

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba October 2003

Domestic Affairs

October 2: Two months after being released from jail, the General Secretary of The Human Rights Party of Cuba, René Montes de Oca, is back in jail. According to information provided by his sister, Montes de Oca was arrested along with the coordinator of the Human Rights Party of Cuba, Dali Martínez Falcón. (Puente Informativo, 2/10/03)

October 3: Officers of the Capri Police Unit in Havana, released René Montes de Oca Martija, General Secretary of the Pro Human Rights Party of Cuba affiliated to the Andrei Sajarov Foundation from prison. Meanwhile, Fernando A. Martínez Falcón, National Coordinator of the above mentioned organization was released one day after his arrest. (Puente Informativo, 3/10/03)

October 3: A leading activist delivered more than 14,000 signatures to Cuba's parliament demanding a referendum for sweeping political changes in a new challenge to Fidel Castro's government. It was the second year in a row that activist Oswaldo Paya has delivered piles of signatures to the government as part of the Varela Project - seen as the biggest homegrown, nonviolent effort in more than four decades to push for reforms in Cuba's one-party system. "The Varela Project lives," Paya told reporters "The campaign continues across the country." He then went to the National Assembly, accompanied by his wife, Ofelia, and another project volunteer. (The Globe & Mail, 3/10/03)

October 3: Cuba's internal opposition expressed mixed opinions about dissident Oswaldo Paya's delivery of more than 14,000 new signatures in support of the Varela Project to lawmakers, an initiative that proposes democratic changes on the island. For Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, who moved back to Havana after almost 20 years in exile, the Varela Project will not help unite the internal opposition because "the Americans have a hand in it (...) it's a project where there is a lot of foreign manipulation and many interests." "For me, it doesn't say a thing," Gutierrez Menoyo told the press. But Todos Unidos (All United) spokesman Vladimiro Roca said the Varela Project "represents a tremendous demonstration of courage, not only by Paya but by the people who signed this form after the government's wave of repression." Roca said the fact that another 14,000 signatures were obtained for the Varela Project shows that "the people are no longer afraid and are reacting courageously to the government." Blanca Reyes, wife of writer Raul Rivero - one of the dissidents sentenced in March to jail terms averaging 20 years - said Paya has maintained "a very honorable and very courageous position at a time of crisis such as the one we are going through; it is unbounded courage." (EFE, 3/10/03)

October 4: A book exploring the family roots of Fidel Castro sold out in 48 hours at Havana bookstores. Skillfully blending literature and historic research, the book focuses on the Cuban leader's father, Angel María Castro, who was born in Galicia, Spain, and his mother, Lina Ruz, a native of Cuba's Pinar del Rio province. The book is titled "Todo el tiempo de los cedros" and was written by Cuban journalist Katuska Blanco. With a first run of 10,000 copies, it also tells of Fidel Castro's days as a child in his hometown of Birán, in eastern Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/10/03)

October 4: With the remodeling of imported vehicles, some 240 ambulances have been produced by Empresa Conformadora de Metales in Havana. The director of the enterprise, Regla Villavicencio, explained that over the past three years her entity has turned Citroen, Berlingo and Mercedes Benz vehicles into ambulances for Cuba's medical emergency system. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/10/03)

October 6: Cuba's high life expectancy, averaging 76 years, combined with an extremely low birthrate and a steady stream of young migrants have created a graying boom which will make it one of the oldest countries in Latin America by the end of the decade. With Cuba's social security system already straining under a stagnant economy, a significant elderly population creates challenges both in the immediate future and for a potential post-Castro transition to a market economy, experts say. According to Cuba's 2002 census 14.7 percent of Cubans are over 60, a number similar to the older populations of Argentina and Chile. But by 2010, demographers estimate that figure will jump to 18 percent, surpassing many countries in the region. By 2025 one in four Cubans will be over 60 and by 2050 an estimated 40 percent of the island's population will be in their golden years with about 156 seniors for every 100 children, presuming no major demographic shifts, officials said. (Sun Sentinel, 6/10/03)

October 6: The initiative led by dissident Oswaldo Payá to present more than 14 000 signatures to the Cuban National Assembly in support of a referendum on democracy was called by Foreign Affairs Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, "a charade". (EFE, 6/10/03)

October 7: The Catholic Church is still facing obstacles in Cuba, says the archbishop of Havana. Cardinal Jaime Lucas Ortega, who visited Italy recently, spoke to Catholics in Milan about the situation of the Church in Cuba. In an interview Ortega said that little or nothing has changed on the island. "Criticisms and arguments with some foreign governments have inflamed political life. However (...) daily life has neither improved nor worsened". Referring to limitations imposed on the Church activities, Cardinal Ortega said that the Church's presence continues to be very limited at the level of education and the media. "The Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party is always hovering over us. It is an organ of control which limits the evangelizing action of the Church. For the Cuban state, the Church is either an ally or an enemy -- an ideological view that does not take into account the Church's authentic nature and mission in the world", he added. (Zenit, 7/10/03)

October 7: Professors and students at the Higher Institute of Arts highlighted the vital contribution of the "trova" and its essential presence in times of revolutionary change at the inauguration of the academic year 2003-4. In the presence of Fidel Castro, founder artists and others who have contributed to the Nueva Trova movement received the institution's Diploma of Artistic Merit. (Granma International, 8/10/03)

October 8: Cuba marked the 36th anniversary of the guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara's death in Bolivia. The main ceremony drew more than 40,000 people to the Che Memorial in Santa Clara, some 270 kilometers (167 miles) east of Havana, local media reported. The remains of the Che and his comrades killed in Bolivia lie at the foot of the monument. (EFE, 8/10/03)

October 9: Cuban Vice-president Carlos Lage underscored the results of a project aimed at improving living and social conditions of sugar workers' communities based around sugar mills. The program prioritizes sugar factories that remain inactive after the restructure of that economic sector. (AIN, 9/10/03)

October 10: Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá congratulated Iranian rights activist Shirin Ebadi for winning the Nobel Peace Prize and said he was ready to continue fighting for democratic changes in Cuba "without hate, but without fear." Payá, the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement and recipient of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, was himself nominated for the Nobel honor by former Czech President Vaclav Havel. (EFE, 10/10/03)

October 11: Prisoners Iovany Aguilar Camejo, Carlos Oquendo Rodríguez and José Aguilar Hernández, arrested since an incident at the Mexican Embassy in Havana on February 28th 2002, were released from prison. On February 28th 2002, close to 21 people in a bus forced their way through the gates of the Mexican Embassy in Havana, requesting political asylum. More than

150 people were arrested in surrounding areas. Amongst the arrested were the oppositionists Iovany Aguilar Camejo, Carlos Oquendo Rodríguez and José Aguilar Hernández all of whom were on their way to visit Elizardo Sánchez Santa Cruz. (Puente Informativo, 11/10/03)

October 13: An earthquake registering 4.5 on the Richter scale shook Santiago de Cuba. According to the National Center for Seismological Studies, which is based in Santiago, the quake was the island's tenth and strongest so far this year. There were no deaths or injuries reported as a result of the quake, but Cuban television news showed minor damage to area housing. Residents told reporters that the quake lasted nearly one minute and was the strongest they've felt in recent years. Santiago de Cuba in particular, and eastern Cuba in general, is occasionally affected by small to moderate earthquakes. (Radio Habana Cuba, 14/10/03)

October 15: Contamination from two factories in San Francisco (Eastern Cuba), one produces clay and the other ceramics, is posing some health risks to local residents, reported the official daily "Juventud Rebelde". The Deputy Director for environmental conservation in Camagüey, Jorge Landrián, acknowledged that "the contamination generated by the two factories has not been resolved yet". (EFE, 15/10/03)

October 15: A governmental commission of architects from the Housing Institute is inspecting the technical conditions of houses in the capital. The municipalities with the highest levels of deterioration are Habana Vieja, 10 de Octubre, Centro Habana and Cerro. Deterioration levels are estimated to be at 80% in the residential sector of these municipalities. (Cubamet, 15/10/03)

October 15: Authorities at the prison where independent journalist Julio César Gálvez is confined have ordered to rid his cell of rats and insects. Gálvez is part of the group of 75 peaceful dissidents and independent journalists sentenced to long prison terms last April. (Cubamet, 15/10/03)

October 16: The National Police detained two union leaders, collaborators of Lux-Info-Press in Havana, dissident sources reported. Police agents blocked the way to activists Giordis Enrique Mendoza Ruiz and Orlando Carlos García Pérez. Both were handcuffed and driven to the local police station under charges of distributing counter revolutionary pamphlets to workers. According to Giordis E. Mendoza Ruiz, police confiscated 50 pamphlets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that he had in his possession and fined him for 60 pesos. They also issued him a warning for the crime of "social danger". Orlando C. García indicated that the military police confiscated 40 pamphlets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 2 Lux Info Press Magazines that he had in his possession. (Puente Informativo, 16/10/03)

October 20: The 135th anniversary, commemorating the date that the Cuban national anthem was sung for the first time, was held with a varied cultural program in Bayamo. The second town founded by the Spanish, Bayamo was taken by the independence fighters on October 20, 1868, when hundreds sang the national anthem that Cuban lawyer, musician, poet and writer Perucho Figueredo had written shortly before. In 1980, Cuba's Congress declared October 20 as National Culture Day, so the celebration each year in Bayamo has a strong cultural component. (Prensa Latina, 20/10/03)

October 21: The Cuban film industry, one of the sectors most affected by the economic depression that has hit the country over the past ten years, will produce eight new films in 2003, said Omar González, president of the Cuban Institute of Arts and Film Industries (ICAIC). In statements to reporters, González pointed out that the recovery of Cuba's film industry has been slow. "It is expensive to make films," said González, adding that many steps have been taken to revitalize the industry. "Roble de Olor" by Rigoberto López; "Entre Ciclones" by Enrique Colina; "Suite Havana" by Fernando Pérez; "Más Vampiros en La Habana" by Juan Padrón, and "Bailando Cha Cha Cha" by Manuel Herrera, are some of the new films. The list also includes

"Perfecto Amor Equivocado" by Gerardo Chijona, "Aunque Estes Lejos" by Juan Carlos Tabío, and "Tres Historias de Amor" by three young producers. (Prensa Latina, 21/10/03)

October 21: Manolo Ortega, a famous TV announcer in Cuba died of a heart attack. He was 81. Ortega presented Fidel Castro at major events for more than 30 years. He began his professional career in the 50s at former CMQ. (Granma, EFE, 22/10/03)

October 21: The Cuban Ministry of Interior launched a book on the US embargo against Cuba. Titled "Bloqueo: El asedio económico más prolongado de la historia", the new 233-page book by Cuban PhD on Juridical Sciences, Andrés Zaldívar, is the most recent release by Capitán San Luis Editorial House. (Radio Rebelde, 22/10/03)

October 21: Cuba is trying to adapt to the impact of its own generation of "baby-boomers" born in the 1960s. First, it was a question of providing enough spots in child-care centers and primary schools. Now, in the not-so-distant future, the pension system will begin to feel their weight. "When those born in the 1960s reach retirement age, the economically active population will begin to shrink, in absolute terms," said Otilia Barros, director of the Centre for Demographic Studies (CEDEM) at the University of Havana. The "demographic transition" process is marked by a plunge in birth and mortality rates. In Cuba, the tens of thousands of people who emigrate has also played a role. A study by Barros published by CEDEM states that between 2000 and 2050, the total number of people over 75 could grow by more than one and a half million. According to projections by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), by 2025 Cuba will have the oldest population in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 25.9 percent of the population over 60, followed by Barbados (25.4 percent), Trinidad and Tobago (20.5 percent), Uruguay (20 percent), and Chile (18.4 percent). (IPS, 21/10/03)

October 22: A state enterprise in central Cuba dedicated to the fishing and processing of sea cucumbers continues to damage the marine ecosystem of the Cuban archipelago, which some local specialists consider irreversible. A Cuban scientist has warned that sea cucumbers are in danger of extinction from the island's marine fauna due to over-harvesting. (Cubanet, 22/10/03)

October 23: The Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque met with residents of the Los Sitios neighbourhood in Central Havana to talk about the enormous losses caused by the 40-year United States embargo of the island. Cuban official press said that in the last days over 170 meetings on the US embargo, like the one at Los Sitios, have taken place Havana. (Radio Habana Cuba, World Data Service, 23/10/03)

October 24: Members of State Security Department threatened the family of Roberto de Miranda Hernández, an independent educator sanctioned to 20 years in prison during the summary trials of last April, with imprisonment. Miranda's son denounced the statement made by military police that they will arrest his mother "if she continues to challenge the government in favor of my father's liberation and the liberation of rest of the 74 dissidents." (Puente Informativo, 24/10/03)

