



FOCAL

Canadian Foundation for the Americas
Fondation canadienne pour les Amériques
Fundación Canadiense para las Américas
Fundação Canadense para as Américas

Research forum on Cuba

Chronicle on Cuba

November 2005

Highlights

Domestic Affairs: Fidel Castro mobilizes tens of thousands of young people and launches a national wide campaign against corruption and illegalities. Cuban authorities make dozens of arrests related with the corruption campaign. Fidel Castro meets with Cuba's Roman Catholic Church. Repression against the dissident movement continues. Fidel Castro stresses the need to create a “totally new society” in Cuba.

Economy: Canada signs an agreement with Cuba calling for the sale of 100,000 metric tons of wheat. Venezuela heads Cuba's list of most important commercial partners. The Cuban government launches a campaign against private markets and business. Fidel Castro attacks private business and announces hikes in wages, pensions and electricity rates. Cuba's economic growth may surpass nine percent in 2005, says Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez.

Foreign Affairs: About 300 Cubans participate in the “People’s Summit”, parallel to the Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina. The Iranian and Cuban governments strengthen diplomatic ties. The Cuban-Venezuelan solidarity campaign Operation Milagro establishes its first base outside of Cuba in Bolivia. Cuba opens its embassy in Islamabad. President Martin Torrijos of Panama visits Cuba ahead of dozens of eye patients traveling for free operations.

Security: Cuban and Chinese military leaders meet in Havana to reaffirm ties between the two communist countries.

US-Cuba Relations: A US plan to send three American relief specialists to Cuba to assess damage from Hurricane Wilma is suspended due to lack of agreement between the two governments. The US becomes Cuba's biggest food supplier. Cuba receives a record UN General Assembly vote against the US embargo. A key supporter of exile militant Luis Posada Carriles is arrested in Miami.



Domestic Affairs

November 1: The absence of medical staff sparked a public disturbance in the emergency ward of a hospital in Arroyo Naranjo, Havana. Approximately 200 patients awaiting medical attention protested violently forcing the police to

intervene. The mobilization of doctors towards missions in Venezuela and other countries has affected public health services in the island. (*Puente Informativo*, 1/11/05)

November 3: Non-violent opposition organizations delivered an open letter to the Provincial Court of Villa Clara demanding the cessation of acts of harassment against dissidents in the city of Santa Clara. More than twenty civil society organizations endorsed the demand. (*Cubanet*, 3/11/05)

November 7: The municipalities of Centro Habana and Habana Vieja are experiencing a wave of arrests by the police and other bodies of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior. Most of those arrested are young Cubans who are residents in other provinces and have been sent back to their places of origin. An activist of human rights said the arrests may respond to recent aggressions perpetrated against foreign tourists. (*Cubanet*, 7/11/05)

November 8: Institutional relations between the Catholic Church in Cuba and the State "can be improved," if consideration is given to the fact that both pursue "the common good of society at large," affirmed the magazine "Palabra Nueva", of the archdiocese of Havana. Palabra Nueva states that any plans for the celebration of 70 years of relations between Cuba and the Holy See "should entail an improvement of relations between the Cuban State and the Church." (*AFP*, 8/11/05)

November 8: Cuba's most prominent dissident urged the island's Communist government to take part in a public discussion of a plan for reform that calls for dialogue and the release of political prisoners. The project is outlined in a document titled "Common Ground, a Path and Hope for Cuba," drafted over two months with contributions from dozens of dissident organizations, opposition leader Oswaldo Payá said in an interview with the press. The document calls for the "immediate and unconditional" release of political prisoners, respect for human rights, freedom of association and peaceful protest, freedom of speech, free elections and political pluralism. It also proposes a process of national reconciliation and forgiveness that averts "vengeance and settling of scores" and a model of economic freedom "grounded in humanism and social consciousness." (*EFE*, 8/11/05)

