez said. "I wrote to him in my own handwriting last night, in the early morning, to send it with the messenger who was returning immediately: 'You are fighting a great battle every day, all these nights,'" Chavez said. In a reference to the US, Chavez said that "transition in Cuba will begin when Raul handles back power to Fidel". Chavez spoke near the end of his speech as if Castro were listening. "Get better, Fidel. It's an order. I never give you an order. Now I'm giving you one," Chavez said. "Get better, an order. I know you're disciplined." (*The New York Times*, *El Nuevo Herald*, 11/8/06)

**August 10:** While President Hugo Chávez's account of receiving a message from Fidel Castro -- and sending another back -- underlined his standing as a virtual protégé of the aged Cuban leader, Caracas was rife with speculation about an alleged cooling of the usually warm relations. The rumors were sparked by the fact that shortly after Castro's surgery, Chávez appointed his brother Adán, who had been ambassador to Havana, as minister of the presidency -- in effect, his chief of staff. No replacement for Adán has yet been appointed. Some media commentators in Caracas have suggested that Adán's withdrawal might somehow indicate a cooling of relations, which have revolved around the personal rapport and shared political objectives of Chávez and Fidel Castro. This version seemed to be bolstered by the fact that Chávez learned of Castro's health crisis from television while on an official visit to Vietnam, and that none of his public statements suggest he has spoken directly to the Cuban leader. Alberto Garrido, author of several books on Chávez, cautioned against reading too much into the few known facts. "Chávez's relationship with Castro grew without Adán," he says, and the appointment of Adán to the Cabinet is part of a domestic agenda and not directly linked to the relationship with Havana. "A much more hard-line phase [of Chávez rule] is beginning," Garrido argues, "and Chávez needs a reliable and radical team around him." But according to Américo Martín, a veteran of Venezuela's Cuban-backed guerrilla groups of the 1960s and author of a new book on Cuba, Chávez and Raúl Castro hold different views on the future of the island. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/8/06)

**August 12:** Intellectuals linked to the Network in Defense of Humankind (RIDH) met in Havana to coordinate actions and reflect on the most pressing problems in today's world. The meeting, held at Casa de las Americas, one of the institutions linked to the RIDH, was presided over by Italian journalist Gianni Mina, Brazilian theologian Frei Betto and Belgian philosopher Francois Houtart, among other thinkers and writers. In the new situation, new players like strikers, indigenous movements, the unemployed and the landless people, have emerged, interacting with intellectuals and politicians, Cuban poet Roberto Fernandez Retamar recalled. For his part, Francois Houtart called on the popular forces to move from collective awareness to united actions against the lies of the hegemonic forces. Cuban Reverend Raul Suarez spoke about the existence of an ecumenical section within the Network of networks, saying that the incorporation of religious people into the defense of humankind agrees with Jesus postulates. (*Prensa Latina*, 12/8/06)

**August 13:** Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadienyad expressed that his country is ready to assist in the medical treatment of Fidel Castro. In a phone conversation with Cuban acting president Raúl Castro, Ahmadienyad also offered Iran's help in the celebration of the Non Aligned Countries Summit to be held next September in Havana. (*IRNA*, 14/8/06)

**August 13:** Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez traveled to Havana to meet ailing Fidel Castro. Cuba's Communist daily Granma published new pictures of Castro showing him on his 80th birthday together with his brother Raul and Chavez. In a photograph, Raul Castro is shown embracing Chavez when he arrived in Havana. It was the younger Castro's debut appearance as acting Cuban president. "An Unforgettable Afternoon Among Brothers," Granma said of the afternoon visit by Chavez, who is Castro's closest friend and political ally in Latin America. (AP, 14/8/06)

**August 14:** The leader of the communist government of North Korea, Kim Jong Il, sent a message of solidarity to Fidel Castro, who turned 80 on Sunday, August 13. In the message, Kim reaffirmed to Castro his country's support and solidarity towards Cuba. "We extend you our deeply heart-felt congratulations on your 80th birthday," said Kim, according to Pyongyang's state-run news agency. (AP, 15/8/06)

**August 14:** Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage rejected untruths spread by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, and cleared up reasons why he had recently suspended a meeting with Arias in Colombia. In an open letter to Arias, Lage explained the initiative of that encounter, to be held on the swearing in of Colombian leader Alvaro Uribe, had from the beginning come from the government of Costa Rica. Lage said it was not in Cuba's interests to agree to the meeting, knowing Costa Rica's position against Cuba, but had accepted it as a gesture of courtesy. He added the Costa Rican embassy in Colombia said the motive of the request was to re-establish diplomatic relations between Cuba and Costa Rica, which had not been requested by Cuba. Lage's note points out that shortly before the meeting Arias was quoted by the media as saying he wanted to direct a message to Raul Castro with disrespectful and intrusive demands. (AFP, *Prensa Latina*, 14/8/06)

**August 15:** Costa Rican President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias dismissed an insult proffered by Cuba's vice president and reiterated his desire to see democratic change on the Communist-ruled island. "I have many defects, but I'm no liar," Arias told reporters in response to Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage's characterization of him as "a liar." "I plead for, and have always done so, I haven't changed my mind, for a regime change and not for a monarchical succession" in Cuba, said Arias, who won the 1987 Nobel Prize for his efforts to end civil wars in Central America. In an open letter to Arias, published in Havana and San Jose, Lage responded to a statement by the Costa Rican president who said he had suspended a meeting with Cuban officials scheduled for last week in Colombia because they imposed limits on what subjects could be discussed. "The initiative for the meeting had always come from his government; Cuba never asked for it and it wasn't you or any of your officials who suspended the meeting because 'they tried to limit the agenda.' It was me who did it," Lage said. (EFE, 15/8/06)

**August 15:** Carlos Rodríguez and his girlfriend, Johan Mary Jiménez, two Cuban physicians who defected from Venezuela to Colombia, said that Cuban doctors working abroad do not have an easy life. Rodríguez, 30, and Jiménez, 28, were working in the town of Lagunillas, near Venezuela's northwestern border with Colombia. Like many Cuban medical personnel, they went to Venezuela with the hope of saving a little money, or at least returning home with some consumer goods hard to find on the island. "Cubans look for a way to change their lives," Rodríguez said. "Going to another country to work was one way to do that." The couple said they each received the equivalent of about \$200 a month as salary. The Venezuelan government provided them with separate housing and the state oil company, PDVSA, subsidized their food. Cuban officials monitor them closely, Rodríguez and Jiménez told the press. They could not speak with the media, and there were regular "code reds" -- alerts for unspecified reasons during which they couldn't leave home. Although it was promoted as a way to help poor people who had minor illnesses, aches, pains and infections, Rodríguez and Jiménez said their Cuban supervisor made it clear that they also had to campaign for Chávez in the lead up to a 2004 recall referendum, which Chávez won handily. The Cuban medical personnel also provided the Venezuelans with Cuban medicines. Rodríguez, who was part of the team that distributed the medicine to neighborhoods, said "boxes and boxes and boxes" arrived weekly from Cuba via military aircraft. Whether Cuba donated the medicines, or the Venezuelan government paid for them, was impossible to establish. Since the Venezuelan program was launched, Cubans on the island have complained about a significant drop in the number of doctors there

and the already low supplies of medicines there. "I was worried about all this medicine leaving Cuba," Jiménez said. "What about the Cubans?" (*The Miami Herald*, 15/8/06)

**August 15:** The fourteenth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) could be the first major international meeting to be held in Havana without the active participation of Fidel Castro, a staunch defender of this bloc of developing countries, which he presided over a quarter of a century ago. "Like any international organisation, the NAM is merely a reflection of the real world, which logically is very different now than it was in 1979," the last time Cuba hosted the summit, Cuban deputy foreign minister Abelardo Moreno said in an interview with the press. He said one of the challenges facing the NAM is to work with the "characteristics and positions that exist today" in that changed international context, and to become "a vital organisation, with clout, that really exercises the influence it should have." The non-aligned countries currently make up nearly two-thirds of the members of the United Nations, which in Moreno's view makes them a force with real potential. "The UN is one of the NAM's main forums of action, and this should continue to be the case," he added. The NAM's membership includes 53 countries in Africa, 38 in Asia, 24 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in Europe (Belarus). "So far, our overall impression is that at least 50 heads of state or government will be attending the summit," he said. (*IPS*, 15/8/06)

**August 16:** Cuba presented the Coordination Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with a draft final declaration to be discussed at the 14th Summit of this body in September. A Cuban Foreign Ministry source confirmed to *Prensa Latina* that the document has been handed over to representatives of the member countries at the UN headquarters in New York by Abelardo Moreno, deputy minister of foreign affairs on the island. According to *Prensa Latina*, the NAM summit will focus on the Middle East crisis, especially the situation in Lebanon. The draft addresses "Washington threats to Iran and Venezuela, as well as the increasing of the embargo against Cuba". According to traditional NAM practice, the proposal is first reviewed by the Bureau, in charge of coordinating activities and the positions of the states represented in the movement. The draft declaration was prepared by Cuba as the host nation for the upcoming meeting of heads of state and government of the Non-Aligned Movement and the country to assume the presidency of the group for the second time in its history. (*Granma International*, AFP, 16/8/07)