October 25: Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban Parliament) agreed to acknowledge the work of the country's cultural workers, due to their crucial contribution to the Revolution. "Let this homage reach the humblest worker for his undertaking", stressed Ricardo Alarcon, President of the legislative body whose first ordinary session of its sixth legislature was held at Havana's Convention Palace, and which was presided over by Fidel and Raúl Castro. (AIN, 25/10/03)

October 25: Doctor Mirta Roses, General Director of the Panamerican Health Organization, stressed the success of the Cuban health system, particularly the island's development of medical genetics. During a visit to the National Center of Medical Genetics, the international body

official learned about recent Cuban studies on Medical Genetics and said that such results must be shown to the world since they are based on solid humane principles. (AIN, 25/10/03)

October 25: Education and culture are passionate issues," affirmed Fidel Castro, speaking during the discussion of the Ministry of Culture report, presented by its head, Abel Prieto at the 1st Ordinary Session of the 6th Legislature of the National Assembly. "Both are intimately connected," he commented, "because without the national education system set in motion by the Revolution in 1959 arts education would not have developed." (Granma International, 26/10/03)

October 26: Fidel Castro reiterated the need to give the Cuban people a general integral culture that would help them to better understand the international situation. "I am convinced that talent is massive and any person has the talent to do several things," said the president in a parliamentary session that analyzed a report by the Culture Minister. In a speech motivated by the information given by Culture Minister Abel Prieto to deputies, the Cuban leader made it clear that the concept of general integral culture covers artistic culture. Fidel Castro explained to delegates participating in the 1st Ordinary Period of Sessions of the 6th Legislature of the Unicameral Parliament that political culture is essential to understand today's world. That is why the Cuban government is promoting several educational, cultural and social programs. (Prensa Latina, 27/10/03)

October 27: A life-size statue of Ernest Hemingway was unveiled at the one of the U.S. writer's favorite bars, El Floridita, located in Old Havana. The bronze image places the author of "The Old Man and the Sea" at his customary place, sitting on the barstool at the world-renowned "Cradle of the Daiquiri", on the corner of Obispo and Monserrate streets. Hemingway lived just east of Havana at a farm known as Finca Vigia from 1940 to 1961, and came into town to enjoy his favorite Cuban drinks -- frozen daiquiris and sour-sweet mojitos laced with mint leaves. (AP, 27/10/03)

October 28: The Council of State of Cuba has removed the Minister of Light Industry, Jesús Pérez Othón from office. In its place, it appointed Engineer Estela Domínguez Ariosa who up until then had been vice-minister of the Iron and Steel industry, stated an official note. (AFP, 29/10/03)

October 28: A number of Cuban ecumenical leaders met at a Baptist Church in the Havana suburb of Marianao with Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcón and other high-ranking government and religious leaders. They spoke with Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Remírez de Estenoz; Caridad Diego, head of the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba; and Reinerio Arce, president of the Cuban Council of Churches. The Reverend Raúl Suárez, pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Marianao, said that the US blockade does not make to political, social or economic sense - and is against Biblical, ethical and theological reason. (Radio Habana Cuba, 29/10/03)

October 29: Cuban authorities interrogated Claudia Marquez, wife of an imprisoned Cuban dissident and editorial board member of the opposition magazine De Cuba, Marquez reported after leaving the police station. Two State Security agents arrested her and drove her to a police precinct in Marianao, a working-class neighborhood of Havana, Marquez told the press. She said once she was at the police station, agents "said they weren't going to allow [the publication] of another edition of De Cuba magazine, that my statements had been very aggressive lately and that I was becoming increasingly outspoken." "They also told me that I was reorganizing the society of journalists and independent press and that they weren't going to allow it," she said. Agents repeatedly told Marquez the interrogation was "a warning" for violating the so-called "Gag Law," which imposes sentences of up to 20 years for those who divulge information that could endanger "the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the Cuban state," she said. (Sun Sentinel, 30/10/03)

October 29: According to Cuban Public Health Ministry statistics, after abortion was legalised in 1965 in Cuba, maternal mortality dropped from 120 to seven per 100,000 live births in 2000. The Statistical Profile of the Cuban Woman, published in 2000 by the National Statistics Office (ONE), reports that there were a total of 5.6 million live births between 1968 and 1996, and 3.2 million abortions. Last year, 21.5 abortions were documented for every 1,000 women between the ages of 12 and 49, and 49.8 for every 100 births. The gap between desired family size and the number of abortions practiced was pointed out by a survey on reproductive health carried out in two provinces by ONE's Centre of Studies on Population and Development. The study will be extended to the rest of the country with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (IPS, 29/10/03)

October 29: Independent journalist Abel Escobar Ramírez was arrested near Morón (350 km east of Havana). Police agents confiscated documents from the home of another journalist in the same region during a search carried out the same day. A correspondent for the independent news agency Cuba Press in the centre of Cuba, Escobar Ramírez was detained by members of the National Revolutionary Police (PNR) on the road between his village, Patria, and the town of Morón. He had been heading towards the home of Jesús Alvarez Castillo, another independent journalist working for Cuba Press. He was taken to the regional headquarters of the Department of State Security (DSE), the political police, in the town of Ciego de Avila (south of Morón). (Reporters Without Borders, 31/10/03)

October 30: The wives and mothers of seven political prisoners on a hunger strike in a Holguín prison sent a letter to Cuban authorities in which they hold Fidel Castro responsible for any harm to their relatives' health. The seven started the hunger strike on October 17 in protest against the treatment they've received and the "subhuman conditions" of their imprisonment, said relatives. (Europa Press, 31/10/03)

October 30: Using a strategy that critics have called excessive but that some health experts praise as effective, Cuba has managed to control the spread of the AIDS virus more successfully than most nations. While the Caribbean's HIV infection rate is exploding and now is second only to sub-Saharan Africa, officials in Cuba say that only .05 percent of the country's population has been infected with the AIDS virus, by far the lowest rate in the region. Cuba's aggressive campaign against the AIDS virus involves universal treatment for those who are HIV positive. There also is an extensive outreach program that uses television advertisements and volunteers distributing educational materials and condoms to encourage safe sex and limit transmission. But the government also closely monitors the lives of those infected with the AIDS virus. Most Cubans who test positive are required to stay in a sanitarium for at least three months. Once there, they can leave only with the permission of the staff. (KRT Wire, 30/10/03)

October 30: "Cuba's first social organization is the Revolution and the only social organizations that cannot exist are those organized by the United States against the Revolution." In this regard, Castro added that the issues confronting Cuba are different from those facing Latin America. In a panel on social movements: between the crisis of neoliberalism and the challenge of the alternatives, which debated the role of civil society in the region, during the 21st General Assembly of the Latin American Social Science Council (CLACSO), Fidel Castro affirmed that Latin America exists in a world whose problems are being debated and Cuba is something else, an established process. (Granma International, 31/10/03)

October 31: Cuban poet and journalist Raul Rivero, sentenced to 20 years in prison, is in poor health, suffering from vitamin deficiency and rapid weight loss, according to his wife, Blanca Reyes. Reyes said she was concerned about the health of her husband, who is serving time in a Ciego de Avila prison, some 480 kilometers (300 miles) southeast of the capital. Rivero, 57, is one of 75 Cuban dissidents sentenced in early April to up to 28 years in prison for threatening the independence and sovereignty of the state, collaborating with the United States and undermining the principles of the revolution. (EFE, 31/10/03)

October 31: Angel Gaztelu was described in Cuba as a "key voice of Cuban poetry", by official newspaper Granma, after the death of this outstanding Cuban creator at age 89 in Miami. The Granma cultural page referred to the remembrances of famous Cuban essay writer Graziella Pogolotti, talking about the links of Angel Gaztelu with the local artistic avant-garde in the first half of the 20th Century, and published a photo of Gaztelu, author of "Gradual de Laudes" on his last visit to Cuba in 2002. (Prensa Latina, 31/10/03)

October 31: The famed Cuban singer-songwriter Pablo Milanés criticized the restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by the regime of Fidel Castro on the island. "There are mistakes we should be able to criticize and we have sound judgement; but when one does it one feels isolated; there is fear and tension and that's absurd because you cannot continue being a revolutionary and have Stalinist ideas of exerting pressure people's minds and freedom," he said. (El Nuevo Herald, 31/10/03)

October 31: "We have four therapeutical vaccines in clinical trial in Cuba aimed primarily at cancer in lungs, breasts and colon," said Tania Crombet, specialist of the Molecular Immunology Center. Crombet, who participated in the 9th Oncology Congress that concluded in the Cuban capital, told reporters that there are also other studies begun, with hopes that they can pass to the clinical evaluation stage in the coming years. Current trends of immune-therapy in cancer, the use and development of vaccines, conservative treatment of some neoplasias and control of cancer, were at the center of debates at this event attended by some 300 delegates. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/11/03)

Economy

October 2: Approximately 40 tons of illegal lobster are seized every year in Cuba, authorities said. National fishing bureau chief Juan Fung Riveron said the confiscations and accompanying fines are aimed at preventing illegal trade that could endanger lobster populations in the future. Official estimates indicate that economic damages resulting from the illegal fishing and sale of lobsters, shrimp, turtles and other valuable and protected species may exceed \$5 million per year. (EFE, 2/10/03)

October 4: Cubanita is the trade mark under which Cuban citrus fruits produced by the Victoria de Girón enterprise in Central Cuba are increasing sales in Europe. Among the major markets for the Cuban product are the UK, France, Holland, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. The Victoria de Girón enterprise expects to produce 400 000 tons of citrus fruits this year. (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/10/03)

October 5: The 3rd International Conference on Construction for Tourism, to be held in Havana, will focus on information technology, investment and insurance, according to organizers. Cuban engineer Clara Mustelier, chair of the conference organizing committee, told the weekly Negocios en Cuba that attendance by Caribbean specialists, whose experiences are very similar to Cuba's, "is significant." Participants from Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Spain have confirmed their attendance at the Oct. 13-18 meeting. (EFE, 5/10/03)

October 6: The President of Cuba's Central Bank, Francisco Soberón, said that the island has a lot to learn from Malaysia. Soberón, who is leading the Cuban delegation at a bilateral business encounter with a Malaysian delegation in Havana, stated that there are good possibilities of trading information technologies with Malasia. (AIN, 7/10/03)

October 6: The 7th Session of the Cuba-Uganda Joint Commission was inaugurated in Havana. Cuban Minister of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, Marta Lomas, said that the

Ugandan delegation has identified new areas of interest, such as the Cuban industries of sugar and biotechnology. (AIN, 6/10/03)

October 7: Approximately 100 travel agencies from 20 countries have confirmed their participation in the 3rd Turnat meeting, at Cuba's eastern province of Granma. The meeting, considered as the most important of its kind in Cuba, will use the facilities in Marea del Portillo Beach, the meeting's main venue, near the mountain range of Sierra Maestra. The Turnat-2003 agenda will include conferences to be attended by specialists. (Xinhua, 7/10/03)

October 8: Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage said that the coming sugar cane harvest should mark a point of recovery in the industry due to greater State support. During a meeting with the ministers and vice-ministers involved in agriculture and sugar processing activities as well as officials and grassroots leaders from the sector, Lage said that the poor results of the previous harvest were due to a lack of supplies, operational deficiencies and adverse weather. In the midst of the current economic limitations, Lage stated, the country will make an effort to guarantee the indispensable resources. Cuban Vice-President anticipated that the 2003-04 harvest should go well, "since it is not only about producing sugar, but doing it with efficiency and low cost." (Prensa Latina, 8/10/03)

October 9: Cuba's foreign debt was unchanged in 2002 at just under \$11 billion as the government slashed imports to cope with a foreign exchange shortage, according to a yet to be released UN study. Cuba's foreign debt totaled \$10.900 billion at the end of last year, similar to the 10.893 billion reported in 2001, the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reports in a soon to be published study of Communist-run Caribbean island's economy for the period 1998-2002. The debt was unchanged in part due to a strong dollar in 2002, and is expected to increase this year as the U.S. currency has weakened. Cuba has not published any information on its 2002 balance of trade, current account and debt, but the ECLAC report was prepared in collaboration with the state-run National Institute for Economic Research using preliminary official data. (Reuters, 9/10/03)

October 10: The Norwegian drilling rigs operator Ocean Rig ASA said that it had received a letter of intent regarding a contract for the semi-submersible drilling rig Eirik Raude from Repsol YPF Cuba SA. The contract would cover the drilling of one well offshore Cuba for a day rate of USD195,000, Ocean Rig said. (Nordic Business Report, 10/10/03)

October 14: Argentine Interior Minister Aníbal Fernández recommended "caution" when negotiating with the Cuban government concerning its proposal for a 75 per cent haircut in Cuba's 1.9bn US dollar debt with Argentina. During the negotiations that Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa conducted with Fidel Castro's government, it was decided that "approximately 50m US dollars would be set apart from this debt of 1.9bn US dollars. These funds would be earmarked for providing free medical care in Cuba to Argentine citizens who need highly complex medical treatments and who lack the funds to pay for such care," the foreign minister reported. Cuba also proposed that Argentina apply a 75 per cent haircut to the Cuban debt. In relation to that suggestion, Fernández recommended, "first, take a careful look at things". (Telam, 15/10/03)