November 8: After several decades without erecting temples in Cuba, the Catholic Church began work on a new building for the San Carlos and San Ambrosio Seminar School, in the outskirts of Havana. According to sources with the Archdiocese, the project is being financed with donations made to the Church, without involvement of the Cuban State. (*AFP*, 8/11/05)

November 9: Health condition of political prisoners get worse, a dissident human rights organization said, and called for their immediate release. In a document issued to the press, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) mentioned the cases of Héctor Palacios, 64, Nelson Aguilar, 60, and Omar Pernet 60, sentenced to 13-25-years in jail and who have been recently hospitalized for long periods of time. Others, like Ricardo González, 35, José Luis García, 40, Julio César Gálvez, 60, and Francisco Chaviano, 52, have remained in the hospital of the Combinado del Este prison, in the outskirts of Havana. (*AFP*, 9/11/05)

November 11: The 18th edition of the Cuban Festival of African roots, Wemilere 2005, will honor the Republic of Mali and late Cuban singer and twice Grammy nominee, Lazaro Ross. The Festival, slated in Guanabacoa, 7 miles from Havana, will gather more than 200 musicians, dancers, researchers, sculptors and painters from different countries. Wemilere, which means Orisha celebration in the Yoruba language, aims to preserve and promote African-Cuban identity and culture. (*Prensa Latina*, 11/11/05)

November 11: Cuba's computer technology policy gives priority to the social uses of information technology and telecommunications, while excluding private access to tools like the Internet. "As we are able to afford them, new areas will open up," the Cuban minister of Information Technology and Communications, Ignacio González Planas, assured the press at an Internet forum organized by the foreign ministry. González Planas did not, however, clarify whether

those "new areas" would include the possibility of access by Cuban citizens to the Internet from personal accounts on their home computers. According to official information, there were 335,000 computers in Cuba at the end of June this year, or 2.98 computers per 100 inhabitants. But only 13 out of every 1,000 Cubans had access to the Internet in 2004. González Planas stated that economic conditions in Cuba prevent mass access to the Internet, and therefore the government has elected to make such resources available for social use, through collective centres, e-mail and web-surfing rooms, schools, universities and computer youth clubs. "This is definitely more effective and more citizens can have access than if, for example, we installed connections in a few homes, which only a small élite could afford and would use up a large part of our band-width," said González Planas. However, the e-mail and web-surfing rooms are few and far between, and are mainly located in the tourist hotels. Furthermore, they only accept convertible pesos (local currency equivalent to the US dollar), and they do not always admit Cuban citizens. (*IPS* , 11/11/05)

November 12: Cuba is home to some 11.2 million residents, three-quarters of whom live in urban areas, according to the communist island's third census since the 1959 revolution that launched Fidel Castro to power. The census, taken three years ago, showed Cuba's population grew by almost 1.5 million since the last census in 1981, according to the Communist Party daily *Granma*. It was not clear why it took three years to report the data compiled in September 2002. The average age of Cubans is 35, though nearly 15 percent of the population is aged 60 or older, state-run newspapers reported, citing the census results. The population is split equally by gender, but Juan Carlos Alfonso, who directed the census, predicted that women will be the majority on the island within a few years, according to *Juventud Rebelde*, Cuba's communist youth newspaper. An increasing number of Cubans are of mixed ethnicities, with a quarter classified as mestizo in the survey. There is electricity in about 95 percent of all homes, while 96 percent of households have cooking facilities. The census found there are slightly more than three people per household on the island. (*AP* , 12/11/05)

November 13: During negotiations prior to the Information Society Summit in Tunisia, Cuba will pursue allowing advantages of the Information Society to be universalized, official sources declared. Cuba's Vice Minister of Information Technology and Communications Jorge Luis Perdomo told journalists that, "the digital divide between rich and developing countries can only be ascended with the concepts of social justice, people's involvement, equity and solidarity as basic principles. Cuba has always defended the idea that the massive use of ICT is not a purpose, but rather a powerful instrument to achieve development, Perdomo stressed. For this reason it is necessary to establish a fair international economic order based on real participation of all peoples, to adopt decisions for their well-being and future, he said. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/11/05)