**August 16:** With Fidel Castro apparently on the mend but still ceding power to his brother Raul, the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) says now is the time for newspapers around the hemisphere to urge the immediate release of some two dozen imprisoned journalists, and an end to government harassment of the tiny independent press on the island. IAPA is suggesting newspapers to publish the commentary simultaneously on August 18. "Given recent developments in Cuba (...) the situation has worsened for the independent press in that country," IAPA President Diana M. Daniels, general counsel and corporate secretary of The Washington Post Co., wrote in the "Dear Colleagues" letter to IAPA members. "We believe this is the time to heighten our pressure for the immediate release of the jailed journalists, most of whom are suffering from chronic health problems and abuse in the prisons," wrote Daniels and Gonzalo Marroquín, director of the Guatemala City daily *Prensa Libre*. IAPA listed the imprisoned journalists, who are serving terms ranging from one to 27 years, as the following: Ricardo González Alfonso; Víctor Rolando Arroyo; Normando Hernández González, Julio César Gálvez; Adolfo Fernández Sainz; Omar Rodríguez Saludes; Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez; Mijaíl Barzaga Lugo; Pedro Arguelles Morán; Pablo Pacheco Avila; Alejandro González Raga; Alfredo Pulido López; Fabio Prieto Llorente; Iván Hernández Carrillo; José Luis García Paneque; Juan Carlos Herrera; Miguel Galván Gutiérrez; José Ubaldo Izquierdo; Omar Ruiz Hernández; José Gabriel Ramón Castillo; Léster Luis González Pentó Alfredo Felipe Fuentes; José Manuel Caraballo Bravo; and Oscar Mario González. (*Editor & Publisher*, 16/8/06)

**August 16:** When receiving Cuban Finance Minister Georgina Barreiro in Hanoi, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung expressed his confidence in Fidel Castro's full recovery. The prime minister said the hope, that Fidel will soon return to lead the country, is shared by the other leaders of the State, Government, and Communist Party. It was also announced that Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet, who assumed the position a month and a half ago, will visit Cuba very soon, which will contribute to strengthen the ties of friendship and brotherhood between both nations. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/8/06)

**August 17:** Many of the international aid teams that descended on Indonesia after the 27 May earthquake in Java, have packed up and gone home. But a medical team from Cuba has proved so popular that locals have asked it to stay on for another six months. More than two months after the quake, the 135-strong Cuban team sees up to 1,000 patients a day at two field hospitals set up in the earthquake zone, 30km (18 miles) from Jogjakarta. Nearby, there are crushed houses and rubble - ugly reminders of the earthquake that killed more than 6,000 people and destroyed 100,000 homes. The Cubans are the last hope for many Indonesians given the scant primary health care services provided by the government in Jakarta. The two Cuban hospitals in Java are fully-equipped with X-ray machines, laboratories, operating rooms and specialists to handle the broken bones and other injuries common to earthquake victims. (*BBC*, 18/8/06)

**August 17:** A presidential candidate backed by Venezuela's major opposition parties pledged that, if elected, his government would remain independent of both US and Cuban influence. Manuel Rosales, the popular governor of Zulia state, said Venezuela's foreign policy has been skewed by President Hugo Chavez's antipathy for Washington and his close friendship with Fidel Castro. "We don't have to depend on either the (US) empire or the bearded one," Rosales said, alluding to Castro. (*AP*, 17/8/06)

**August 17:** Bolivia's health minister filed a complaint with the Cuban Embassy after a Cuban doctor barred journalists from entering the hospital where he works, saying the facility is his country's territory. "I immediately contacted the Cuban ambassador (Rafael Dausa) to lodge my protest, because, if there was this type of response, it is not appropriate," Nila Heredia told Radio Panamericana. The Cuban doctor, who was not identified, refused to allow a journalist with ATB television to enter the Chacaltaya hospital, located in the city of El Alto near La Paz, to investigate an alleged case of medical malpractice affecting an elderly man. According to several news reports, the physician responded that the hospital is "Cuban territory" after the reporter demanded the right to enter the facility on the grounds that it is part of Bolivia. A contingent of 1,700 medical professionals from Cuba were invited to Bolivia earlier this year - initially to provide emergency assistance to flood victims - by socialist President Evo Morales. The presence of the Cubans - who work at 15 hospitals equipped and remodeled with Havana's support, including Chacaltaya - has been criticized by Bolivian physicians, who accuse them of taking work away from local doctors. (*EFE*, 18/8/06)

**August 20:** Yolexi Cordero Guerrero, a Cuban doctor with the Cuban Medical Brigade providing medical services in Honduras, was murdered along with two Hondurans in a Tegucigalpa neighborhood. According to police sources, preliminary investigations indicate that the murder was planned. (*Notimex*, 20/8/06)

**August 20:** The OAS General Secretary, Chilean José Miguel Insulza, said that a possible return of Cuba to the Organization of American States (OAS) might come to fruition in the medium term, although the issue must be raised by the organization's members. Insulza affirmed that, in any case, a possible reincorporation of Cuba to the OAS would not take place within days or months. "Everybody wants to discuss the topic, but I am going to let the member countries take the initiative," added the official. "I would like for Cuba to return (to the OAS), but it is difficult because I believe there is no will on the part of Cuba to do so nor is it willing to implement the changes required within the framework of the Inter-American Democratic Charter," said Insulza. (*Reuters*, 20/8/06)

**August 20:** Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez called for a round of applause in honor of Fidel Castro during his weekly radio and TV show, urging Castro to get better and saying he has been like a father. Chavez paused to wish Castro well during a six-hour edition of "Hello President" dedicated to the inauguration of a children's cardiology hospital. "I imagine you must be happy watching 'Hello President' and seeing how the Bolivarian Revolution is advancing, following the example of the Cuban Revolution," Chavez said, referring to his socialist movement named after South American independence hero Simon Bolivar. "You should feel proud to be the father of the Cuban Revolution," Chavez said, urging a round of applause from the audience seated under an awning outside the hospital. "Bravo, Fidel! Bravo, father of us all, the revolutionaries of this continent." (*AP*, 20/8/06)

**August 20:** Cuba granted Zambian newspaper "The Post" a permanent bureau status in Havana. With the signing of a permanent accreditation valid up to April 2007, what remains now is for The Post to find office space and accommodation. The Post bureau once in full operation will be among other international media organisations operating in Cuba such as CNN and Latin American agencies including the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela supported Telesur. The Post has also applied to open a bureau in Venezuela and was only awaiting feedback from Caracas. (*The Post*, 21/8/06)

**August 21:** The Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez assured that the video in which Carlos Ahumada says that the *panistas* must take part in an alleged plot against Andrés Manuel López Obrador originated in Cuba, although not necessarily from the government of Fidel Castro. In a telephone interview, the Foreign Affairs Secretary emphasized that if that were the case, "it would be an extremely irregular situation" that would constitute a violation of Mexican sovereignty. (*Notimex*, 21/8/06)

**August 21:** Bolivian President Evo Morales signed a call to respect Cuba's sovereignty, adding his name to nearly 13,000 personalities from around the world demanding that the United States put an end to its subversive plans against the island. The text entitled "The Sovereignty of Cuba Must be Respected" calls to stop the US aggression against Cuba, emphasizing the Bush administration's "transition" plan against Cuba. (*Radio Cadena Agramonte*, 21/8/06)

**August 22:** One of 12 Cuban rafters rescued near the Mexican coast on August 18 after being adrift for 26 days, died in the Tampico Naval Hospital. A Public Information Ministry official informed that Cuban citizen Fidel Domínguez Rivera, 23, died from dehydration and a severe leg infection. (*Notimex*, 22/8/06)

**August 22:** Mexico still awaits a response from the Cuban authorities to a proposal to discuss the "alarming issue" of the lack of a migratory agreement between two countries. A Mexican diplomatic source said that a formal offer had been made in two occasions, "without any response as of yet on the part of the Cuban authorities." (*Notimex*, 23/8/06)

**August 23:** Polish ex-President Aleksander Kwasniewski, who helped negotiate a peaceful end to Ukraine's "Orange Revolution", has offered to mediate talks between the Cuban government and Cuban opposition leaders. Polish media reported Kwasniewski was organising what he called a "round table" of international figures to travel to Cuba next year to hold a dialogue on that country's future. "Talks on this subject are in progress (...) and some monitoring of whether it will be possible," Kwasniewski was quoted as saying by local news agency PAP. "It is still far from finalised." There was no immediate indication whether the Cuban government would be interested in outside mediation. (*Reuters*, 23/8/06)

**August 24:** Ambassador Ruben Perez Valdes and staff members of the Cuban embassy in Pyongyang engaged in friendship work at the Korea-Cuba Friendship Factory with Ra Sok-ju as its manager on the occasion of the month for solidarity with the Cuban people. After being briefed on the history of the factory in front of the monument to the on-site instructions of President Kim Il-sung and leader Kim Jong-il, they helped employees of the factory in maize-harvesting and mowing. (*KCNA*, 24/8/06)

**August 24:** Pakistan and Cuba have a vast scope of improving their bilateral, trade, economic and cultural relations and were heading in that direction, ambassador to Pakistan Gustavo Machin Gomez said. The Cuban ambassador, the first to Islamabad after the reopening of its embassy, said the two countries have long standing diplomatic ties that will be taken to a higher level. The medical team from Cuba, which helped the people following 8 October earthquake in North West Frontier Province and Azad Kashmir (Pakistani-administered Kashmir) played the important role of introducing Cuba in Pakistan and establishing "strong bonds of friendship", he said. "I come here with clear goals to strengthen, enhance, promote, boost, foster and encourage bilateral relations between the two countries." The ambassador said increased political, economic activities and war against terrorism have projected South Asia in the world. "I feel proud to represent Cuba in Pakistan among the friends," he added. (*APP*, 24/8/06)

**August 25:** Cuba announced Miguel Pereira Hernández as its new ambassador to China. Previous to this post, Pereira Hernández was director for Asia and Oceania, at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, an official note published in official daily Granma said. (*EFE, 25/8/06*)