October 15: Cuba has one of the highest unemployment rates in the region with a rate of 12 per cent, according to a study by the University of Miami (UM). The Cuban government has reported that unemployment has decreased from 7.9 percent in 1995 to 3.3 per cent in 2002. But the U of M says the government adds in workers on compensation. The report further indicates that those figures also include 94 per cent of the 100 thousand workers from the sugar industry who were laid off in 2002 as well as the 320 thousand urban farmers working half time. (Notimex, 15/10/03)

October 15: Carlos Lage, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, informed the press of a slight reduction in the prices of certain products in comparison with those

at the beginning of the year. A national network of 2,388 farmers' markets with prices fixed at provincial level on the basis of production and costs and the absence of intermediaries, is being consolidated as an alternative to the private sector supply and demand markets, where prices are very high. At the opening of three farmers' markets in the capital, which brought the total of this kind of outlet to 73, the vice president of the Council of State stated that the state markets should be inserted within the People's Councils in the communities. (Granma International, 15/10/03)

October 17: Cuba's Ambassador to Argentina informed the foreign ministry of that country of the island's intention to buy 50 tonnes of wheat. Alejandro González Galiano said that payment would be in cash, which is an unusual practice in the sales of cereals. (Infosic, 17/10/03)

October 18: For the sixth year running the famous Cuban cigar Partagás, produced in its Havana factory, won four of the top prizes awarded by Havanoscope, the specialized French cigar guide. The experts from Havanoscope 2004 tasted all 260 brands of Habanos available on the European market, from both famous and almost unknown Cuban cigar houses. The jury awarded 19 'five bands', the top prize in this traditional contest of which Partagás took four. The Cuban cigar houses Cohíba and H. Uppmann both won three prizes. (Radio Habana Cuba, 18/10/03)

October 20: The Centre for Research on Animal Development of Cuba (CIMA) will start an artificial insemination campaign of equines aimed at increasing their numbers, which had alarmingly decreased in the last several years, said the official daily Granma. Current number of horses is less than half a million, said the newspaper. (AFP, 20/10/03)

October 22: A local community rice cultivation program is developing in Havana province and is expected to produce 19,000 tons of rice in the year 2005. The initiative is aimed at making rice cultivation a popular activity based on the use of older technologies. In that respect, the island's agriculture and sugar ministries have made plots of land available in order to meet a faster planting schedule. To date, rice harvests in the province have reached little over 5000 tons, although the project is expected to reach production of up to 17,500 tons of rice this year. (Radio Habana Cuba, 22/10/03)

October 23: The official Brazilian development bank has approved a credit worth US\$12.2 million, which will allow Cuba to purchase 500 Brazilian automobiles as well as bodyworks and chassis for buses. (EFE, 23/10/03)

October 23: A substantial number of Cuban workers feel that they work too long in less than optimal conditions and are not compensated in direct proportion to their efforts, say some of the findings of a recent study by the Labor Medicine Institute. According to the study, 46% of those surveyed thought that they worked much harder in relation to the salary they perceive, with women generally feeling more often overworked than men, and those aged 36 to 50 feeling more overworked than those between the ages of 18 and 35. The study surveyed 1,000 workers in Havana. (Cubanet, 23/10/03)

October 24: Foreign investment is and will continue to be a complement of the country's economic and social development efforts, said Marta Lomas, minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation (MINVEC). Lomas offered a review of her ministry to the members of the National Assembly of the People's Power. There are currently 355 active international economic associations, mainly in tourism, the basic industry and construction. The main foreign business partners are Spain, Canada and Italy. (Granma, 25/10/03)

October 30: Israel and Cuba haven't had diplomatic relations since 1973, but that hasn't stopped thousands of Israelis from touring the Caribbean island. "We assume that at least 10,000 Israelis have already visited Cuba," said Daniel Faians, president and CEO of Polaris Group, a large

travel wholesaler and airline agent based in Tel Aviv. "Those who go to Cuba stay in deluxe hotels and travel in private cars with private guides," Faians said. (JTA, 30/10/03)

Exile Community

October 8: A Cuban exile organization accused the US government of having a "double standard" because it has granted visas to members of Cuba's National Ballet, after having denied visas to other artists from the communist island this fall. "This is one more demonstration that, with respect to Cuba, the current government says one thing and does another," Joe Garcia, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, one of the main US exile groups, told the press. (EFE, 8/10/03)

October 10: The Cuban American National Foundation applauded President Bush's remarks at a Rose Garden ceremony where he articulated a tougher-line policy towards Cuba's communist regime. "Today's announcement is a definite step in the right direction; it demonstrates that the President is moving Cuba's freedom to a top spot on his foreign policy agenda, that he is taking an interested and active role in developing a Cuba policy that will hasten democratic change on the island. We are very encouraged that he's made clear that the time for change in Cuba is now, and that there is no better ally of Cuban freedom than the United States of America," said Jorge Mas Santos, Chairman of the Cuban American National Foundation. (US Newswire, 10/10/03)

October 22: The Cuban-American Bar Association plans to send financial aid to the family of imprisoned Cuban dissident Oscar Elias Biscet and possibly other political prisoners jailed since a crackdown against opposition groups on the island. The move is part of a larger plan hatched by CABA following the mass arrests and convictions of Cuban dissidents by the Fidel Castro regime in March and April. CABA is seeking to ratchet up pressure on the Castro government and keep a spotlight on the fate of the prisoners who were sentenced to terms of six to 28 years after summary trials and convictions. (Miami Daily Business Review, 22/10/03)

October 24: The dominant sector of Miami's Cuban exile community, a much-courted bloc of votes in next year's elections, blasted moves by Congress to lift travel restrictions to the communist-ruled island and urged a presidential veto. The Cuban American National Foundation, or CANF, which opposes lifting any of the US-imposed sanctions on Fidel Castro's government, described the rationale for adopting the amendment as "immoral." "For as long as there is no freedom for the Cubans themselves in Cuba, including the freedom to travel within their own country, it is immoral to even raise the possibility of allowing US citizens to travel there freely," CANF human rights director Omar López Montenegro told the press. (EFE, 24/03)

October 24: As anti-Castro groups wait for the presidential veto, others who favor easing the restrictions on travel to Cuba hailed the Senate vote. "We congratulate the Senate for voting like that with the support of a substantial majority. We believe it is one more step toward reconciliation, toward change in Cuba," Cuban Committee for Democracy chairman Ricardo González told the press. Lifting the restrictions will draw more tourists to Cuba, he said, and this will help the people on the island. "Those who maintain that the money will end up in Castro's pockets don't know what they are talking about," González said. (EFE, 24/10/03)

October 27: A Cuban exile and a former Detroit television executive are planning to launch a cable channel that would exclusively air programming about Cuba in English. Called Cubana One Network, the Naples-based company is currently meeting with cable providers across Florida to sign up the channel on their digital tier. (The Miami Herald, 27/10/03)

Foreign Affairs

October 1: Members on both sides of the Canadian Senate snapped to attention and burst into prolonged applause when Speaker Dan Hays recognized Che Guevara's daughter -- a Cuban pediatrician -- among the visitors in the gallery. It wasn't the woman's vocation that stirred the senators so dramatically but her name: Guevara. Aleida Guevara March, acknowledged the applause and stood patiently as several senators came to meet her and pose for pictures in the Senate foyer. (Vancouver Sun, 1/10/03)

October 1: The ninth Iran-Cuba joint economic commission meeting will be held in Teheran, Ministry of Agriculture Jihad announced. According to the Public Relations Department of the ministry, Iran's Minister of Agriculture Jihad Mahmoud Hojjati and his Cuban counterpart will take part in the three-day meeting. (Asia Pulse, 2/10/03)

October 1: The 11th International Conference on European Studies is on its way in Havana with the goal of exchanging ideas to eradicate antagonisms and as an alternative, perhaps the only one with true value, to confrontation. The meeting, sponsored by the Cuban Center of European Studies (CEE), coincides with the recent dispute between Cuba and the European Union (EU), of which our country feels completely exonerated, stated Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Angel Dalmau at the opening session. (Prensa Latina, 1/10/03)

October 2: The president of the Cuban National Assembly (Parliament), Ricardo Alarcón, criticized the EU position on the US-Cuba conflict. Alarcón, who was participating in debates of the 11th International Conference on European Studies, regretted what he considers "a change" on the EU position towards Cuba. "The Torricelli Act has now become more a European law than a US one", emphasized Alarcón, during a special speech to Cuban and foreigners attending a European Studies Conference. (EFE, Granma International, 2/10/03)

October 2: The Minister of Health of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Colm Imbert, expressed his satisfaction with cooperation in the area of health between his country and Cuba and with the well adjustment of the Cuban medical staff in Trinidad and Tobago. (EFE, 2/10/03)

October 3: Doctors in Trinidad and Tobago blasted Cuban medical personnel working in the country, charging that they were placing the health of citizens at risk. "The Medical Professionals Association of Trinidad and Tobago continues to be concerned about the substandard level of care that is being forced upon the unsuspecting public of Trinidad and Tobago with the introduction of Cuban medical personnel into the public health system," MPATT chief Dr. Colin Furlonge said in a statement. (EFE, 3/10/03)

October 3: The 4th Joint Commission of Integral Cooperation Agreement between Cuba and Venezuela is underway in Caracas. Marta Lomas, Cuban Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration, and Ramón Rosales, Venezuelan minister for Production and Commerce, lead the missions of its respective nations, stated Granma daily. (AIN, 3/10/03)

October 3: Argentine Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa is scheduled to travel to Cuba to mark a return to normal in diplomatic relations with the island, which have been frosty since 2001, officials said in Buenos Aires. Bielsa will arrive in Havana for a three-day visit, during which he is scheduled to sign an agreement intended to boost bilateral trade, Argentine Foreign Ministry officials told the press. He is also expected to renew negotiations on the rescheduling of Cuba's \$1.9 billion debt to Argentina, the officials said. (EFE, 3/10/03)

October 3: The daughter of revolutionary Che Guevara flew into Victoria to raise support for "The Cuban Five." Aleida Guevara March is one member of a cross-Canada tour organized by Goods for Cuba and the Canadian Network on Cuba. She was speaking at the University of Victoria. (National Post, 4/10/03)

October 3: Tom Butime, Ugandan Minister of State for Foreign Relations, arrived in Cuba leading the delegation that will participate in the 7th session of the Joint Commission between both nations. (AIN, 3/10/03)

October 4: Cuba said it wanted better relations with the European Union, but insisted that as long as the EU did not review its anti-Cuba stand, relations would not reach the levels they once had. That was the core of the message delivered by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, during the last day of debates of the 11th International Conference of European Studies, a week-long event that gathered over 50 academics and experts from 15 countries here in Havana. "Our hope is that there is rectification, a serious discussion that could lead relations along a path of respect and cooperation. We want to have relations with Europe, we are not pleased not to have them, but we also have moral values, we have principles, we have the right to be respected," said Pérez Roque, noting that Cuba "honestly believe(s) that, in the current situation, the governments of the European Union have not acted with enough maturity, good will, and open-mindedness that this situation required". (Radio Habana Cuba, 4/10/03)

October 5: Cuban Minister Ricardo Cabrisas conferred with Iranian Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karroubi on matters of mutual interest. A report released by Majlis public relations department said that in the meeting, Karroubi, referred to the revolutionary background of both countries, their culture of seeking for independence and peace, and called on the two countries to use their full potentials to bolster bilateral relations. Turning to international developments and regional crises, he noted that closer ties between independent countries will contribute to safeguarding peace and global stability. Karroubi underlined Iran's readiness to boost cooperation with Cuba within international fora such as the UN and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. (IRNA, 5/10/03)

October 5: John Paul II appointed Archbishop Luis Robles Díaz, the apostolic nuncio in Cuba, as vice president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. He succeeds Archbishop Cipriano Calderón Polo, who resigned for reasons of age. (Zenit, 5/10/03)

October 6: The European Commission has asked the Cuban government to consider the new batch of signatures submitted in support of the Varela Project -- a "legal" initiative within the Cuban constitutional framework -- said to the media Chris Patten, commissioner in charge of foreign relations. (Europa Press, 6/10/03)

October 6: The Czech Foreign Ministry has completely rejected a note in which the Cuban embassy protested against the course of a recent demonstration outside its building in Prague, ministry spokesman Karel Boruvka told the press. According to Boruvka, the ministry does not agree with the claim that Vienna conventions on diplomatic relations were violated. "We still insist that the demonstration was duly reported, that the police knew it would be held and ensured its problem-free course," Boruvka said. He added that the Cubans had reported no incident to the police. (CTK, 7/10/03)

October 6: The leader of liberal democrats of the European Parliament, Graham Watson, supported Cuban dissident Osvaldo Payá's initiative of delivering signatures to the Cuban government to bring about reforms, as part of the Varela Project. (Notimex, 6/10/03)

October 7: Arco Progresista, a coalition of moderate Cuban dissident groups, described as "positive" Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque's declarations aimed at "overcoming" the differences between Cuba and the European Union. (DPA, 7/10/03)

October 7: Vietnam and Cuba signed an extended Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation in Hanoi under the signatures of leaders of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO), the Vietnam-Cuba Friendship Association, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) and the Cuba-Vietnam Friendship Association. The original agreement was signed in

1997 and was first renewed in 2000. This signing will extend the agreement until 2006. (VietnamNews, 8/10/03)

October 7: Former presidents of Poland, Lech Walesa; the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel; and of Hungary, Arpad Goncz, affirmed that "the last wave of confrontations accompanied by an anti European diatribe from the Cuban political leadership can only be seen as an expression of weakness and desperation" on the part of Fidel Castro's regime. (Notimex, 7/10/03)

October 7: Athens 2004 Olympic Games and increasing bilateral collaboration in sports were discussed by a Greek governmental delegation at the Cuban National Sports, Physical Education and Recreation Institute (INDER) in Havana. Humberto Rodríguez González, President of the INDER met with Petros Tsokas, Councillor of the Greek Vice-minister for Culture and Sports. Tsokas, highlighted that there is a huge interest in Greece in strengthening collaboration with Cuba, regarding boxing, volleyball, athletics, baseball and others, like fencing. (AIN, 8/10/03)

October 8: The Diabetes Foundation (Spain), and the World Diabetes Foundation, in cooperation with the German NGO Humanitäre Cuba Hilfe, will set up a network of health centres for diabetics in Cuba where there are 305.000 diabetics. (Diario Médico, 8/10/03)

October 8: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez held talks with his visiting Tanzanian counterpart, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, in Havana, in a bid to seek ways of strengthening relations. Perez highlighted the ties linking both countries and thanked the Tanzanian government for its solidarity position in international for a. (Xinhua, 8/10/03)

October 8: Havana is urging Russia to support a draft resolution at the UN General Assembly session to be held in November demanding that the US lift its economic blockade of Cuba, Cuban Ambassador to Russia Jorge Marti has said. (Interfax, 8/10/03)

October 9: Former socialist French Prime Minister, Laurent Fabius, decided to sponsor Cuban journalist and poet Raúl Rivero, the most emblematic dissident of the 75 who were detained by Castro's regime last March. Fabius, who in July took part in the weekly demonstrations organized near the Cuban embassy in Paris, agreed to sponsor Rivero as part of a campaign to obtain from French senators and members of parliament "as much support as possible" for the imprisoned dissidents. (AFP, 9/10/03)

October 10: Although relations between Cuba and the European Union (EU) are in crisis, the European bloc is still willing to engage in political dialogue and discuss aid and cooperation, said the EU business attaché in the island, Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff. At a time when relations between EU authorities and the socialist government of Fidel Castro have hit rock bottom, what is necessary is to seek common ground, said the diplomat. "We are working on that, but it takes two to tango -- or to dance salsa," said Kühn von Burgsdorff in an interview. Kühn von Burgsdorff heads the office of the European Commission -- the EU executive branch -- in Havana, which was inaugurated in mid-March by the bloc's Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Paul Neilson. (IPS, 10/10/03)

October 10: Canada expressed concern at US President George W. Bush's announcement of more measures against Communist Cuba, and hoped that many Canadian firms doing business with the island would not be affected. "There are many Canadian companies active in Cuba with investments there, with employees there," Industry Minister Allan Rock told reporters when asked about Bush's comments. "My concern would be -- working with the minister of foreign affairs -- that nothing occur which would impede their ability to carry out business and serve the interests of their shareholders," he said. "I think it's important for us to do what we can to protect the interests of Canadian investors in Cuba (...) we have the perfect right to do that. We have our own independent foreign policy," said Rock. (Reuters, 10/10/03)

October 11: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon welcomed to Havana a delegation from the Central American Parliament headed by Augusto Vela Mena. During the meeting, Ricardo Alarcon and the Parliamentary delegation discussed bilateral issues as well as the political and economic situation in the region. (Radio Habana Cuba, 11/10/03)

October 12: Argentina's Foreign Minister, Rafael Bielsa, hosted a reception for the Castro regime's leaders on the occasion of new ambassador Raul Taleb presenting his credentials. Among those attending the Argentinean gala were Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage; Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque; Speaker of Parliament Ricardo Alarcón, and the chairman of Cuba's Central Bank, Francisco Soberón. Bielsa and Pérez pledged to renew bilateral ties and put behind them the dark days of 2001 when Cuban leader Fidel Castro slammed Argentina's then-president Fernando De la Rúa a "U.S. lackey" for voting against Cuba at the U.N. Human Rights Commission. (EFE, 12/10/03)

October 12: To commemorate the arrival of Christopher Columbus in America, Spanish Ambassador Jesús Gracia, met at his residency in Havana, with political dissidents and human rights campaigners whose groups were repressed in a brutal crackdown earlier this year. Among the Spanish ambassador's guests were Christian Liberation Movement head Oswaldo Payá; Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo of the Change for Cuba group, and Elizardo Sánchez, a human rights campaigner who has been smeared in the government-controlled press as a "paid informer" Also present were some of wives of some of the 75 independent journalists, peaceful dissidents and rights activists who were rounded up this past spring. (EFE, 12/10/03)

October 12: Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1998, Portuguese José Saramago, declared, "I have not broken with Cuba," in a interview with journalist Rosa Miriam Elizalde in Spain, published by Juventud Rebelde newspaper. Among a series of questions at the end of the interview, Elizalde asked about the IMF ("the owners of the money") and Cuba. "I have not broken with Cuba," Saramago declared. "I am still a friend of the Cuban people, but I reserve the right to say what I feel and to say it when I think I should do so." (Prensa Latina, 13/10/03)

October 12: The wives of jailed Cuban dissidents requested a meeting with Argentine Foreign Minister to inform him about their husbands' "deplorable prison conditions" and to ask him to intercede on their behalf during his visit to the island (El Nuevo Herald, 12/10/03)

October 13: Argentinean Foreign Affairs Minister Rafael Bielsa pledged strong ties with Cuba, after an intense day that included the signing of bilateral agreements and the presentation of the new Argentinean ambassador to Cuba. The creation of a bilateral mixed commission, the negotiation of the Cuban debt with Argentina, and the increase of cultural exchanges marked - among other themes- Bielsa's talk with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and several Cuban ministers. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/10/03)

October 13: Relations between Cuba and the European Union are "frozen", Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister said. In Pérez Roque's opinion, the attitude that Havana has perceived in Latin America "stresses even more the isolation of the European Union's (EU) policy towards Cuba. Cuba does not feel isolated; Cuba feels that it has the support of the European peoples." Pérez Roque believes that - encouraged by the governments of Spain, the United Kingdom, and Italy - the EU has "given in" to US policy, but noted that his country would like to maintain normal relations with the 15-nation bloc. (Notimex, 13/10/03)

October 13: Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque described as "useful and productive" the meeting held with Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez at the recent UN General Assembly meeting. Speaking to newsmen, Pérez Roque said that "the meeting was useful and productive. I believe that this was an initial step forward but we are not yet at the point at which we could say that relations have returned to normal". Pérez Roque added: "There was a first

exchange; a first rapprochement; and a clear statement of positions. I spoke frankly with Foreign Secretary Derbez and left the meeting with a good impression. I was positively impressed by his willingness to talk." (Notimex, 13/10/03)

October 14: Argentinean Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa said that his meeting with Fidel Castro in Havana consisted of "six hours of a very deep conversation", in which "historical aspects of today's reality were discussed." Bielsa added that it was "el Comandante Castro who almost exclusively" spoke during the meeting. "I don't think Fidel Castro is too much interested in our opinions," he said. (El Clarín, 15/10/03)

October 14: Cuba's Ambassador to the United Nations Bruno Rodríguez declared that the Security Council (SC) has become an anti-democratic and conspiratorial organization acting after opaque and secret informal meetings. Rodríguez said that in no other organization is the principle of sovereign equality violated so blatantly and institutionally, every day, to the point that non-permanent members are excluded and ignored despite the legality of the vote and against war. Speaking at the General Assembly session dedicated to UN reform, Rodríguez stated that if true reform is desired, it must begin with the Security Council. (Prensa Latina, 15/10/03)

October 14: Spanish university rectors were making no secret of their indignation after the government refused to grant a visa to Cuba's Deputy Minister of Education to take part in a professional symposium in Spain. Rodolfo Alarcón had been invited to brief the rectors on Cuba's plans to host an international conclave of university students next year and exchange viewpoints on other matters of professional interest. (EFE, 15/10/03)

October 14: According to the vice director of the Spanish Diplomatic Information Office, Manuel Salazar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not request an interview with Cuban vice minister of Education, Rodolfo Alarcón, as conditional on extending him a visa entry into Spain. Salazar said that the visa was not extended because the Cuban embassy withdrew both Alarcón's passport and his visa application form. However, the Cuban ambassador to Spain, Isabel Allende, reiterated to the press that Spanish authorities made an interview with Alarcón at the Spanish embassy in Havana conditional on extending the visa. (Europa Press, 14/10/03)

October 14: Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are violated, or at least threatened, in Cuba and Venezuela, an organization of newspaper publishers said. The Inter-American Press Association concluded a five-day meeting in Chicago saying the situation is the worst in Cuba. The Miami-based umbrella group of nearly all newspapers in the Americas said Cuba is the country where freedom of the press "is violated most systematically and completely." "Twenty-eight independent journalist are serving prison sentences ranging from 14 to 27 years in subhuman conditions, far from their families, with no medical attention and no respect for their other basic human rights," the IAPA concluded in a report. (The Miami Herald, 14/10/03)

October 14: From the Mexican capital it's been reported that the University of Colima (Mexico) will strengthen academic relations with the Institute of Animal Sciences (ICA), affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education of Cuba. (Notimex, 14/10/03)

October 15: The third Cuban-Mexican Joint Commission for Development and Cooperation concludes in Mexico after exchanges were termed very positive. Cuban Vice Minister for Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (MINVEC) Raúl Taladrid told the press that these meetings are valuable in renewing bilateral relations. The Mexican delegation to this third bilateral meeting is chaired by Economic Affairs and International Cooperation Under Secretary María de Lourdes Dieck and formed by officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, agriculture, environment, health, energy, work, communications and science, and Mexican Ambassador to Cuba Roberta Lajous. (Prensa Latina, 15/10/03)

October 15: Cuba considers the recent treatment of a Cuban deputy minister by the Spanish Embassy in Havana both impolite and humiliating. In a breach of protocol, the diplomat was told to meet with the Spanish ambassador in order to obtain a visa to travel to Madrid. A Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry (MINREX) note states that the Spanish Embassy informed the Higher Education Ministry that to receive this visa, it was necessary that the deputy minister meet personally with the ambassador. Deputy Minister Alarcon, who could not attend the activities scheduled in Spain, went to Great Britain where he is meeting with British rectors at the invitation of London Metropolitan University. (Prensa Latina, 15/10/03)

October 15: A declaration of the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Relations (MINREX) made public by local television, informs that Cuba continues quite concerned about to the increasing instability in Bolivia. The document reads that this situation is the result of a deep and delayed social and economical crisis aggravated to unsustainable levels, as a result of the application of neoliberal policies imposed by the US to Latin America. (AIN, 15/10/03)

October 17: The Spanish newspaper El Mundo granted Raúl Rivero its Annual Award for his contribution to freedom of the press on the island. Rivero shared the award Columnists of El Mundo with his Moroccan colleague Alí Lmrabet, sentenced to four years in prison for allegedly offending the King. (El Nuevo Herald, 18/10/03)

October 20: Cuban doctors in South Africa who opted out of government-to-government contracts are baffled by the apparent lack of teeth of court rulings. The Cuban Embassy in Pretoria has now been told the work permits of those doctors who opted out have become "null and void". Yet, provincial health employers and local regulatory authorities that tried to sack these doctors have suffered defeats in the labour court. In court victories in Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town and Johannesburg courts, the doctors' employers were ordered to inform the registrar of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) that the doctors remain employed at their hospitals, as there is a need for their services. (News24, 20/10/03)

October 20: Reporters Without Borders has published its second world press freedom ranking. Second from last in the ranking, Cuba is today the world's biggest prison for journalists, according to the organization. (Europa Press, 20/10/03)

October 20: The Philippine-Cuban Friendship Association was launched as part of the Cuban government's drive for strengthen ties with Asian countries. Cuban Ambassador to the Philippines Ramon Medina said his government and the Philippines would strengthen ties in the areas of trade and education. "Cuba is now faced with economic blockades and other trade sanctions. We look at the Philippines' support for our country with deepest gratitude," Mr. Medina said in a television interview. The head governor of the RP-Cuba FA and University of the Philippines President Francisco Nemenzo said the Philippine government should support Cuba in its efforts to stop the US from launching offensive assaults. "The US has kept on interfering with the affairs of Cuba... We want friendship with the Americans but not with their present leader," he noted. (Business World, 21/10/03)