**August 27:** Acting President Raul Castro received a Syrian delegation, state media said August 29, as the younger brother of ailing leader Fidel Castro began taking on a leadership role for the summit of nonaligned nations to be hosted by Cuba in September. The younger Castro met with the delegation led by Syrian Information Minister Mouhsen Bilal, which confirmed President Bashar Assad will attend the mid-September gathering in Havana, the Communist Party daily Granma said. The group gave Raul Castro, the defense minister and No. 2 man in the communist-led government, a message from Assad wishing his older brother a speedy recovery and affirming Syria's solidarity with the island nation amid "a toughening of threats and aggressions by the Bush administration toward Cuba," the newspaper said. Granma said Raul Castro assured the Syrians that Cuba was ready to host a successful gathering for scores of heads of state and government as his country takes over the chairmanship of the Nonaligned Movement from Malaysia. Accompanying Raul Castro in his meeting with the Syrian minister were Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Fernando Ramirez de Estenez, member of the Communist Party Secretariat. (*AP, Granma, 29/8/06*)

**August 28:** The Ladies in White, a group comprising relatives of jailed dissidents, appealed to leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement to press the Cuban government for the release of political prisoners during next month's summit in Havana. The group said the Communist regime in Havana could show progress on the human rights front by "immediately and unconditionally freeing" the 60 dissidents who remain behind bars more than three years after being arrested and sentenced in a harsh crackdown. The Ladies also urged the Non-Aligned governments to ask Cuba to guarantee that it will not re-arrest a dozen of the "Group of 75" who have been released from custody on medical grounds. "They are innocent, as all they did was try to exercise their freedom of expression. Equally, some 300 existing peaceful political prisoners should be freed," the organization said. Honored last year by the European Parliament with the Sakharov Prize for human-rights activism, the Ladies in White is made up of wives, mother, sisters and other female kin of the members of the Group of 75. (*EFE, 28/8/06*)

**August 28:** Costa Rican president Oscar Arias urged the Ibero-American countries to support a transition toward democracy in Cuba. In an op-ed published in the Spanish daily El Pais, the Central American president said that current crisis in Cuba, due to Fidel Castro's illness, should allow a discussion about Cuba's future in which the Ibero-American community of nations should participate. "The first and most urgent goal to struggle for in all multilateral forums should be the lifting of the embargo", Arias said. He explained that the second goal should be a commitment by all Ibero-American nations to exert pressure on the US to close the Guantanamo naval base, and to return it to Cuba's sovereignty. "A decisive support of all Ibero-American nations to these two goals should constitute a reasonable basis to request from the Cuban government clear signs of democratic opening", Arias highlighted. Similar op-eds by Arias were published in Costa Rican daily La Nacion and in the American Miami Herald. (*Notimex, Reuters, 28/8/06*)

**August 28:** A Cuban technician in optometry, member of the Cuban medical brigade working in Bolivia, defected. In an interview with a local TV channel, Condeval Sosa Martínez, 26, said he doesn't want to return to Cuba. Sosa Martínez said that he took that decision because in his country he expends all his salary to go towards buying food. He earns the equivalent to \$16 dollars. "I have no options of future or hope to prosper there", he added. This is the second member of the Cuban brigade that has defected in the Andean nation. (*EFE, 28/8/06*)

**August 29:** Some 500 Pakistani youths will be the first citizens from that country to study medicine in Havana under scholarships offered by the island. The Pakistani youths will leave for Cuba sometime this year after their selection is completed by a higher education and health commission in Pakistan, according to Qatar's The Peninsula on-line daily. Havana offered Pakistan the scholarships while a Cuban medical contingent worked in the earthquake-affected areas of that country's administered Kashmir region and its North West Frontier Province, said Cuban Ambassador to Pakistan Gustavo Machin. (*ACN, 29/8/06*)

**August 30:** Yang Jiechi, China's vice minister of Foreign Affairs, will lead the official delegation to Havana's Non Aligned Summit in September. "China is a developing country, and an observer at NAM", the vice minister said. (*EFE*, 30/8/06)

## Security

**August 1:** The Cuban military has begun to call up reservists. Cuba's military committees, which serve the same function as US draft boards, began mobilizing registered young men after the announcement of Fidel Castro's transfer of power to his brother Raúl. Registration is mandatory and lasts until the age of 45. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/8/06)

**August 5:** Former revolutionaries promised to keep fighting for Cuba as the island beefed up security, saying it fears a US attack during Fidel Castro's health crisis. Cuban army reservists took to the streets of Havana. The government, under the control of Castro's brother, Defence Minister Raul Castro, has mobilized citizen militias and asked military reservists to check in daily. The White House has insisted no such threat exists, with press secretary Tony Snow dismissing the suggestion that the United States would attack the island as "absurd." The Communist Party daily newspaper Granma issued a statement by the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution on its front page. "We will continue working with the same revolutionary fervour that you taught us," the veterans' group assured Castro. It also expressed confidence that Castro would be back on his feet soon. Cubans interviewed on state-run media also said they would fight to the death against any invaders from the north, while the official Granma wrote: "We Cubans are prepared for the defence" of the island. (*Canadian Press*, 5/8/06)

**August 8:** The authorities in the province of Santiago de Cuba are in a state of high alert for fear of a massive exodus towards the US Naval Base at Guantánamo. The southern coastline is constantly patrolled and all highways running the length of it in that province have been placed under military control. On the Siboney beach highway, near the US Naval Base, checkpoints have been set up to control traffic through the area. (*Cubanet*, 8/8/06)

**August 15:** Cuba's armed forces, a one-time guerrilla outfit that became the communist country's most efficient and business-savvy institution, will play a crucial role whatever happens after Fidel Castro, experts on Cuba said. With their commander, Defense Minister Raul Castro, now taking over at least temporarily from his brother Fidel Castro as president, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) are virtually running the country, they said. "We have the head of the armed forces as the head of state," said Hal Klepak, a professor of history at the Royal Military College of Canada and author of a book on the FAR. "The message is very clear -- there will not be disorder because it won't be permitted." (*Reuters*, 15/8/06)

**August 16:** From the start of Fidel Castro's health crisis at the end of July, the Cuban public has been starved of hard facts about his condition - officially classed as a state secret. The Cuban government justifies this news blackout by stating that the country faces a clear and imminent threat from the United States. Cuban National Assembly speaker Ricardo Alarcon said that following "concrete threats" from the US, "the information that we give about this whole situation has to be careful, limited to only what is essential". The conduits through which Cubans can get independent news are very limited: foreign press is not widely available, the internet is strictly controlled, broadcasts beamed to the island from the US are jammed and permits to install satellite receiving equipment are almost impossible to obtain. It is estimated that there are up to 30,000 illegal satellite television receiving dishes throughout the island, although it is unclear how many are used for viewing serious news and current affairs programmes and how many are used just to enjoy a wider variety of entertainment. The Cuban government's daily newspaper Granma, published an editorial on 9 August pointing out that pirating television programmes "not only violates national and international regulations, but it is the breeding ground for those who want to execute the Bush administration's plans to defeat the Cuban Revolution" and that the practice was a form of "illicit enrichment". (*BBC*, 16/8/06)

**August 16:** Cuba began demobilizing thousands of reserve troops on alert since Fidel Castro temporarily handed power to his brother Raul Castro for health reasons, Communist Party sources said. The alert for civilian rapid-response brigades in case of domestic unrest was also winding down, the sources said. Dressed in olive green fatigues, reserve troops were seen patrolling the streets of Havana. (*Globe and Mail, Reuters, 17/8/06*)

**August 18:** Raul Castro, in his first public comments since temporarily taking over power in Cuba from his ailing brother, said in an interview that he had mobilized the country's armed forces in the hours after Fidel Castro's illness was announced, to fend off any invasion that might have been planned by Washington. "We could not rule out the risk of somebody going crazy, or even crazier, within the US government," Raul Castro, the country's defense minister, said in an interview with the editor of Granma, the Communist Party newspaper. Mr. Castro, speaking from his office at the Defense Ministry, said Cubans stood ready to repel any attacks with "rifle in hand." "So far the attacks have only been rhetorical, with the exception of the substantial increase in subversive radio and television broadcasts against Cuba," he said in an article with the headline "No Enemy Can Defeat Us." (*The New York Times, 18/8/06*)

**August 20:** Cuban Defense Minister Raúl Castro discussed plans for the 1996 shootdowns of two Brothers to the Rescue airplanes during a meeting with official journalists just weeks after the event, according to an audio tape obtained by El Nuevo Herald. In the tape, a voice identified as Raúl's details the planning carried out during a meeting of military officers around January 13, 1996, the day Brothers aircraft allegedly had overflowed Havana to drop anti-government leaflets. The two Brothers Cessna C-337 were shot down by MiGs February 24, killing Armando Alejandro, Carlos Costa, Mario de la Peña and Pablo Morales. Brothers to the Rescue has denied any violations of Cuban airspace. The 11-minute recording was taped during a June 21, 1996 conversation at a Cuban Communist Party office in the eastern city of Holguín between Castro, government officials and journalists from the government's Radio Rebelde network. (*The Miami Herald, 21/8/06*)

## **US-Cuba Relations**

**August 1:** After Fidel Castro temporarily ceded presidential power to brother Raúl Castro, Miami-Dade County officials activated their Emergency Operations Center. Miami Mayor Manny Diaz predicted that the next few days would be "very tense." Coast Guard officials said they were on standby. "We haven't mobilized anybody yet," said Miami Coast Guard spokesman Dana Warr. "We're watching it just like everybody else." (*The Miami Herald, 1/8/06*)

**August 1:** In view of the Cuban situation after Fidel Castro ceded power to his brother Raul, the State Department said it would support a democratic transition in Cuba. "We believe that the Cuban people aspire and thirst for democracy," spokesman Sean McCormack said. The White House was "monitoring the situation," a spokesman said. Without speculating on Castro's health, the spokesman said the administration will "continue to work for the day of Cuba's freedom." Eric Watnik, a State Department spokesman, said: "We are not in a position to comment on Fidel Castro's health." (*AP, Reuters, The Miami Herald, 2/8/06*)