October 20: Cuban volunteers are teaching Maori reading and numerical skills. Te Wananga o Aotearoa (the University of New Zealand) is believed to have three "volunteers" from Cuba to help improve literacy rates among Maori. Chief executive Rongo Wetere was not available, but a wananga spokeswoman confirmed that a programme with Cuban educators was under way. "Literacy and numerical has been identified as a major impediment to people's participation in society, and that is what the wananga is wanting to address," she said. (The New Zealand Herald, 21/10/03)

October 20: In Frankfurt, the German section of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) called for the release in Cuba of two union leaders arrested for handing out copies of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Cuban police arrested and accused Giordis Enrique Mendoza Ruíz and Orlando Carlos García Pérez of distributing "counterrevolutionary documents." (AFP, 20/10/03)

October 21: Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova donated his UNESCO 2003 José Martí International Prize to educational programs in Cuba. (Radio Progreso, 21/10/03)

October 21: Guatemala inaugurated the 17th International Fair (INTERFER 2003) providing space for commercial exchange among 20 participating countries, including Cuba, which is taking part with 12 enterprises from different sectors. The Cuban presence is promoting exportable products from each of the 12 enterprises attending the exhibition, as well as strengthening trade with Guatemala, Cuban Chamber of Commerce general secretary, Frank Abel Portela, told the press. Our attendance at the fair focuses on increasing commercial ties with Central America and the Caribbean, as well as the Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce and other institutions, Portela stated. (Prensa Latina, 22/10/03)

October 21: "Human Rights and Self-Determination: The Cuban Case", a book by a group of Mexican authors, was launched as "a denouncement of the campaigns of lies created by the US against the island". At the Lamm Cultural Center, where the book was presented, the writers, including attorneys, journalists and researchers, agreed that this is a small contribution toward telling the truth about Cuba, manipulated as it is by the US media. (Prensa Latina, 21/10/03)

October 22: The Cuban ambassador to New Zealand is defending a Cuban-sponsored Maori literacy project, branding ACT MP Rodney Hide a racist America-lover for criticising it. Indonesia-based ambassador Miguel Ramirez said the Cuban method of teaching literacy through radio and television had been used throughout Latin and South America and was in demand throughout the world. "Cuba does have a lot of things to show despite whatever Mr Hide may say," Mr Ramirez said. Mr Hide said he was "staggered" that New Zealand's biggest tertiary institution, Te Wananga o Aotearoa, was getting help from Cuba to write its distance-learning literacy programme called Greenlight. (Dominion Post, 23/10/03)

October 22: The European Union shares concerns of several human rights organizations over five Cuban citizens arrested in the United States, according to Italian Foreign Minister and current President of the EU, Franco Frattini. (EFE, 22/10/03)

October 23: The British Parliament approved a resolution in support of political prisoners in Cuba. "...the Cuban Government continues to hold several hundred political prisoners, whose offences include pro-democracy activism and speaking out against Government policies on issues such as abortion and treatment of the blind". The resolution further notes that among the most prominent cases are human rights activists Dr Oscar Biscet, Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva and Jorge Garcia Perez, all three of whom were arrested after peaceful protests. The note calls upon the Cuban Government to allow peaceful protest on human rights and pro-democracy issues, to release all those held for such activities, and to cease from applying pressure on them or their families; and "urges Her Majesty's Government to place these issues at the core of bilateral talks" (Puente Informativo, 23/10/03)

October 23: Two books by Cuban National Hero José Martí were published in France and Switzerland. An event at the Cuban Embassy in Paris was to present a compendium of journalistic works that Martí wrote in 1881 and 1892, and the novel "Lucía Jerez" in a bilingual edition. The first book, entitled "*En los Estados Unidos. Periodismo 1881-1892*" (In the United States. Journalism 1881-1892), was coordinated by the Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar, president of the Havana-based Casa de las Américas, and the researcher Pedro Pablo Rodríguez, and was published by UNESCO's Editorial Archivos. (Prensa Latina, 24/10/03)

October 24: The Seminar on the Administration of Assistance to Development Projects assessed the possibilities to enhance cooperation between Spanish non-governmental organizations and institutions in eastern Cuba. Organizations such as Economistas Sin Fronteras, Sevilla Global and Urban Economic Promotion Agency, and Universidad de Oriente, the People's Power National Assembly and Santiago de Cuba's Investment and Economic Collaboration Ministry sponsored the meeting. (Prensa Latina, 24/10/03)

October 25: Tensions between Cuba and Mexico stem mainly from Mexico's position at the Geneva Human Rights Commission, said the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Felipe Pérez Roque. The Minister did not deny the decline in the bilateral relationship. (El Nuevo Herald, 25/10/03)

October 25: Intellectuals from around the world have condemned US harassment of Cuba in the final declaration of the "In Defense of Humanity" encounter held in the Mexican capital. The document summarizes the ideas expressed by social theorists and activists from 15 countries during two days of discussion, and warned of the risk of direct military intervention against the Cuba. (Granma International, 27/10/03)

October 26: Uruguayan President, Jorge Batlle, regarded as "impossible" Cuba's integration in the Mercosur because the island does not have a "democratic government." In an interview published in the weekly Expresso, Batlle maintains that "the only political agreement among the members of the group is the Declaration of Usuhaia, which requires members to have a democratic government, and I don't think that's the case of Cuba." (El Nuevo Herald, 26/10/03)

October 27: Just back from a tour of twelve cities in Canada to denounce the case of the five Cuban prisoners in the US, Aleida Guevara March, daughter of Ernesto Che Guevara, and Irma Gonzalez, daughter of imprisoned René González, were interviewed by Radio Havana-Cuba. Guests of the 34 Canadian-Cuban solidarity committees, they spoke about the situation of the Five Cubans, who on the island are considered "heroes for their struggle against terrorism". "Not many people knew about this, Aleida said. "There was a wall of silence between this case and the people of Canada, so we asked them for help to talk about this and to raise awareness about these five anti-terrorist fighters and many people have come to us to say we'll help you; we'll do whatever we can." (Cuba Now, 27/10/03)

October 27: The 21st General Assembly of the Latin American Council for Social Sciences (CLACSO) got underway in the Cuban capital. Some 300 delegates from Latin America and another 300 from Cuba are attending the meeting and the 3rd Latin American and Caribbean Social Sciences Conference. Well-known US intellectual Noam Chomsky, and Bolivian Evo Morales are in the Cuban capital to attend the event, which is taking place at Havana's International Convention Center. (Radio Habana Cuba, 27/10/03)

October 27: President Lansana Conte of Guinea has returned from a 10-day private visit to Cuba, during which he was widely believed to have received medical treatment. (IRINewsAfrica, 27/10/03)

October 28: For several days Carmen Delia Llano Ochoa, a Cuban mother resident in Canada has protested outside the Cuban Consulate in Montreal against Cuban officials' refusal to grant an exit permit to her son. According to Carmen Delia, the Canadian Embassy in Havana granted her son a resident visa to join her. The visa expires in February. Should Cuban authorities continue refusing, she has threatened to go on a hunger strike. Dozens of supporters sensitive to the case have joined Carmen Delia. (NotiCuba.Com, 28/10/03)

October 28: Cuba's experiences during its revolutionary process can help build a better world, according to Fidel Castro. Speaking during a workshop session at the 3rd Latin American and Caribbean Social Sciences Conference, the Cuban leader pointed to the achievements of the

Cuban Revolution and the fact that the island has been able to resist an economic blockade imposed by Washington for more than four decades. Referring to dismal reports of environmental degradation, Fidel Castro asked delegates at the workshop yesterday if they honestly thought the earth would still be around in 100 years if obsessive consumption habits continued unabated. The leader of the Cuban Revolution ventured to say that if over-consumption of the powerful continues, conditions for humanity could be damaged and destroyed to the point of no return. (Radio Habana Cuba, 29/10/03)

October 28: Four months after Brussels imposed sanctions to condemn the sentencing of 75 political dissidents to long prison terms EU-Cuban relations continue "frozen," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said. Meeting with journalists at a reception organized by Havana's Apostolic Nunciature, the foreign minister stressed that there was no solution in sight for the diplomatic fallout as long as EU ambassadors insist on mingling with dissidents during their receptions. (El País, 29/10/03)

October 29: Cooperation in health between Cuba and Seychelles has received a major boost following the announcement that the number of doctors from the Caribbean island working in Seychelles will be increased. This came out at the end of the 9th session of the Seychelles-Cuba Joint Commission held in Havana. The Minister for Health, Mr Patrick Pillay, led the Seychelles delegation to the talks. For its part, the Cuban delegation was headed by Marta Lomas Morales, Minister for Foreign Investment and Cooperation. (Seychelles Nation, 29/10/03)

October 29: The Socialist International's XXII Congress held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, asked for the liberation of political opponents in Cuba. The Congress made this appeal "within the framework of the national legislation in force and the international treaties on human rights, and dialogue among the sectors of the country to continue with the democratic process on the island without intervention from any foreign country". As well as criticizing Castro, the final declaration of the Sao Paulo socialist meeting said the US trade and travel embargo on Cuba was "a huge mistake for democratic interests." (International Socialist, Reuters, 20/10/03)

October 30: The Spanish "Universidad Empresa Foundation" of the Balearic Islands, will support a project for autistic children and adolescents in Santiago de Cuba province. The learning center was created two school years ago as the result of this program, which began 10 years ago. Now, it will receive funding from the Spanish entity, allowing it to enlarge the old center, restored by the Cuban State when the school was opened. (Prensa Latina, 30/10/03)

October 30: Viet Nam's Foreign Ministry has signed with its Cuban counterpart an agreement on bilateral cooperation and exchange of technical consultancy on document archiving. The signing took place during Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Cong Phung's visit to Cuba, which was part of the two ministries' annual political consultancy programme. (Viet Nam Press, 30/10/03)

October 30: Cuban leader Fidel Castro called on leaders of social movements from across the Americas to find their own methods for change rather than copying existing political models - including communist Cuba's. Castro told leaders of groups representing Indians, workers and others that they should "seek their own way" as they press for change in their countries around the Western Hemisphere. "One should not be dogmatic; that is one of the secrets of revolution," said Castro at a meeting of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences in Havana. "Every one of the movements will have different things. There will be things that are similar but not exactly the same," he said. (AP, 30/10/03)

October 30: If Latin American opponents of Washington's free trade policies join forces, they could deal the United States a blow as serious as its loss in the Vietnam War, Bolivian opposition leader Evo Morales said. Morales, a former presidential candidate and now a congressman, is attending a meeting of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences in Havana. "It is important

to incorporate intellectuals into the struggle," Morales said on the communist government's nightly "Roundtable" television program. He said intellectuals should "not only be concerned, but do something." (AP, 30/10/03)

October 30: Cuba introduced a Canadian studies program comprised of history, culture and other spheres of Canadian life at Las Tunas University. Paul Gibbard, Political Program Manager of the Canadian Embassy to Havana, said that both nations have common interests, illustrated through more than a century of official relations. The diplomat recalled the fact that no other nation sends so many tourists to the Island, and announced an increase of 20 percent of tourists for 2004. Gibbard praised the mutually profitable investments made by Canadian companies in oil and nickel in Cuba. (AIN, 30/10/03)

October 30: While in Brazil, Spanish president José María Aznar Aznar discarded the possibility of expelling Cuba from the Ibero American Summits. But, Aznar asserted that he would work together with Brazilian president Luis Inacio Da Silva to support "the institutionalization of democracy in all country-members of the Summits", during the next Ibero American Summit to be held in Bolivia. (ABC, 1/11/03)

October 31: Fidel Castro called his Spanish counterpart, José María Aznar, a "Celestina" for his tour throughout Latin America "recruiting youngsters" for "a war of conquest" against Iraq. "What is the Spanish Celestina doing recruiting young Latin-Americans for a war of conquest," asked Castro in an over four-hour long speech at the closing ceremony of the 25th Assembly of the Latin American Council on Social Sciences (CLACSO). Celestina is a character in the homonym work by Spanish author Fernando de Rojas (XV century) that represents a go-between who uses all her wiles to seduce others into wrongdoing. (ABC, 1/11/03)

Security

October 22: Lieutenant General Ramon Espinosa Martin met with Colonel General Cao Gangchuan, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission and China's defense minister. Espinosa, member of the Cuban Communist Party Board of Directors and chief of the Cuban eastern army, is in Beijing on an official visit with a delegation of generals and officers of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). During its stay in China, the Cuban delegation will make a tour for several provinces in the interior of the country and visit units of the Chinese army, navy and air forces, as well as centers of military education and tourist and historic sites. (Prensa Latina, 22/10/03)

October 22: The Cuban Ministry of Armed Forces homaged the 40th anniversary of a Cuban military mission in Algeria, with a cultural politic event in the headquarters of that institution. In the ceremony, General Efigenio Ameijeiras, who led the Cuban troops in that Arab country, was given by Algerian Ambassador Ahmed Maamar the medal for the 40th anniversaries of Algeria's independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations between both governments. (AIN, 22/10/03)

October 29: Lieutenant General Ramón Espinosa Martín concluded a one week long official visit to China, where he held talks with Chinese military authorities. Espinosa, also member of the Cuban Communist Party Politburo and chief of the Eastern Army, arrived in Beijing heading a delegation joined by other generals and top officers from the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). (Prensa Latina, 29/10/03)

Terrorism

October 2: Pentagon officials said they worry that terrorists are trying to infiltrate the US military and may have done so at the prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Three workers at the prison, including two members of the military, have been arrested on suspicion of espionage at the high-security base. It is unclear whether the men were connected to or part of any terrorist plot, the commander in charge of homeland security said. "I'm hoping we're going to find these are unusual, these are few and far between, that this isn't some large cell," said General Ralph Eberhart, head of US Northern Command. (Toronto Star, 2/10/03)

October 2: The United States issued a new accusation that Cuba had a "limited" biological arms program. At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Cuba, Christopher Dodd, a Democrat from Connecticut, asked why Washington continued to enforce a four-decade sanctions regime against Havana. "If it (Cuba) is no longer a threat, why would we maintain those restrictions?", Dodd asked Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, Roger Noriega. "We continue (...) to believe that Cuba has at least a limited, developmental, offensive biological weapons research and development effort and is providing dual-use biotechnology to other rogue states," said Noriega, the top US diplomat for Latin America. (Reuters, 2/10/03)

October 5: The Cuban Foreign Ministry issued a statement, strongly denouncing recent statements by Roger Noriega, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs. Published on the front page of Granma newspaper, the statement by Cuba's Foreign Ministry notes that Roger Noriega echoed the "ridiculous" accusation previously made by his colleagues that Cuba is working on bio-terrorist projects -- despite the fact that such claims have been roundly rejected as completely false. The Cuban Foreign Ministry called on Washington to present the slightest piece of evidence to support its false claims that the island is developing biological weapons. (Radio Habana Cuba, 6/10/03)

October 9: Military authorities have taken unusual steps to protect evidence in an espionage investigation at the Guantánamo Bay prison camp, including classifying routine court documents and requiring visiting reporters to promise in writing not to ask about the case. (The Miami Herald, 9/10/03)

October 10: Christophe Girod, the chief representative in Washington of the International Committee of the Red Cross, said the imprisonment by the US of more than 600 people at Guantanamo Bay, in Cuba, is unacceptable because the detainees are being held indefinitely without proper legal aid, the New York Times reported. Girod spoke at the US naval base as Red Cross representatives were completing an inspection, the newspaper said. He said it's intolerable that the camp is used as "an investigation center, not a detention center," for the 660 prisoners, mostly Afghans, the paper said. (Bloomberg, 10/10/03)

US-Cuba Relations

October 1: A leading Cuban-American legislator joined President Bush's reelection campaign committee -- but only after an emotional closed-door debate over whether the Bush administration was committed to sharpening its Cuba policy. Following intense negotiations with Bush campaign officials and his own peers in the state Legislature, Representative Gastón Cantens agreed to attend a news conference with Governor Jeb Bush, Bush-Cheney 2004 manager Ken Mehlman and other GOP luminaries. Cantens, a Miami Republican, stood on stage to express his support as a chairman of "Hispanics for Bush." (The Miami Herald, 2/10/03)

October 2: A request by US Senator Blanche Lincoln and nine other senators for a second American food exhibition in Cuba has been rejected by the federal government. The US State and Treasury departments cited Cuba's "recent repressive actions" in turning down the request.

The State Department said in a letter to the senators made public this week that Cuba's government and US foreign partners "could interpret licensing of another such fair as conveying a sense of normalcy and business as usual." "Should the political situation improve, for example, by the regime releasing the unfairly imprisoned opposition members or otherwise indicating its interest in reform, we would be prepared to reconsider our views regarding these types of license requests." (AP, 3/10/03)

October 2: The sponsor of a US Food and Agribusiness Exhibition last year in Cuba charged the Bush administration is refusing to grant him a license for a second exhibition for political reasons. Peter Nathan, president of PNW Exhibicon of Connecticut, said he believes the Bush administration does not want the food and agribusiness exhibition to take place as planned in January because the show is likely to get a lot of international news coverage and would be bad for President Bush's chances of maintaining the support of Cuban Americans opposed to the government of President Fidel Castro. "This is definitely a political decision, having more to do with the re-election campaign than with Castro," Nathan said. (Congress Daily, 3/10/03)

October 2: Senator Max Baucus testifying at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on US policy toward Cuba, stressed the idea that the embargo has been in place for more than four decades, "and it has not worked". He added that, "many dissidents were reportedly arrested because the Cuban government was concerned about their meetings with Americans". "If the Cuban government fears contact between the American and Cuban people, the answer is to send more Americans, not fewer", Baucus remarked. (Washington Files, 2/10/03)

October 2: The chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar, Republican-Indiana, criticized US policy toward Cuba during a hearing, saying the 43-year-old trade embargo on the communist island nation "has not worked." Lugar, who has usually maintained a low profile on Cuban policy, also signaled for the first time that he could support ending the travel ban "at an appropriate time." (The Miami Herald, 3/10/03)

October 2: Cuba's military would benefit greatly from an easing of US travel restrictions against the country because it controls 65 percent of Cuba's hotel rooms and would use the proceeds to suppress dissent, a State Department official said. Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega defended the restrictions in the face of criticism from members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who said the policy is not working. Noriega said the 70 percent of Cuba's tourist hotels are in isolated enclaves so that they are invisible to ordinary Cubans who, in any case, are not authorized to patronize the hotels. He cautioned against any easing of the restrictions. "We would advance none of our goals by making concessions to a decrepit dictatorship," he said. Noriega also remarked that President Bush "will veto any measure to change the current restrictions." (AP, The Miami Herald, 2/10/03)

October 2: United States will work to obtain Cuba's condemnation by Latin American governments, a top US State Department official said. During a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on US policy toward Cuba, Assistant Secretary of State, Roger Noriega, said that Latin American support to Washington on Cuba's condemnation was his "deepest desire" and "personal mission". (Reuters, 2/10/03)

October 2: The daughter of a CIA pilot shot down and executed during the Bay of Pigs invasion sued the Cuban government under an anti-terrorism law. Federal laws prohibit summary executions by state sponsors of terrorism. An autopsy concluded Alabama National Guard pilot Thomas "Pete" Ray died of a gunshot to the right temple. Ray became a pawn in the Cold War when Cuba kept his body in cold storage for 18 years while the United States officially denied he was authorized to be in Cuba. Ray's body was returned in 1979, but it was 1998 before the CIA acknowledged his role in the failed 1961 attempt to oust Fidel Castro. (AP, 3/10/03)

October 2: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev came to the defense of Cuba, saying it was a Third World nation that fell victim to confrontations between the two super powers during the Cold War. "Now that we have ended the Cold War, it's time to lift the embargo," he said during a forum at the University of North Florida. Gorbachev is also to meet with government officials in Miami concerning US trade sanctions that were imposed against the Communist nation more than 40 years ago. (News4Jax.Com, 2/10/03)

October 3: Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, an opponent of Fidel Castro who recently returned to the island from exile to wage a peaceful struggle for democracy, said that machinations by the "far right" were to blame for a US government order freezing the Miami bank account of an organization he heads. Gutierrez Menoyo said he learned of Ocean Bank's decision to freeze the Cambio Cubano (Cuban Change) Foundation's bank account several days ago. "They have committed an illegality, a product of the extreme right's efforts to hamper the operations of Cambio Cubano," Menoyo told the press. The funds were frozen at the request of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which sanctions those who violate the economic embargo against Cuba, local media in Miami reported. (EFE, 3/10/03)

October 3: The Daily News published excerpts of a column by Fidel Castro that was protested by a Spanish-language newspaper's owners and led to the editor's resignation. The column was scheduled for publication in the New York daily El Diario-La Prensa, but owners overruled Editor in Chief Gerson Borrero when some staffers objected to the piece, calling it propaganda for Cuba's Communist government. (Reuters, 3/10/03)

October 4: The 40-year struggle over US policy on Cuba witnessed a new skirmish, with Mikhail Gorbachev, former Soviet president, and Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Latin America, taking conflicting positions at rival Miami conferences. In one salon, Bush administration officials promised a continued hard line to defend the 43-year embargo of Cuba. Opponents of that embargo, gathered nearby, to hear former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev paraphrase president Ronald Reagan, calling the "wall of economic embargo" against Cuba a "relic of the cold war" that America should tear down. The opposing conferences were sponsored by the University of Miami -the pro-embargo--, and by New York's New School University. Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, noted Bush's support of the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, travel restrictions to the island and efforts to raise worldwide awareness of Fidel Castro's oppressive regime. He said those policies would serve to help undermine the Cuban government. (Financial Times, Sun Sentinel, 4/10/03)

October 4: A senior State Department official says President Bush will veto any attempt to ease travel restrictions for Americans who want to visit Cuba. The official also says the United States will continue to support Cuban dissidents seeking democratic reform in Cuba. Roger Noriega, the US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemispheric Affairs, told Cuban exiles President Bush will not hesitate to veto any bill that crosses his desk, which would ease travel restrictions on US citizens who wish to visit Cuba. (VOANews, 4/10/03)

October 7: John Parke Wright and several other Florida ranchers toured the Niña Bonita farm on Havana's outskirts to see how Jersey heifers and New York Holsteins imported this summer are adapting to Cuba's subtropical climate. "I have no desire to prop up any government or any military," Wright said. "The cows here only go toward milk for people. I'm not waiting for any change." Wright's 15,000-acre family ranch was expropriated after Fidel Castro's revolution, but these days the fifth-generation Naples cattle rancher wants to beef up future trade deals and forget about the past. (Sun Sentinel, 8/10/03)

October 7: US Senator Evan Bayh visited leading democracy activist organizer Oswaldo Paya and declared him courageous during a two-day visit to the communist-run island. "He is a man of courage," Bayh said of Paya in a brief statement to international journalists after the early evening meeting of a little less than an hour. "I admire his work." Bayh said he was traveling with a group

of Indiana business people and agricultural representatives. He was the third U.S. senator and the fourth member of Congress to visit Cuba in the past month. (AP, 8/10/03)

October 7: Cuba expects that Cuban-born US business people start arriving in the island like those from other states, and that Florida becomes one of the states with most commercial ties in these lands. "We do not exclude US resident Cuban émigrés who have built an honest capital to trade with Cuba," Pedro Alvarez, director of the state firm Alimport, which is in charge of food purchases for the island, said to the press. (AP, 8/10/03)

October 8: Booming sales of US foodstuffs to Cuba have fallen short of easing the decades-old trade embargo that Havana wants lifted, the country's ambassador to Spain said. Speaking several weeks before the communist nation presents its annual report about the effects of the US trade embargo to the United Nations, Ambassador Isabel Allende said her country was suffering under one-sided trading conditions imposed by the United States. (AP, 8/10/03)

October 8: Over the past nine months, US firms have sold some \$238 million worth of farm products to the Cuban state import company, Alimport, accounting for around 25 percent of the island's annual food imports. Statistics from the company suggest that this boom in trade has even raised the United States above Spain, France and Italy in terms of such exports to Cuba. (El País, 8/10/03)

October 8: The Indiana Farm Bureau signed a commitment to work for the repeal of trade and travel sanctions against Cuba in return for a Cuban pledge to buy \$15 million in agricultural products. Cuban officials said they have spent \$512 million on food imports from 35 US states in two years after a four-decade-old trade embargo against President Fidel Castro's government was relaxed by the US Congress. Indiana Democratic Senator Evan Bayh, heading a agricultural and business delegation to Havana, said trading with Cuba was the best way to promote "positive change" on the Caribbean island, the hemisphere's only communist state. (Reuters, 8/10/03)

October 8: The US Coast Guard sent home 23 would-be Cuban migrants, along with a miniature white poodle that attempted to come to the United States. The 23, picked up at sea in four groups, were repatriated on a Coast Guard cutter. (Los Angeles Times, 8/10/03)

October 8: A new Bush administration policy that prohibits certain educational trips to Cuba has reignited the debate on US policies regarding the communist regime. US citizens are generally not allowed to visit Cuba, but there are exceptions -- such as for educational purposes. Earlier this year, the Treasury Department issued an interim final rule that bans 'people to people' educational exchanges that are unrelated to academic coursework. The policy has triggered protests from members of Congress, universities, travel agencies and individuals who closely monitor US-Cuban policies. A vast majority of the 1,200-plus written comments that were submitted to Treasury express strong opposition to the new policy. The department made those comments available to the public late last month. Representative Jo Ann Emerson, a critic of the Bush administration's policy toward Cuba, said "the Treasury Department overstepped its authority by tightening travel restrictions to Cuba". (The Bulletin's Frontrunner, 8/10/03)