**August 1:** Congressman José E. Serrano called on the Bush Administration to leave Cuba alone as that nation waits to see the outcome of Fidel Castro's delicate surgery. "Should Fidel Castro ultimately be unable to continue to lead Cuba, we must leave the transition to the Cubans," Serrano said. "The U.S. has no role to play in a post-Castro Cuban government. The Cubans themselves must make decisions about their future, free of threats and intervention from abroad". "Unfortunately, I fear that the Bush administration will not take this approach and instead will seek to destabilize Cuba. This Administration has bungled so many foreign policy questions, that I have no doubt their instincts and actions will be incorrect on this matter as well". (*Press Release, 1/8/06*)

**August 2:** The Bush administration dismissed Raul Castro, suddenly the acting leader in Cuba, as no more than a "prison-keeper" as officials reviewed long-standing plans for the post-Fidel Castro era. "The fact that you have an autocrat handing power off to his brother does not mark an end to autocracy," White House spokesman Tony Snow

said of the Castro brothers. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, who was born in Cuba, addressed that issue at a news briefing without referring specifically to Venezuela. He said the US does not want to see anyone \_ "any third party \_ stand in the way of the rights of the Cuban people to elect their government." He also rejected the Cuban government's suggestions that once the Castro era ends, Cuban- Americans will return to the island, reclaim the homes they abandoned and expel the current occupants. "We are telling the Cuban people that that is just not true," Gutierrez said. (AP, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Miami's three Cuban-American congressional representatives said that the Bush administration is poised to roll out new policy initiatives to try to speed up a democratic transition in Cuba at a time when Raúl Castro is temporarily in power. The White House will announce the policy initiatives over the next few days, said US Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart. He declined to provide details. "There are going to be a series of announcements," Díaz-Balart said. "We are not going to make them today." One possible change is that the United States may move to deny any type of entry into this country to people who commit violence or harassment against dissidents and pro-democracy activists on the island. Congressional representatives announced that the US government is keeping a list of names of people who violate human rights on the island. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/8/06)

**August 2:** The White House and Congress, caught unaware by Fidel Castro's illness, prepared for a possible showdown in Cuba as lawmakers drafted legislation that would give millions of dollars to dissidents who fight for democratic change. "The message will be, 'The United States stands with you,'" Senator Bill Nelson (Democrat-Florida), one of the bill's authors, said in an interview. "Be ready to assert your independence." "The president's comment was that everybody was caught by surprise, and we'll have to wait and see" what US action is necessary, said Senator Robert Bennett (Republican-Utah), who discussed the developments with President Bush. "I think all of us can say we had no idea this was coming." "It's difficult for us to assess what the situation is," said White House spokesman Tony Snow. He cautioned Cubans against any mass exodus -- and Cuban-American exiles against returning to claim property they lost in Cuba. "Stay where you are. This is not a time for people to try to be getting in the water and going either way," Snow added. "We have talked about the importance, eventually, of finding an orderly and safe way for people to make transit between two places." (AP, 3/8/06)

**August 2:** Cuba, once a hot US tourist destination, is again whetting the appetites of leisure-related businesses in the United States after ailing Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother Raul this week before having surgery. But with Cuba's political future highly uncertain, no sign that a long-standing US trade embargo will end any time soon and the country's dilapidated infrastructure, major companies are not ready to start unveiling any investment plans. "This is the time if you have a specific plan on Cuba to take it off the shelf or out of the desk and dust it off," said Teo Babun, a Cuban-born, Miami-based business consultant on Cuba and the Caribbean. "Make your plans, but don't pack your bags and buy your ticket." Babun says Cuba is not an easy market, even for companies with extensive experience in Latin America. "Don't think that experience in itself will be sufficient to operate in a market like Cuba." He said he tells clients that they need to understand that what is occurring now in Cuba is a succession and not a transition, like when the Soviet bloc fell. The right business model would need to be found, and a knowledge base about opportunities would need to be built, Babun said. (*Reuters*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Coast Guard patrol boats repatriated 159 illegal Cubans to Bahia de Cabañas, Cuba, in seven repatriations during the month of July. The migrants were interdicted while attempting to enter the US illegally during the month of July, the Coast Guard said. Of the people intercepted, there were two significant groups. One group of 26 was interdicted on a go-fast vessel 44 miles south of Marquesas on July 10 while another group of 18 was picked up at sea by the Carnival cruise ship "Triumph", 15 miles north of Havana, Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** Florida Governor Jeb Bush said that the authorities continue to monitor closely the evolution of Fidel Castro's health and are readying contingency plans against a possible massive US-bound exodus from Cuba. Although he clarified that the authorities are not yet in a state of emergency, Jeb Bush said that they are keeping a close eye on

what is happening there. "There is a massive migration plan coordinated with the federal government," said Bush. "I have asked the emergency operations center to coordinate with local officials and be prepared" for any contingency, he added. (*AFP*, 2/8/06)

**August 2:** In Washington, Cuban American Senator Mel Martínez said that if a massive US-bound migration from Cuba takes place, the Coast Guard and the Navy should intervene to restore order. "I believe that there would be tremendous losses of lives and it would also be a mess that, at this juncture in the history of the United States, could not be tolerated," said Martínez in a press conference. The US Coast Guard Service said that it was still business as usual for them. However, according to their spokesperson, Angela McArdle, contingency plans also "deal with the possibility of mass migration by sea." (*AFP*, 2/8/06)

**August 3:** An art exhibition of Cuban painter Manuel Lopez Oliva is attracting large crowds of artists, students, academics and even US politicians at the John Slade Ely House gallery in New Haven, Connecticut. Lopez Oliva said it is no exception that a Cuban visual artist exhibits in the United States. One of the characteristics of Cuban art today is its popularity, creating enriching ties worldwide. In the case of the US, he said, there has been a certain perseverance in the showing of Cuban painting, drawing and something of sculpture in museums and galleries of the US since 1942 and have become part of important collections in that country. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** As Cuba appears on the brink of change, local churches are watching closely and contemplating their future role in the spiritual life of the island. Evangelical Christian groups say they are gearing up for a Castro-free Cuba. "We want to give a glass of water, a plate of food and the love of Jesus," said David Lema, associate director of theological education at the Florida Baptist Convention. "The convention would be on the front lines." Lema said his organization was ready to deploy teams, similar to its hurricane response teams, to provide aid, build churches and teach the Gospel if communism fell in Cuba. The Florida Baptist Convention has partnerships with Cuban churches, but Fidel Castro's government has imposed restrictions on fast-growing congregations, Lema and others say. (*Sun Sentinel*, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** Oswaldo Payá, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, said that Castro's transfer of power to his brother has had "a real impact" on average Cubans. "It's a new situation, in which there is a possibility of the end of an era in Cuba," which leads to "a variety of feelings, because there are many people who are identified with the government," he said. The climate on the streets is one of "caution, and a certain silence," he said. Asked about the Bush administration's statements following Castro's announcement, Payá praised the US government for its "caution" and "prudence" so far. But he said that statements such as those by Miami Republican Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart, saying, "The time has come in Cuba for a campaign of civil resistance, civil disobedience," and a recent Bush administration report from its Commission for Assistance for a Free Cuba, which outlines US plans for a post-Castro Cuba, can do more harm than good. "We're in a very complex, very tense situation," Payá said. "The US message should be to ratify that there is no such thing as a US threat on Cuba, that there is no intention to intervene. It should say, 'Look, the Cuban process must be defined exclusively by the Cuban people.'" "Now, the message should be of calm and non-intervention. These are very tense days in Cuba, and the most important thing is that there be peace, because there is a danger of [government] repression, and repression would bring about confrontation, and that could open up a process which nobody knows where it could end." In a separate telephone interview earlier this week, another well-known peaceful oppositionist, Vladimiro Roca, leader of Todos Unidos, said that the Bush administration and Cuban exile leaders "should send a positive, non-threatening, reconciliation message" to Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** At a time when Fidel Castro is ill and his brother-successor is mysteriously missing from public view, the Bush administration is admitting that it's in the dark on what's really going on in the island 90 miles from Key West. "Our insight into the decision-making process of (...) this particular dictatorship isn't that great," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, three days after Castro ceded power to his brother. "I don't think there are too many people outside that small core group of people who run Cuba who really know what is going on. I don't have an assessment for you on Fidel Castro's health," McCormack said. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** US President George W. Bush offered "full and unconditional" support for a democratic transition in Cuba, urging Cubans "to work for democratic change." The comments were part of Bush's first public statement on the situation in Cuba since an ailing Fidel Castro, 79, provisionally handed power to his 75-year-old brother Raul. "The United States is absolutely committed to supporting the Cuban people's aspirations for democracy and freedom," Bush said in a written statement. "We will support you in your effort to build a transitional government in Cuba committed to democracy, and we will take note of those in the current Cuban regime who obstruct your desire for a free Cuba." [[Statement by US President](#)] (CNN, 3/8/06)

**August 3:** Cuba's state-run media derided US President George W. Bush's call for Cubans to push for democracy as "the epitome of delirium" and "hollow blathering." Randy Alonso, a legislator and director of a nationally televised round-table discussion program, dismissed Bush's statement as "the epitome of delirium and dry inebriation." Another panelist, Arleen Rodriguez, said the Bush statements were not new, just "threats and blustering," while Rogelio Polanco, director of the Juventud Rebelde (Rebel Youth) newspaper, described it as "tin pot rhetoric" and "hollow blathering." Referring to Cuban-American legislators pushing for measures to accelerate political transition on the island, panelist Reynaldo Taladrid affirmed that "going to Washington to ask to come in behind the Marines" is an act of "political cowardice." The official government paper, Granma, derided President Bush's statement of support to the Cuban people, calling it "tin pot rhetoric." (AFP, *The New York Times*, 3,4/8/06)