October 8: Two of the people who converted a 1951 Chevy pickup into a boat in a failed bid to reach American shores were granted interviews giving them a chance to get US visas, one of the men said. Ariel Diego and Luis Grass received letters from the US Interests Section inviting them to interviews. Such interviews do not guarantee being granted a visa. (The Miami Herald, 8/10/03)

October 9: The Ballet Nacional de Cuba has announced the cancellation of "Les Sylphides," a ballet by Michel Fokine that was to be performed at City Center and on its national tour, in response to an accusation of copyright infringement by the Fokine Estate in London. American

Ballet Theatre owns the exclusive rights to the ballet in New York through September 2005. "How sad it is that I won't be able to show my company performing my version of this beautiful work," Alonso said in a statement released by the company. (The New York Times, 9/10/03)

October 10: The US State Department has denied permission for the head of Cuba's Interests Section in Washington D.C. to attend a conference in Alabama on ties between Mobile and Havana. According to published reports, Rodriguez and other Cuban officials were informed that they would no longer be able to travel beyond the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., where the Cuban Interests Section is housed and New York, where Cuba's United Nations mission is based. (Radio Habana Cuba, 10/10/03)

October 10: President Bush promised Cuban-Americans, a crucial constituency in his re-election bid, that he would tighten the pressure on the Cuban government to reform. Bush named his Cuban-born housing secretary, Mel Martinez, and Secretary of State Colin Powell to head a governmental commission "to plan for the happy day when (Fidel) Castro's regime is no more." Bush also said the United States would step up enforcement of existing restrictions against the communist government, such as a ban on tourism by Americans, and crack down on what he called the trafficking of women and children in Cuba. The United States also will launch a public outreach campaign to identify "the many routes to safe and legal entry" for Cubans who try to flee their homeland, he said. He announced plans to increase legal immigration from Cuba by issuing more visas for those who seek "safe and legal entry" and to "ensure that Cubans fleeing the dictatorship do not risk their lives at sea." President Bush didn't say how many new visas would be issued. [For more on this, see Remarks by the (U.S.) President on Cuba.] (Knight Ridder, AP, Reuters, 11/10/03)

October 10: In Washington, the House recently voted to end the travel ban on Cuba, which president George Bush has decided to enforce more tightly. "If we are serious about undermining Castro and bringing freedom and democracy to that island, why not let Americans travel there with that message?" said Representative Jeff Flake, Republican-Arizona. "President Bush has it wrong with Cuba", said Mavis Anderson, senior associate for Cuba at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). "If we want to have a positive impact on the human rights situation in Cuba, we ought to engage the country, not continue a failed strategy of isolation", Anderson added. "You have to wonder about the White House's motives in announcing this", said Phillip Schmidt also from the Latin America Group. "Policies in Florida might dictate taking a hard line approach to Cuba, but a balanced analysis of the situation would suggest that it is time for a new and more effective policy." (Knight Ridder, Europa Press, 10/10/03)

October 10: One of Cuba's best-known former political prisoners welcomed President Bush's support for the island's opposition, but didn't see much new in the initiatives. Vladimiro Roca spoke after President Bush directed administration officials to recommend ways to achieve a transition to democracy in Cuba after 44 years under Fidel Castro. "Bush's words are moral support for us," Roca said. Still, he said, Bush's message contained "very little new." Roca said he agreed with Bush's plan to crack down, saying "American tourism won't bring democracy to Cuba." "US Treasury Department regulations effectively bar most Americans from traveling here, by making it illegal to spend money on the island". But Roca said Bush's formation of a commission to develop a post-Castro transition plan for Cuba "won't work very well." What will happen in Cuba after Castro leaves is impossible to know or plan for, said Roca. Castro, now 77, has been in power for 44 years. (AP, 10/10/03)

October 13: Branding Fidel Castro a tyrant, White House national security adviser Condoleezza Rice called for renewed international pressure against the Cuban leader. Speaking days after President Bush said he would begin tight enforcement of a ban on travel by US citizens to Cuba, Rice said Castro's crackdown on dissidents has brought him worldwide condemnation. "This needs to be an international effort," she told a meeting of the Inter American Press Association in Chicago. "It is unacceptable that Cuba remain in the state that it does in this hemisphere at a time

when democracy and freedom and prosperity are within grasp (...) It should not be that the Cuban people are forgotten." (Reuters, 14/10/03)

October 13: Cuba's government accused the Bush administration of pandering to Cuban-American voters and blasted new initiatives aimed at spurring a post-Castro transition as little more than political schemes to secure a Florida election victory. "This is how the White House repays this [Cuban American] mafia for the fraud and scandalous tricks of the 2000 presidential elections," read a Foreign Ministry statement published in Cuba's government-run daily. "We would not be surprised if new aggressions are sown against our country as we approach November 2004." Fidel Castro's government retorted: "The transition dreamed of by Bush and his acolytes in the Miami mafia will never occur in Cuba. Our country is in transition, yes, but it is a transition toward more revolution, toward a more just society." (Sun Sentinel, 14/10/03)

October 14: The family of a Cuban man accused of spying says that if he is mistreated they will make public the information he gave them. They say he is ill and should not stand trial. A day before Omelio Angulo is to stand trial in Cuba for espionage, his brother, Enrique, and his sister, María, admitted Omelio was trying to pass along information about the military, but they say they don't know why. Maria Cardoso, Omelio's sister, and the man she calls her husband, Arcel Cardoso, took their two daughters on a two-week trip to Camagüey to visit relatives. Omelio asked Maria to take some letters back to Enrique. But she was discovered at the airport before leaving for Miami. "Why won't the letter be in court tomorrow?" asked Maria. "Because it's too important for the Cuban government? I want to let the Cuban government know that if they don't treat my brother right, I'm going to say everything in the letter." The Cuban Interests Section in Washington did not return phone calls. (The Miami Herald, 14/10/03)

October 15: The Arizona State University Art Museum increasingly has been specializing in Cuban art. The museum has about 60 contemporary works of Cuban art in its collection, and in the late 1990s put together a major show of Cuban art that traveled to nine locations in six states. "It was very enthusiastically received all over the country," said Marilyn Zeitlin, museum director and chief curator. "There is a perennial interest in Cuba. I really can't explain it. It has a rich culture in music, dance, art and poetry," Zeitlin said. (The Arizona Republic, 15/10/03)

October 15: The Cuban government said it is ready to establish "healthy" relations with the United States, which imposed a full unilateral embargo on the Caribbean country four decades ago. "We have created an economic and social infrastructure, but above all, human capabilities that make us fully trust our opportunities to develop healthy relations with the United States," said Vice Foreign Trade Minister Pedro Padrón, in an interactive Internet forum. But eventual changes in relations with the United States would not change the direction, nor the "deeply human sense of our social project," he said. (Xinhua, 15/10/03)

October 15: The day before the renowned Cuban National Ballet took to the stage in Daytona Beach, two of its young dancers defected. Gema Diaz, 21, and Cervilio Amador, 20, were supposed to perform in the company's production of Don Quixote. (The Miami Herald, 16/10/03)

October 15: Twenty Cuban migrants seeking asylum in the United States were repatriated to Cuba after they were intercepted in the Straits of Florida, the US Coast Guard said. The Coast Guard said the asylum seekers had been trying to reach Florida, on the US southeast coast, when they were plucked from the ocean in three separate groups. (AFP, 15/10/03)

October 15: Secretary of State Colin Powell, interviewed on the Univision television network, offered his thoughts on new US initiatives to encourage a transition to democracy in Cuba. Asked about how soon the new Commission will start meeting, and what are the new ideas to hasten democracy in Cuba, Powell answered: We have presented proposals to the Cubans before. (...) "With the president's new initiatives we will be forming a commission, and I hope to have it

formed in the very near future: my staff working with the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martinez, and in a period of, I think, six months, will come forward with some recommendations for the president". Powell added "We will be, also, tightening up our travel restrictions to make them consistent with law and taking some action -- other actions that are consistent with our laws, all for the purpose of letting Castro know that his actions, especially his recent actions, are unacceptable". "This isn't the Cold War-he said-- this is the time to let people speak out and freely choose how to be governed. That will happen in Cuba. And the waves of freedom will eventually sweep across Cuba, just as they have in some of the other parts of the world". (Washington File, 16/10/03)

October 16: Tour operators from the United States and Cuba are meeting with Cuban officials in Cancun, Mexico to discuss the Caribbean island nation's travel industry potential, in defiance of Washington's plans to tighten the ban prohibiting US citizens from visiting Cuba. The Travel Conference meeting is being held by ATRIP (Association of Trip Industry Related Professionals), USA-Engage, Nacional Foreign Council, US-Cuba Trade Association, ABC Charters, Cuba Travel Services, Marazul Charters, and others. (IPS, 16/10/03)

October 16: US authorities have stepped up inspections of charter flights to Cuba out of Miami, and plan to do the same at other airports, following a toughening of US policy toward the island, a top official said. A Treasury official told a House subcommittee on human rights and wellness that the tighter scrutiny led to the seizure of \$10,000 in unauthorized currency from one passenger. The maximum a passenger can take to Cuba is \$3,000. "Already, in response to the president's announcement, Customs and Border Protection inspectors have stepped up their efforts by examining nearly all of the charter flights departing from Miami," said Richard Newcomb, Treasury's director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control, or OFAC. (Reuters, 16/10/03)

October 16: US President George W. Bush could apply Chapter III of the Helms-Burton Act as a means of generating greater international pressure on the Cuban regime. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega, announced that the new commission created by Bush to step up support for the Cuban opposition could start operating at the end of October. (Notimex, 16/10/03)

October 17: Cuban ballet dancers have brought their fiery passion and Russian-based technique to American audiences for decades, despite political tensions between the two countries. That tradition continues when the Ballet Nacional de Cuba launches an American tour - its first since November 2001 - and Cuban superstar José Manuel Carreño debuts with the Boston Ballet in "Don Quixote." Mr. Carreño, who marks his first performance with Boston Ballet, has also danced with the English National Ballet and the Royal Ballet in London. For eight years, he's been a member of American Ballet Theatre. (Christian Science Monitor, 17/10/03)

October 17: At a conference of Cuban and US tourism operators, both sides said limited hotel space could restrict any increase in American tourism, even if politics allows it. "Pent-up demand is going to be huge" after decades of restrictions on US visits, said Robert Whitley, president of the United States Tour Operators Association, which represents companies moving 10 million tourists a year. Most estimates say at least 1 million Americans - and perhaps many more - could try to visit Cuba in the first year after a travel opening. Miguel Figueras, adviser to Cuba's Tourism Ministry, said that figure could reach 2.5 million to 3 million in five years. Cuba's rapidly growing tourist industry accounts for 40 percent of the Cuban government's foreign trade income. It expects to serve 1.9 million tourists this year, most from Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Britain. (Reuters, 19/10/03)

October 18: "We are a large industry and sometimes we do not use the political power we have in terms of jobs, in terms of votes," said Brad Belt, executive director of the new Association of Travel Related Industry Professionals (TRIP). The group organized a conference in Cancun on Cuban travel. If they are successful, Fidel Castro's government could see a dramatic increase in

the number of tourists - expected to be 1.9 million this year - who have become the island's largest source of hard currency. (AP, 18/10/03)

October 18: US charter companies that fly some 150,000 people to Cuba annually charged that US officials are harassing their clients even though they have permits to visit the communist island. "Customs and Treasury agents are going to every single flight that departs from Miami for Cuba, and they are questioning every single passenger about their licenses and how much money they are taking," said Tessie Aral, vice president of Miami-based ABC Charters, Inc. Other charter operators meeting with Cuban officials at a three-day travel industry conference in Cancun said their passengers faced similar scrutiny. Complaints focused on US Customs and Border Protection and Treasury Department officials at Miami's international airport, where all but two of 30 weekly flights to the Caribbean island nation depart. (Reuters, 18/10/03)

October 19: About 40 American tour operators visited Cuba, ignoring the US administration's toughening crackdown on travel to the country. The Americans flew to Havana for a firsthand look at tourist locales after a two-day Cuba travel conference in the Mexican Caribbean resort of Cancun. "We are now asking when - and not if" the US restrictions on travel to Cuba will be eliminated, said Matt Grayson, government affairs director for the National Tour Association. Conference organizer Kirby Jones of Washington said a loophole in the US travel restrictions allowed the operators to visit the island legally for the day because they were fully hosted and did not spend any money. The group was flying back to Cancun in the evening. (Canadian Press, AP, 19/10/03)