**August 3:** Caleb Charles McCarry, the Bush administration's point man on Cuba, does little to hide his disdain for Cuba's ailing and longtime leader, Fidel Castro. The feeling seems to be mutual. McCarry, whose job is to help instigate and oversee a transition to democracy in the communist stronghold, made his view clear in July when asked how he felt Castro was faring weeks shy of his 80th birthday on August 13. That was well before this week's announcement that Castro was hospitalized for an intestinal illness and had granted his brother, Raul, temporary control of the country. "Actually, I'm far more concerned about how the Cuban people are faring under this dictatorship," McCarry told reporters at the State Department. "Let us remember, this is an extremely repressive regime that seeks to stamp out dissent and independent thought at every turn." (AP, 4/8/06)

**August 3:** After the surprising official announcement on the media that Fidel Castro would temporarily transfer power to his brother, the chief of the US Intelligence Service, John Negroponte ordered new research on Cuba. The US Intelligence Service has no independent means to determine the state of Castro's health. "It will be hard for the CIA to reassure the president that it knows exactly what is going to happen if Castro dies or remains incapacitated. They are only going to be able to obtain second or third hand information," said former CIA official Robert Baer. (Reuters, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that Cubans should remain in their homeland to strive for "positive change" and that those of them "who desire peaceful democratic change can count on the support of the United States." She addressed the Cuban people in a message aired over the US government-funded Radio and Television Marti, which broadcasts to the Communist-ruled island from studios in Miami. "We in the United States are closely watching the events in Cuba. Much is changing there, yet one thing remains constant: America's commitment to supporting a future of freedom for Cuba, a future that will be defined by you - the Cuban people," the secretary said. "We encourage the Cuban people to work at home for positive change, and we stand ready to provide you with humanitarian assistance, as you begin to chart a new course for your country," Rice said, making Washington's second appeal in three days aimed at preventing a mass Florida-bound exodus from the island nation. [[Message to the People of Cuba](#)] (EFE, 4/8/06)

**August 4:** Cuban dissidents expressed their differences over recent statements by US President George W. Bush in which he urged inhabitants of the island to work for democratic change. Vladimiro Roca, a prominent dissident who heads the illegal organization All United, said Bush's statement was "a gesture of solidarity with the cause of democracy and Cuba and with the internal opposition." Roca said that the US government "is the only government that maintains a firm and consistent policy of support for democracy and for the movement toward democracy within

Cuba." "It's the only government that acts in accordance with the principles it defends, very unlike some European governments that maintain a position of distance with regard to democracy and democratic change in Cuba," Roca said. Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, Castro comrade-in-arms turned opponent who heads the moderate dissident organization Cuban Change, was on the other side of the fence. He said Bush's statements "do not help in any way the internal dissident movement" on the island. "They are statements with overtones that completely (suggest) interference and of course can be framed within (the context of) science fiction," Menoyo told the press. But economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of the dissidents who forms part of the group of 75 independent journalists and democracy activists jailed in the spring of 2003 and who was released for health reasons, said he was very appreciative "of Bush's desire that there be democracy in Cuba." "I think that the United States can help a lot in that sense by making its policy toward Cuba more flexible, allowing greater contact between Cubans in exile and us," he added. (*EFE*, 5/8/06)

**August 6:** The United States pledged not to stoke political crisis in Cuba as Fidel Castro ails, but warned that the communist icon who has defied Washington for decades must not be replaced by a new dictator. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged Cubans to stay on the island amid the political tumult but promised Washington would stand by them in a time of political transition. "We are not going to do anything to stoke a sense of crisis or a sense of instability in Cuba," Rice said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "This is a transition period for the Cuban people, we are going to stand with them for the proposition that there should not simply be the end of one dictatorship and the imposition of another dictatorship," Rice said. She also renewed her appeal for Cubans to work for democratic change on the island, rather than leaving en masse for the United States as political uncertainty lingers. "The United States really feels very strongly that their future is at home and mass exodus is not to be expected nor would it be condoned," Rice said. (*AFP*, 6/8/06)

**August 7:** President George W. Bush said the United States is in the dark about what has sidelined Fidel Castro, causing him to turn over power to his brother, Raul. "Our desire is for the Cuban people to choose their own form of government," Bush said, specifying that he was talking about Cubans who live on the island and not those who have fled. Regarding Fidel Castro's health, he said, "The only thing I know is what has been speculated, and this is that, on the one hand, he is very ill and, on the other hand, he is going to be coming out of hospital. I don't know." Bush said once the Cuban people have an opportunity to transform from a communist dictatorship to a difference type of society, "the Cuban people ought to decide. And once they decide to form a government, then Cuban-Americans can take an interest in that country and redress the issue of property confiscation." But he said the first thing that needs to happen is "the Cuban people need to decide the future of their country." (*AP*, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** TV Martí broadcasts to Cuba have increased to a six-times-a-week schedule by using a private aircraft, officials said, setting in motion a key component of the Bush administration's plan to accelerate a transition to democracy on the communist-ruled island. The transmissions from the civilian aircraft, contracted by the US government and flying out of Key West, come as Fidel Castro remained out of the public eye since he underwent surgery. The new flights are part of a \$10 million allotment by Congress for an airborne broadcasting project that would make it more difficult for Havana to jam the US-funded TV Martí programs. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** Cuban Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon warned that the United States would face "hell" if it meddled with the Caribbean island. Any invasion now would "become a hell for them from the first day," Alarcon said. "We will guarantee them total failure once again," he added in an interview from Havana with the Venezuela-based television station Telesur, in an apparent reference to the Bay of Pigs attack. "All those who have been dreaming (...) that something terrible would happen in Cuba, that people would take to the streets, that there would be great instability, the door slammed on them," National Assembly head Ricardo Alarcon said. They must have very swollen hands now," he said, speaking on Venezuela's Telesur network. (*AP, National Post*, 7/8/06)

**August 7:** Eager to unite Cuban families without triggering a massive boatlift bound for Florida, the Bush administration is reportedly considering plans to ease immigration rules to allow more Cubans, particularly doctors, to

enter this country. "It sounds to me like what they're doing is they're making some gestures," said Philip Peters, vice president of the Lexington Institute, a Virginia-based think tank, and an expert on Cuba. "They're changing the policy in some marginal ways that are going to make it easier for some groups of Cubans to emigrate to the United States, but they're staying away ... from anything that would send the signal to Cubans that if they take to sea in a little boat they will be brought to the United States." Whatever changes are considered, the administration remains determined to stop a mass exodus. "There are no changes to the policy relating to Cuba at this time," said Jarrod Agen, spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security. Any change would be announced "at the appropriate time," he said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 8/8/06)

**August 8:** Drinks company Bacardi said it is relaunching the Havana Club rum brand in the United States after winning a 10-year legal battle with the Cuban government and France's Pernod Ricard. US patent authorities declared Cuba's registration of the trademark had expired. In a case that went all the way to the Supreme Court, US courts ruled that the Cuban-French joint venture had no rights to the trademark in the United States, the Bacardi statement said. A decision from the Patent and Trademark Office dated Aug. 3 came after the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control denied a Cuban government agency a specific license, which was necessary to seek renewal of the trademark registration. (*Reuters*, 8/8/06)

**August 8:** Bolstered by Fidel Castro's surprise handoff of power, the Bush administration is preparing to ease some immigration rules for Cubans who want to live in the United States, focusing largely on reuniting families now separated by politics and the sea. The draft plans, still under debate, seek to discourage a mass migration from Cuba over choppy waters -- a journey that violates current immigration law and risks lives. But administration officials said they also hope the relaxed rules will prompt Cubans to push the Castro regime for official permission to head to the United States. "Taken together, they promote safe, legal and orderly migration, while they also support the Cuban people in their aspirations for a free and prosperous society," says a draft copy of Homeland Security Department talking points obtained by the press. The new rules are being considered three months before elections in which Florida's governorship and at least one US House seat in Florida are considered to be in play. Many Cuban immigrants live in the state. The Homeland Security Department oversees US immigration policy. (*AP*, 8/8/06)

**August 9:** Bacardi plans to fight for the rights to the Havana Club rum brand in global markets after a US trademark ruling helped it re-launch the brand in the US following a long dispute with the Cuban government and Pernod Ricard. The US patent and trademark office ruled that the Cuban government, which sells rum under the Havana Club brand name in partnership with Pernod Ricard in dozens of countries, could not claim any rights to the brand in the US because its registration of the brand had expired. Bacardi claims that the ruling by the US trademark office means that it now owns the Havana Club brand, and that this will help it challenge the rights to the brand in global markets. The company owns the brand in Kyrgyzstan, Croatia and Tajikistan; has rights pending in India, Nicaragua, the Bahamas and the US; and is challenging rights to the brand in Canada and Spain. The ruling comes after 10 years of acrimony between the Cuban government and Bacardi. The Havana Club brand was created by a Cuban family, the Arechabalas, in 1935, and was sold in the US until the 1950s. The family left the country during the Cuban Revolution under Fidel Castro in the 1960s, and sold the brand to Bacardi in the mid-1990s. Meanwhile, the Cuban government registered the Havana Club trademark in the US in 1976, and in 1993 formed a joint venture with Pernod Ricard to sell the brand internationally. It was not sold in the US due to the country's trade embargo with Cuba. Bacardi, whose Bacardi rum vies with Diageo's Smirnoff vodka as the top-selling spirit in the US, started selling rum under the Havana Club name in the US in 1995, and was sued by Cuba and Pernod Ricard. (*Financial Times*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** United Fruit Co. lost thousands of acres of land when Fidel Castro's government in 1960 seized its Cuban operations. The company first tried to win back the property by providing ships to support Mr. Castro's ouster. Cuba's armed forces rebuffed the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. United Fruit, along with thousands of other companies and people that lost property, then asked for compensation. A U.S. commission in 1972 certified 5,911 such claims worth \$1.85 billion. Those claims, accruing 6 percent interest and now valued between \$7 billion and \$8 billion, would have

to be settled by a post-Castro government to ease trade and investment between the island nation and the US "The claims cannot be ignored," said Robert Muse, a Washington lawyer who represents some of the largest corporate claimants against Cuba's 1960 expropriations. "The claims have to be resolved, or they will stymie renewed trade and investment with Cuba." United Fruit and its subsidiaries claimed millions of dollars in losses. The Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, an independent agency within the Justice Department, certified a total payment due of \$87.4 million, plus interest. "There has always been a hope that, post-Castro, this claim would translate into something of value, and Chiquita's position has consistently been that we expect the claim to be honored," said Michael Mitchell, spokesman for Chiquita Brands International, the Cincinnati company that subsumed United Fruit. (*The Washington Times*, 9/8/06)

**August 9:** TV satellite dishes are a "germ-filled stew" that receive subversive propaganda, Communist officials told Cubans as Washington increased transmissions of its TV Marti channel to the island while Fidel Castro recovers from surgery. The Communist Party daily Granma also alluded to Miami news programs and talk shows that have been filled in recent days with speculation about Castro's health and the island's future. The shows are received on illegal dishes, highly popular here among those who can afford them. "In the case of Cuba, a good part of the programming received this way has content that is destabilizing, interventionist, subversive and encourages, more and more, the carrying out of terrorist activities," Granma said. The US government scaled up transmissions by TV Marti, which features anti-Castro programming. TV Marti's stated objective is to break Cuba's "information blockade" by offering its own current affairs shows as alternatives to state television programming, the only thing Cubans receive if they don't have TV satellite dishes. (*The Washington Post*, 10/8/06)

**August 10:** The Cuban government lambasted a US appellate court decision denying a new trial to five men convicted in Miami, Florida, of being unregistered Cuban agents, saying it demonstrated Washington's "hate and vengeance." The full 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia, with two judges dissenting, rejected the men's argument that pervasive community prejudice against the Cuban government and publicity surrounding the case prevented them from receiving a fair trial. In Havana, the Communist Party daily Granma noted the ruling coincides with recent events in Cuba, where Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power to his brother Raul on July 31 after announcing he had undergone intestinal surgery. "All of these occur in an unusual way and at a time when Miami is calling for an end to a sovereign nation," Granma said. "This has been a political case from the beginning," Granma said, and demonstrates "hate and vengeance against the Cuban nation." (*AP*, 10/8/06)

**August 10:** Pernod Ricard is planning new legal action in the US alleging that Bacardi is misleading consumers by selling rum made in Puerto Rico in the US under the Havana Club brand name. Bacardi recently started selling rum made in Puerto Rico under the Havana Club name in Florida. Havana Club cannot sell Cuban rum in the US due to a trade embargo. Pernod, which sells rum under the Havana Club brand in more than 60 countries globally, says it is not fair to consumers to sell rum under the Havana Club name that is not made in Cuba. The rum sold by Pernod and the Cuban government under the same brand name is made in Cuba. Bacardi says that rum, unlike champagne, has no geographic designation and that it has clearly stated where the rum is made. (*Financial Times*, 10/8/06)

**August 10:** Global press advocacy groups are protesting the Cuban government's refusal to allow foreign journalists into the country to cover the announced illness of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. In an August 7 statement, the Miami-based Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) said Castro's health crisis led international news organizations to seek urgent entry into Cuba for their reporters. But, the IAPA said, Cuban officials had denied entry into Cuba of at least four journalists for failing to get the necessary entry visa, which takes several weeks to obtain. In addition, four other journalists from Europe, who had complied with Cuba's visa requirements, had their permission to enter the country revoked. The IAPA said that "regrettably, we are not surprised at the news blackout imposed by [Cuban] authorities who are incapable of making an exception and allowing reporters to cover the breaking news as occurs in other places, even at a time when their country is under scrutiny by the rest of world, wanting to know first-hand what is going on there." (*Washington File*, 10/8/06)

**August 10:** While the US eyes Fidel Castro's next move, scores of companies and thousands of people whose possessions were confiscated by Cuba after the 1959 revolution are waiting to negotiate payback for their expropriated assets. The Foreign Claims Settlement Commission certified 5,911 claims against Cuba totalling about \$1.85 billion in 1972, when the US Justice Department's program expired. With interest, they could be worth some \$7 billion today. About 30 US companies hold 57 percent of the claims' total value. Under the program, the US can negotiate for a payment on behalf of the claimants. But four decades after the claims were first registered, negotiations have never opened. "The claims were so large, and the hostility so great, that there has never really been an attempt to resolve the claims," said Robert Muse, a Washington-based attorney who represents two companies with large claims against Cuba, which he declined to name. (*AP*, 10/8/06)

**August 11:** If Fidel Castro died tomorrow, the US embargo against Cuba could not be lifted like any other — as President Bush undid by decree the 18-year trade sanctions against Libya in April or President Clinton lifted the 19-year ban against Vietnam in 1994. The door to trade with Cuba is bolted by numerous laws which, over the 46 years since the initial ban took effect, stripped much of the power of trade policy from the president and gave it to Congress. US companies are looking at Cuba's potential but few will discuss it openly, citing the current status of the embargo. But for US businesses eyeing the Cuban market — should the political situation on the island change — moving beyond the embargo will take nothing short of an act of Congress, according to John Kavulich, a senior policy adviser with the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. "No matter what happens in Cuba, a provision of the Libertad Act of 1996 precludes the US president from establishing normal economic and political relations with Cuba, as long as the government includes one of the Castro brothers," said Kavulich, whose New York-based group provides non-partisan commercial and economic information about Cuba. (*AP*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon criticized the US judiciary verdict of maintaining in prison five Cubans who the Cuban government considers as "anti-terrorist fighters". The decision of the 11th Circuit of the Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia, of keeping the Cubans in prison occurred just a year after a panel of three judges from that court unanimously annulled the trial held in Miami almost eight years ago. The president of the National Peoples Power Assembly accused "the US government of inappropriate and painful behavior due to its cynical management and pressuring of the court that sentenced the Cuban Five in Miami." Referring to the legal steps against the Atlanta court's verdict, Alarcon pointed out that such a decision requires a very careful analysis and it must be consulted with lawyers and the five Cubans imprisoned in that northern country. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/8/06)

**August 11:** The top US diplomat for Latin America said that while Washington lacks information on the health of Fidel Castro, the leader's decision to temporarily hand over power to his brother after undergoing surgery indicates the soon-to-be-octogenarian's condition is "serious." The assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Thomas Shannon, told reporters that in the short term, Cubans may have to endure a period of "regime hardening". But he predicted that Fidel plans to pass his mantle on to Raul, now Cuba's defense minister and vice president, will ultimately fail. "The transfer won't work," the assistant secretary said. "Ultimately, there is no political figure inside of Cuba who matches Fidel Castro." Shannon said the United States will continue its efforts to foster a democratic transition in Cuba regardless of what happens with Fidel Castro. The man who has led Cuba without interruption since taking power in January 1959 announced on July 31 in a statement read over state television that he was "provisionally" transferring power to his brother while recuperating from surgery to stop intestinal bleeding. (*EFE*, 11/8/06)

**August 11:** The Bush administration unveiled its much-anticipated new immigration policy toward Cuba, quickening backlogged family visas, offering Cuban doctors who defect abroad easier access to the United States and denying visas to human rights violators. The government also pledged to alert exile families if relatives have been stopped at sea during interdiction operations -- often a major source of anguish for families who receive little or no information about loved ones held on Coast Guard cutters. The measures, contained in two separate written statements issued in Washington by the Department of Homeland Security and US Citizenship and Immigration Services, are the first concrete steps by the US government toward Cuba since Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power to his brother, Raúl, on

July 31. They also constitute the first major modifications in how the Cuba-US migration accords are administered since the deal was brokered in 1994 as a way to end a raft exodus. Under the accords, Cuba agreed to restrict illegal departures in exchange for about 20,000 annual visas for Cubans wishing to migrate to the United States. Repatriation of Cuban migrants interdicted at sea began in 1995. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/8/06)

**August 12:** Michael Parmly, the chief of the US diplomatic mission in Havana, attended a concert in tribute to the Cuban leader, who would turn 80 the next day. Parmly remained for several minutes among the thousands in the audience at a concert organized by Castro's supporters across from the US Interests Section in Havana. (*Reuters*, 12/8/06)

**August 12:** As Fidel Castro's health crisis raised hopes among Cuban exiles of a political transition on the island, some South Florida Christian groups began preparing to send humanitarian aid, missionaries and volunteers to help Cuban churches expand their influence in a post-Castro society. Catholic and Protestant leaders say they expect a political transformation, whenever that might occur, will open up opportunities for evangelism. "We anticipate that any kind of change will start a tremendous growth cycle within the Cuban church," said Teo Babún, president of Evangelical Christian Humanitarian Outreach (Echo Cuba), a Miami organization that conducts humanitarian missions through churches in Cuba. Echo Cuba -- one of several US Protestant groups seeking to strengthen their foothold on the island -- has developed a plan to help Cuban churches and religious leaders take a leading role in restoring civil society. The group plans to equip Cuban church leaders to distribute supplies, coordinate volunteers and participate in forming a new government, Babún said. They have also contacted major Christian donors from around the world to contribute humanitarian aid to Cuba, he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/8/06)