October 19: Fidel Castro told American tour operators that if US restrictions on travel are lifted, visitors will find Cuban tourism workers to be well educated. Tourism workers must have good knowledge of a broad range of subjects, Castro told the group during a surprise encounter at Havana's convention center. "If not, how will they speak with the tourists?" he said. Castro told the Americans that Cuba depended on tourism to pay for its free healthcare and education programs. "We are very appreciative of what you are doing," Castro told the group, referring to lobbying efforts in Washington to end US restrictions on travel to Cuba. Castro did not comment on the Bush administration's opposition to loosening travel restrictions for Americans who want to visit Cuba, and its campaign to crack down on illegal travel to the island. (AP, Reuters, 20/10/03)

October 19: A US Marine patrol has saved 62 undocumented migrants from a potential disaster at sea near Puerto Rico, says the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In a statement, the agency said the migrants -- four from Cuba, and 58 from the Dominican Republic - were aboard a craft that had begun to sink and was about to capsize when it was intercepted by ICE agents. The rescue prevented what ICE said could have been one of the worst tragedies involving undocumented aliens in Puerto Rico. (The Washington Files, 27/10/03)

October 20: Caspar Weinberger, who served as secretary of defense under President Ronald Reagan from 1981 to 1987, said during a trip to Miami-Dade County that he expected Fidel Castro to remain in place for "quite a long time" and that economic sanctions against the island should not be relaxed. However, the 86-year-old chairman of Forbes Inc. said that he did not think that the dictator poses an imminent threat to US interests, because the economic weakness of the communist island had degraded its military capability. (The Miami Herald, 20/10/03)

October 20: A total of 75 Cuban immigrants attempting to enter illegally into the United States, in two groups, were intercepted at sea by the US Coast Guard and sent back to Cuba, said the US Coast Guard. Five individuals suspected of organizing the trips were arrested for human smuggling. (AFP, 20/10/03)

October 21: The United States is working with its neighbours to promote democracy in Cuba, said Roger Noriega to Congress. "Promoting democracy in Venezuela, Haiti and Cuba is a task

we share with all our neighbours," he said to the International Relations Committee of the House of Representatives. (AFP, 21/10/03)

October 23: The Senate joined the House of Representatives in striking at the four-decade-old policy of making travel to Cuba a criminal act, putting Congress on a collision course with Bush administration efforts to step up enforcement of travel restrictions. "The travel ban does nothing to hurt Fidel Castro," said Senator Byron Dorgan (Democrat- North Dakota). "It only harms Americans." He was co-sponsor of the measure, passed 59-36, that bars use of government money to enforce current travel restrictions. The votes in the two Republican-controlled chambers came despite a White House warning that President George W. Bush would be advised to veto the bill if it includes the Cuba provision. The Cuba vote did not reach the two-thirds margin needed to overturn a presidential veto. (The Toronto Star, The Globe & Mail, 24/10/03)

October 23: Another member of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba has defected, the fifth to do so since the company began its current tour of the United States. Adiaris Almeida, 19, who said in Miami that she was forced to change her name from Adriana when she joined the BNC, is expected to request political asylum in the near future. Almeida joins Gema Diaz, Cervilio Amador, Luis Valdes and another BNC member whom she did not identify. (EFE, 23/10/03)

October 23: Cuban Lawyer Rodolfo Dávalos considers that the impossibility of the US District Attorney's Office to deny the appeal of the five Cubans arrested in this country continues to put the judicial process in a form of legal limbo. At a TV Roundtable discussion, Dávalos admitted that the report given by the US Attorney's Office does not refute, at any time, the reason that led the Cubans to present the appeal of the severe sentences imposed by a Miami Court, in 2001. The 80 page document denies the 24 appeal reasons presented by the Defense (the total of five appeals) with political arguments, so it must be annulled for the well being of the US justice, Dávalos continued. (Prensa Latina, 24/10/03)

October 23: Three Cuban sports officials said they failed to receive American visas to attend a regional volleyball meeting that opened in Atlanta the same day. Angel Iglesias, vice president of the Cuban Institute of Sports, told reporters that US visas never arrived for him, Omelio Castillo, president of the Cuban Volleyball Federation, and Jorge Enrique Luzon, member of the legal commission of the International Volleyball Federation. "Cuba denounces this arbitrary act excluding it from the meeting," Iglesias told a late afternoon news conference. (The Miami Herald, 24/10/03)

October 24: US assistant secretary of state, Roger Noriega, confirmed that president George W. Bush is going to veto a bill passed by the Senate aimed at easing travel restrictions to Cuba. (BBC Mundo, 24/10/03)

October 24: Cuban officials said the US Senate vote on easing the ban on travel to Cuba confirmed that most Americans want to improve relations with Havana, but acknowledged the initiative may be blocked short of becoming law. "It's new proof that both [Congress] chambers are in favor of a political change, just like the majority of North American society," Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque said. But Roque acknowledged that President Bush has threatened to veto the measure if it is approved by the full Congress. "I don't know what new trick President Bush will use to avoid [change]," Roque said. "I guess he could veto, ignoring the public opinion of his country to favor groups from the small and corrupt minority in Miami." National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón said that while the measure approved by the Senate likely will not survive, "either way, events like this (...) [are] indicative of the will of the majority of North American legislators in the case of Cuba." Alarcón added that Bush was being pressured "from the bottom" by the growing demands for an end to Washington's "hostile and war-like politics" toward Cuba. (The Miami Herald, 25/10/03)

October 27: The Cuban government recently locked up in an airport lounge three Miami lawyers who are defending clients in a hijacking case so they could not talk to witnesses or see the crime scene, according to federal court documents. The lawyers' court papers say they went through court and diplomatic channels and obtained visas to travel to Cuba for three days in late August. They planned to photograph the crime scene, an airport on the Isle of Youth, and to find witnesses who might help clear six men accused of the March 19 hijacking of a chartered DC-3 flight. Attorney Ana Jhones charged that the Cuban government "purposely and deliberately" thwarted the defense investigation. The defense now is asking for help from its usual courtroom adversary, the US government, to bring Cuban defense witnesses to the federal courthouse in Key West for the trial. (Sun Sentinel, 27/10/03)

October 27: The Montana Farmers Union and other state agricultural producers are eager to begin trade with Cuba under a deal struck last month between the state's congressional leaders and Cuba's largest importer of food. If the deal holds together, Hi-Country Beef Jerky sticks and other Montana-based agricultural products could soon be heading to the isolated socialist nation, which sits only 20 minutes by jet from US shores. Brooks Daily, vice president of the Montana Farmers Union, addressed a sparse audience at Carroll College where he shared the success of Montana's recent delegation to Cuba. The delegation looked to advance normalized trade and travel between the two nations. (Tribune Business News, 27/10/03)

October 27: Nine Cuban migrants washed up on Smathers Beach, a half-mile east of the Key West Airport, in a small yellow boat with a two-piston engine, police said. The migrants, all men between the ages of 32 and 53, said their voyage from Cuba took 17 hours. Medics determined that the migrants were in good health, and officers searched their vessel for weapons or drugs before transporting the men to the Coast Guard base for processing. (The Miami Herald, 27/10/03)

October 27: Roger Noriega, US assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere, ruled out any softening of restrictions on Cuba - despite growing pressure from US lawmakers to do so - in a speech at a local university prior to the two-day Special Conference on Security. Noriega also called Fidel Castro's regime "a dictatorship of ruffians" and said the US would redouble efforts to cut off foreign cash flows. "Rather than make unilateral concessions that could give Castro another terrible day in power, we will concentrate our efforts on helping the Cuban people and denying the Cuban government the hard currency it needs to support its police state," according to a written version of Noriega's speech distributed by the US Embassy. (AP, 27/10/03)

October 28: Cuba-based jamming of US satellite broadcasts to Iran was carried out by Iranians, not by the Cuban government, and it has stopped, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said. The US State Department in July said it had formally asked the Cuban government to investigate the jamming, which US officials said was disrupting both US government and private television broadcasts aimed at the opposition in Iran. (Reuters, 28/10/03)

October 28: Otto Reich, the White House special envoy for the Western Hemisphere, said that one poor nation that President Bush will not negotiate with until a regime change is Cuba. "This president will not do business with a tyrant," Reich said. (AP, 28/10/03)

October 29: A rumored radio broadcast that three missing Naples boaters could be in Cuban territory, perhaps in jail there, made its way to the US State department, prompting an inquiry of the Cuban government. State Department spokesman Curtis Cooper said that the agency contacted US Interests Section officials in Havana who are checking whether the Cuban government has any information about the missing trio. US Interests Section spokesman Ignacio Hernández said he was aware of the case, but, "we don't have any information right now." (The News Press, 29/10/03)

October 29: The charanga band Orquesta Aragon canceled its performance in the US because of problems obtaining visas from the American government, the band's representatives said. Attorney Bill Martinez, of San Francisco, California, who represents the Cuban-based band, said band member's visas were delayed - not denied. (PressOfAtlantic City.Com, 30/10/03)

October 29: Legislation that would relax the ban on travel to Cuba is headed for failure even though it passed both the House and Senate. Lawmakers said that Republican leaders probably would strip the provision from a transportation funding bill during House and Senate negotiations so President Bush would not have to veto an important appropriations bill. Senator Richard Shelby, Republican-Alabama, a key negotiator who will help craft the final bill, wants the travel ban enforced and said, "Everyone is very aware of the veto threat." While declining to admit defeat, Senator Max Baucus, Democrat-Montana, said "A veto would create too much of a firestorm. They (Republican leaders) will find some other way to finesse it." The widely expected result is that when the House and Senate conferees meet to iron out differences in the two transportation bills, the Cuba provision will be quietly dropped or changed to render it impossible to enact. (AP, 29/10/03)

October 29: US linguist and political dissident Noam Chomsky said that President Bush will have to "manufacture" another threat to American security to win reelection in 2004 after US failure in occupying Iraq. Chomsky, attending a Latin American social sciences conference in Cuba, said that after the "disaster" of the US invasion of Iraq, Bush could turn his sights on Communist-run Cuba, which his administration officials have charged with developing a biological weapons research program, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor of linguistics said. (Reuters, 29/10/03)

October 30: During the second annual dinner and reception offered by Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), before approximately 150 people gathered in Miami, Florida, Democratic candidate Dennis Kucinich, said "If elected president I would bring down the failed 'blockade' against Cuba". The crowd reacted with a standing and rousing ovation. (Radio Progreso Weekly, 30/10/03)

October 30: Cuban non-governmental organizations (NGOs) expressed their disagreement with the over four decade US blockade on the island, in a declaration presented to the Foreign Ministry. The text published by Granma newspaper notes that this policy of prohibitions and its recent reinforcement are signs of a conflict "between an independent Cuba or a Cuba annexed to the United States". "The blockade aims to destroy the Cuban Revolution, imposing the US government's will through sanctions and force, in total disregard of international laws", the text emphasizes. (Prensa Latina, 31/10/03)

October 30: Joni Scott, US citizen, traveled to Cuba to distribute Bibles and help organize a prayer group, but the US government says she broke the law and must pay a \$10,000 fine. Scott, a teacher at a Christian school in Indianapolis, flew to Cuba through Canada with a church group in 1999. But she traveled without the permission of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which enforces a 40-year-old US embargo on Cuba. (Gannett News Service, 30/10/03)

October 30: Cuban baseball stars Maels Rodriguez and Yobal Dueñas confirmed in a radio interview that they have defected with the goal of playing professional baseball in the United States. The pair, reported missing by Cuban authorities, surfaced on Miami Spanish-language radio station WQBA. Rodriguez, a 24-year-old right-handed pitcher, would easily be the best major-league prospect to defect from Cuba. Dueñas, a 6-2, 187-pound second baseman from Pinar del Rio, is a five-tool player and former Cuban stolen base champ. Dueñas confirmed he was suspended by Cuban officials for his relationship with the family of recent defector and former teammate Jose Ariel Contreras. (The Miami Herald, 31/10/03)

October 31: Fidel Castro has praised California Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger's muscles, but wonders how much brain power the former Mr. Universe has. "To judge from the photographs, he has a lot of muscle, but they have not tested him to see how much muscle he has in the brain," the bearded revolutionary said during a five-hour speech closing a Latin American social sciences conference. "He may well have more force in the arms than in the brain," Castro, said. "At least he has the merit of having done a lot of exercise," added the Cuban leader. Anti-Castro exiles in Miami have called on California's future Republican governor not to trade with the communist-run island. (Reuters, 31/10/03)

October 31: The Cuban Book Institute lamented Washington's decision to deny visas to a Cuban cultural official and a poet to participate in a book fair in Puerto Rico to which they had both been invited. "Once again, this is an attempt to silence voices from the world of Cuban culture," stated an official note from the Institute. The text went on to say that another group invited to the event is still awaiting a reply from the State Department stating whether or not their entry has been approved. The US authorities denied visas to both Máximo Salgado Perdigón, the Institute's president and poet Aymara Aymerich. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/11/03)

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