**August 14:** A Cuban militant accused of masterminding the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner wants a federal judge to let him out of jail while the US government continues searching for a country where it can deport him. Luis Posada Carriles was ordered out of the United States last year. But an immigration judge said the government couldn't send him to Cuba, where he was born, or Venezuela, where he is a naturalized citizen, citing the possibility he could be tortured. So far, no other country has been found. Posada, a former CIA operative and a fervent foe of Fidel Castro, is accused by Cuba and Venezuela of plotting the jetliner bombing while living in Venezuela. He has denied involvement in the bombing, which killed 73 people. He was jailed last year on immigration charges after being accused of sneaking into Texas from Mexico in March 2005. Felipe D.J. Millan, an El Paso immigration attorney, said he and Posada's Miami lawyers will ask a federal judge to let Posada live with his family in Miami while he waits to be deported. Millan said the government has had plenty of time to find a country to take Posada and he doubts his 78-year-old client will ever leave the United States. "There is no foreseeable opportunity that he will be removed," he said. "He just wants to go home and die in peace." (*AP*, 14/8/06)

**August 15:** US Treasury officials have fined the Alliance of Baptists 34-thousand dollars after citing Birmingham's Baptist Church of the Covenant and all other churches for engaging in banned tourist activities while in Cuba for religious purposes. The group's executive director, Stan Hasteley, said he plans to appeal the fine. The department's July fifth letter mentioned four other Baptist churches guilty of violations during trips to Cuba between 2003 and 2005. A letter last year notified the group its license to travel to Cuba was revoked and accused the Birmingham church delegation of not engaging in a full-time schedule of religious activities as required during a trip in March 2005. (*AP*, 15/8/06)

**August 15:** Twenty Cuban migrants came ashore in Southwest Florida, apparently aided by smugglers who brought them from Cuba in at least one small fishing boat, authorities said. All 20 migrants -- 14 men, four women, a teenage girl and toddler boy -- and two suspected smugglers were taken to a US Border Patrol facility in Pembroke Pines, Border Patrol spokesman Steve McDonald said. Ten migrants were treated for dehydration at a hospital. The migrants told authorities they left Pinar Del Rio in western Cuba on August 13 and they thought they had landed in Miami. (*AP*, 16/8/06)

**August 16:** A Cuban-born US senator expressed optimism about the future of his homeland, but urged patience for political change. Senator Mel Martinez spoke at an event in Coral Gables, near Miami, more than two weeks after the announcement that Fidel Castro transferred power to his younger brother, Defense Minister Raul Castro. Senator Martinez, a Florida Republican who fled Cuba as a teenager, describes the current situation in Cuba as a moment of great change and opportunity. "What we're hoping is that there will be wise and future-thinking leadership that's going to think more about the people of Cuba and less about how they control power; that's going to think more about how they give people an opportunity for a better life, rather than 'how do we maintain what we got' in terms of the power structure that they have established," said Mel Martinez. He said political change on the island will take time. The legislator dismissed recently released photos of Mr. Castro and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as a show, and accused Mr. Chavez of interfering in Cuba's affairs. "The Cuban people are very nationalistic people and they don't appreciate others interfering in what is a very Cuban process," he said. "Hugo Chavez should concentrate on his country, leave Cuba alone. He doesn't play a role in the future of Cuba. That should be a decision made by the Cuban people." (VOA, 16/8/06)

**August 16:** One week after its successful re-launch of Havana-Club rum in the United States, Bacardi USA reaffirmed its ownership of the brand and that its packaging does not mislead consumers. The company will vigorously defend its position in the wake of inaccurate allegations in a lawsuit filed by Pernod Ricard. Havana-Club rum was re-launched in the United States August 8 and is based on the original recipe created in Cuba. Havana-Club rum is an ultra-smooth, clear, premium spirit, distilled and finely crafted in Puerto Rico. The front of the bottle clearly states that Havana-Club is Puerto Rican rum and no where on its packaging does it claim it is produced in Cuba. Historically, in addition to being produced in Cuba, Havana-Club rum was made in Puerto Rico during World War II by the Arechabala company. (Business Wire, 16/8/06)

**August 16:** Two men were charged with smuggling 20 Cuban migrants, including a pregnant woman and a 1-year-old boy, to southwest Florida, according to the US Attorney's Office. Noel Lopez, 32, and Juan Gonzalez-Hernandez, 38, both of Miami, were charged, Chief Assistant US Attorney Doug Molloy said. They both face up to 10 years in prison and a US\$250,000. Collier County residents reported the Cubans coming ashore in a 25-foot (7-meter) boat. The migrants told authorities they left Pinar Del Rio in western Cuba on August 13 -- Fidel Castro's 80th birthday. (AP, 17/8/06)

**August 15:** The Cuban Parliament rejected the Atlanta Court decision disallowing a new trial for five Cubans imprisoned in the United States since September 1998. In an unprecedented decision in US legal history, the court denied a new trial and ordered to send again the case to the panel, to analyze other aspects, states the legislative body's declaration. "We call all parliaments of the world and groups of friendship in each legislative to speak out against this new maneuver that prolongs the imprisonment of these men," noted the text. [[Declaración de la Asamblea Nacional](#)] (Prensa Latina, 17/8/06)

**August 16:** The US Government considered that published photos of a recovering Fidel Castro in bed "prove that the transfer of power in Cuba already began, albeit in slow-motion." During a teleconference with reporters from Argentina and Colombia, US Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, Thomas Shannon, said that the Cuban president "has not yet overcome his health crisis." (EFE, 16/8/06)

**August 17:** US government officials in South Florida said that Cuban migrants have continued to leave the island since July 31 when Castro made his surprising announcement that he was turning over control to Raúl Castro while he recovers from surgery for an undefined "intestinal crisis." Twenty Cuban migrants landed on Marco Island off South Florida's west coast perhaps an indication migrant smugglers may be steering away from the Florida Keys and South Florida's east coast, possibly because of stepped up US patrols in those areas. Border Patrol officials said it was too soon to say migrants had found a new route. Petty Officer James Judge, a US Coast Guard spokesman in Miami, said that at least 55 people had been interdicted and repatriated to Cuba since August 1. Steve McDonald, a Border Patrol

spokesman in Pembroke Pines, said more than 50 Cuban migrants had made it to South Florida in the last two weeks. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/8/06)

**August 17:** A Carnival Cruise ship assisted nine Cuban rafters adrift in the western Caribbean. They accepted water, food and life jackets but refused to come aboard, according to Carnival Cruise Lines. The ship with about 3,500 passengers was en route from Costa Maya, Mexico, to Nassau, Bahamas, when the rafters were spotted. "It's a maritime tradition to help mariners in distress," said spokesman Vance Gulliksen. "It doesn't happen a lot, but it does happen occasionally," he said. Staff onboard the ship notified the U.S. Coast Guard, which picked up the rafters, Carnival Cruise Lines said. The Coast Guard did not confirm or deny the incident, saying it cannot comment on ongoing investigations. (*CNN*, 18/8/06)

**August 18:** Raul Castro said in an interview published in Cuban daily *Granma* that Cuba would be willing to "normalize relations on an equal plane" with the United States. "What we do not accept is the arrogant and interventionist policy frequently assumed by the current administration" of the United States. "Recently rereading Party Congress documents, I found ideas that seemed to have been written today. For example, this excerpt from the Central Report presented by Fidel to the Third Congress in February 1986: 'As we have demonstrated many times, Cuba is not remiss to discussing its prolonged differences with the United States and to go out in search of peace and better relations between our people.'" And he continued: "But that would have to be on the basis of the most unrestricted respect for our condition as a country that does not tolerate shadows on its independence, for whose dignity and sovereignty entire generations of Cubans have fought and sacrificed themselves. This would be possible only when the United States decides to negotiate with seriousness and is willing to treat us with a spirit of equality, reciprocity and the fullest mutual respect." (*AFP, Granma*, 18/8/06)

**August 18:** The United States said it had no plans to invade Cuba, after its communist interim leader, Raul Castro, said he had ordered a mobilization to counter a US invasion threat. "The United States has no plans to invade Cuba," said Eric Watnik, a State Department spokesman, reiterating remarks made by Tom Shannon, the top US diplomat for the region, since Fidel Castro temporarily ceded power to his brother on July 31 following major surgery. In his first public statement as interim ruler, published by the Communist Party newspaper *Granma*, Raul Castro said he had mobilized tens of thousands of reservists and militia members to face a possible US invasion threat. (*AFP*, 18/8/06)

**August 18:** The United States named a special "manager" for its intelligence operations against Cuba and Venezuela. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said such efforts to collect intelligence on Cuba and Venezuela are "critical today" because "policy-makers have increasingly focused on the challenges" that the countries "pose to American foreign policy." The ODNI said the new acting mission manager, J. Patrick Maher, will be "responsible for integrating collection and analysis on Cuba and Venezuela across the intelligence community, identifying and filling gaps in intelligence, and ensuring the implementation of strategies, among other duties." No decision has been made whether Maher will serve in the job on a permanent basis, said the ODNI. Maher, a 32-year veteran intelligence officer, also will continue to serve in his present role as the national intelligence officer for the Western Hemisphere. North Korea and Iran are the only other countries that have been assigned so-called "mission managers," who supervise intelligence operations against them on what the office of national intelligence director called "a strategic level." (*AFP, Washington File*, 21/8/06)

**August 18:** Havana Club, which had been absent from US markets for decades because of a trade embargo on communist-run Cuba, is now making a comeback as a Puerto Rican rum. Bacardi, which produces the new incarnation of the old favorite, insists its product is the real stuff, based on the original recipe it bought from the original owners after the communist government seized their assets in Cuba. But Pernod Ricard -- which sells Cuban-produced Havana Club around the world, except in the United States, in a joint venture with the Cuban government -- says Bacardi has no rights to the brand and is misleading customers. The French company filed a trademark infringement lawsuit in a

bid to force Bacardi to take its version of Havana Club off the shelves. The two liquor giants have been locked in a decades-old dispute over who owns the US rights to the brand. (AFP, 18/8/06)

**August 19:** Raul Castro hinted that he is ready for dialogue with Washington - using typical Havana rhetoric whose words nevertheless bolstered speculation about a post-Fidel turn to pragmatism. "We have always been disposed to normalize relations on an equal plane," Raul Castro said. In Washington, the State Department referred to Raul Castro as "Fidel's baby brother," and said the Bush administration was not impressed by his remarks. "You know, we're not particularly fond (...) of the government of Cuba as run by Fidel," said spokesman Tom Casey. "I can't say that we're particularly enamored of the first words we've heard from 'Fidel Lite.'" Expressions of a desire for talks with the United States if Washington respects Havana have long been part of the official government line. "It's precisely the timing that's interesting," said William LeoGrande, a Cuba expert at American University in Washington. "It's the first major public statement and he's criticizing the US (...) but at the same time, he's saying, 'nevertheless, we're willing to have dialogue.'" Those who have tried to negotiate with the Cuban government in the past said Washington should view Castro's words "as a positive statement" that should be acted upon, said Robert Pastor, an adviser to former President Jimmy Carter. "The critical question on both sides is, 'Do they want to continue to posture or do they want to work together to define a framework that could permit a peaceful transition in Cuba and (...) move in a democratic direction?'" Pastor said. (Houston Chronicle, 19/8/06)

**August 21:** Oscar winner Charlize Theron defended herself against claims a new documentary about Cuba made by her production company ignores the effect which the US embargo has had on the poverty-stricken Caribbean nation. "East of Havana" charts the efforts of three rappers whose attempts to launch their careers are threatened by the censorship of Fidel Castro's government. It is filmed during the build up to a hip-hop festival just before Hurricane Charley hit the island, and interviews a number of locals who live in extreme poverty. Theron, who was born in South Africa, said: "I think in the film we really address the America-Cuba relationship. If there is any political comment it was through (the characters') voices - it's their story not our story". (The Guardian, 21/8/06)

**August 22:** Cuba said that the United States hopes to destabilize the communist country and its ally Venezuela through a new spying effort. "They are moving forward very quickly in their destabilization plans," the Communist Youth daily Juventud Rebelde said. "The war is very seriously under way in its intent to intervene, alter and destroy the two revolutions that committed the horrible sin of serving as example for an entire continent," the newspaper said. US National Intelligence Director John Negroponte said that he was creating a "mission manager" for Cuba and Venezuela to oversee the American spy community's efforts to collect and analyze intelligence on the two countries. (AP, 23/8/06)

**August 22:** The Miami-Dade County School District voted to press ahead with its effort to remove a children's book on life in Cuba from its school libraries. The board voted 5-2 to appeal a federal judge's temporary order barring the district from removing the children's book, along with 23 others in the series. The district wants to remove "Vamos a Cuba" ("A Visit to Cuba") following a parent's complaint that it failed to accurately depict the reality of life under Cuba's communist government. The American Civil Liberties Union of Florida sued to keep the books on the shelf, arguing that they were generally factual, and that the board should add books to its collection, rather than remove those it disagreed with. US District Judge Alan S. Gold ruled in July in favor of the ACLU, granting a preliminary injunction and writing that efforts to remove the books "goes to the heart of the First Amendment issue." After the vote, ACLU spokesman Brandon Hensler said the board was "deciding to continue its senseless litigation and to waste taxpayer dollars that could be used to buy new books." (AP, 23/8/06)

**August 23:** Since Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's July intestinal surgery forced him to transfer power to his brother Raul, the institutions of Cuba's totalitarian apparatus are probably "in a process (...) of negotiation as they attempt to determine what the power-sharing arrangements will be "in the post-Castro era, Thomas Shannon, US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, said. Briefing reporters in Washington, Shannon said that "what we're seeing in Cuba today is effectively a slow motion transfer of power". According to Shannon, "no political

solution can be imposed from the outside, neither from the United States nor [from] any other country, but (...) it's imperative that the Cuban people be able to choose their future." He said that President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, "in a comment several days ago, said that after 47 years of socialism and revolution, now might be the time to allow the Cuban people to choose their leadership." The United States agrees with Arias, "and we think that this is a moment in which the international community can (...) make it clear to the current regime" that "it really needs to begin a process of political opening that would lead to a transition to democracy in Cuba," he said. The State Department official recalled that in 2002, President Bush "effectively made an offer to the Cuban regime," which was promptly rejected by Castro. At the time, Bush said that "if the Cuban regime were prepared to free [its] political prisoners, respect human rights, (...) permit the creation of independent organizations such as political parties, trade unions, [and] civic organizations that were not dominated by the state, and if [Castro] were prepared to create (...) a pathway towards elections," then the White House would consult with the US Congress about abolishing the trade embargo against Cuba "and begin a deeper engagement with the Cuban state," Shannon told reporters. (*Washington File*, 23/8/06)

**August 27:** The Episcopal bishop of Cuba visited a Coral Gables congregation. His mission: To promote closer relations between the two dioceses on each side of the Florida Straits. Bishop Miguel Tamayo delivered a sermon on the importance of unity among Christians and thanked members of St. Philip's Episcopal Church for their pledge to restore Holy Trinity Church in Bermeja, a small sugar cane farming town southeast of Havana. "They are really amazed they are going to have a new church just because you are helping them," he said. Tamayo's visit signals a new push to improve parish-to-parish relationships between the South Florida and Cuban dioceses. The campaign to restore theological ties to Cuban churches picked up earlier this year when Bishop Leo Frade -- a Cuban exile and the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida -- led a delegation to Cuba to meet with priests, seminarians and parishioners. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/8/06)

**August 28:** Pedro Alvarez, president of Cuban Food Import Company (ALIMPORT), described as very positive and successful the recent signing of a letter of intent with Navajo farm businesspeople from the US state of New Mexico. The US delegation included Democrat legislator Tom Udall, representatives of the Navajo indigenous, and New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture Miley Gonzalez. Alvarez told the press that they achieved more progress than expected, as the visit concluded with the signing of a letter of intent to study the possibility of marketing potatoes, onions, yellow corn, wheat, as well as making some progress regarding cattle. New Mexican authorities admitted there is high unemployment in the state, so they are looking for alternative solutions in Cuba, which boasts a close, reliable market, with facilities to launch their products, added Alvarez. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/8/06)

**August 29:** Reverend Lucius Walker, leader of the group Pastors for Peace, arrived in Havana accompanied by 13 US students who will study medicine in the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in September. In statements to *Prensa Latina*, Walker said that the US scholarship holders have the hope to become doctors with the tradition of Cuban experts, as well as fulfill a dream to which they don't have access in United States. "We expect them to learn Cuban medicine's values and traditions as many students from other countries have done," he stated. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/8/06)

**August 29:** US Air Force C-130 "hurricane hunters" flew into Cuban airspace at least twice a day, sampling storm conditions such as wind speed, barometric pressure and other meteorological measurements. Despite nearly five decades of tension between the United States and Cuba, storm safety overrode all that. "We are both in the same business -- we're trying to save people's lives," said Lixion Avila, a Cuban-born hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center in West Miami-Dade. US forecasters publicly thanked Cuba for granting access to island airspace so they could obtain data vital to tracking Ernesto. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/8/06)

**August 30:** In 1918 the Aunt Jemima trademark was registered in Cuba, and even after Fidel Castro seized power in 1959, a steady stream of US companies from Ace Hardware to United Airlines has continued to register their trademarks in the island nation. Despite the decades-long US economic embargo that precludes most trade with Cuba, more than 400 US companies have registered in excess of 5,000 trademarks -- everything from McDonald's Golden

Arches to Nike's famed Swoosh and Pepsi. And until recently, Cuba had no problem registering and renewing trademarks in the United States. Now some fear the recent US refusal to renew the Havana Club rum trademark claimed by a Cuban joint venture and Bacardi's launch of Havana Club -- a brand it also claims -- has placed the delicate balance of respecting other nations' trademarks in jeopardy. The recent developments also raise the possibility of Cuban retaliation, experts say. Cuba could, for instance, cancel the trademarks for Levi's jeans or Heinz ketchup and sell its version in island stores. Those products could filter into other markets, too, harming US companies that have long sought to keep fakes off store shelves abroad, said the US National Foreign Trade Council. (*National Post*, 30/8/06)

**August 31:** For the US and Cuban governments the weather is usually a safe topic. For decades, the two countries have quietly worked together to track tropical storms and hurricanes in hopes of saving their citizens' lives. The two sides share meteorological data on storms. Cuban forecasters have received training in the US. Eight US Air Force C-130 planes crossed into Cuban airspace to gather information on Tropical Storm Ernesto's wind speed, center and other information. In an unusual public acknowledgment, the National Hurricane Center commended Fidel Castro's communist government for its assistance. "Special thanks to the government of Cuba for permitting the recon aircraft (to) fly right up to their coastline to gather this critical weather data," forecaster Stacy Stewart wrote in an advisory. Jose Rubiera, head of Cuba's Meteorological Institute, told reporters in Havana in May that the cooperation "is not only desirable, it is necessary to save human lives." Still, the issue of airspace has been tricky. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which oversees the hurricane center, has long been allowed to fly its WP-3D Orion planes over Cuban airspace, but it has only two of them, limiting the amount of time it can fly during a storm. (*AP*, 31/8/06)