November 14: La Villa de San Cristobal de La Habana, Havana's full name, is preparing to celebrate the 486th anniversary of its founding with a huge effort to clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Wilma spawned the worst flooding of its long history. Once known as the "Pearl of the Caribbean," this island's main city with its 2.2 million inhabitants is shaking off the effects of the hurricane. Most of the coast-hugging road is already passable to pedestrians and Havana residents can once again stroll along the Malecon for a breath of fresh air during the long blackouts suffered almost daily by a large part of the city. Any good tour of the Malecon must end, or begin, in Old Havana, the heart of the city and its main attraction. Designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, Old Havana contains more than 3,000 buildings of historic or architectural interest within its 142 hectares (325 acres). Many Havana residents are sure to be present at midnight on November 15 on the Plaza de Armas to commemorate the founding of the city. There, they will pass three times around the plaza's high-sacred ceiba tree, throw a few coins into the air and ask the city's patron, St. Christopher, to grant them a wish. Among those in attendance at the long-standing ceremony will be Eusebio Leal, the city historian and the moving force behind the recovery of old central Havana, who says that the city "is a piece of the memory of Cuba, of the Americas and the world." (*EFE*, 14/11/05)

November 15: Elsa Morejón, the wife of political prisoner Dr Elías Biscet, reported to the press that the director of Combinado del Este Prison in Havana, Lieutenant Colonel Miguel Azcuy, informed her and Biscet's relatives that he is currently in "Maximum Severity System: Phase 1" and that as long as he refuses to put on the uniform of common

prisoner, he will not receive any privileges; his situation in prison could get even worse. The prison director confirmed that due to a new administration at Combinado del Este Penitentiary, the situation of the Cuban doctor changed after August, 2005. Dr. Biscet, who suffers from hypertension, chronic gastritis, and high cholesterol, has not been able to receive the food items his family brings him. The number of family visits has been reduced, and instead of being every 45 days, the visits will now be every four months (two hours long), during which time Dr. Biscet will be able to receive his items of personal hygiene and some food. (*Puente Informativo*, 15/11/05)

November 15: Political prisoner Jorge Luis García Pérez (Antúnez) began a hunger strike, reported his sister, Bertha. Antúnez is confined along with dangerous inmates, in overcrowded conditions of that propitiate violence. He's demanding a cell transfer and his right to family telephone calls. Antúnez has been in prison for 15 years. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 17/11/05)

November 16: Delegates participating in the 5th Continental Congress on Natural Medicine sessioning in Havana will discuss the antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties of this country's Vimang medicine. Vimang is a mango-based natural product created by the Cuban Chemical Center to fight diseases such as lupus erythematosus, diabetes, lymphomas, leukemia and skin conditions. The natural medicine sold in over 20 nations is also effective against joints and muscular pains. (*Prensa Latina*, 16/11/05)

November 17: Fidel Castro met with top leaders of Cuba's Roman Catholic Church to mark the nation's 70 years of diplomatic ties with the Vatican, the island's official media reported. The island's top Catholic churchman Cardinal Jaime Ortega, all of Cuba's bishops, and the Holy See's diplomatic representative in Cuba, Papal Nuncio Monsignor Luigi Bonazzi, were among church leaders who met with Castro and other government leaders, the Communist Party daily Granma reported. During a dinner hosted for the group by Castro, the Cuban leader recalled the historic visit by the late Pope John Paul II to the island in January 1988, and "expressed that the greatness of John Paul II was his wonderful way of seeing and understanding the problems of the world today," the newspaper said in a front page story. (*AP*, 17/11/05)

November 17: Almost 1,000 species of the endemic flora of Cuba, about a third of the existing total in the country, face extinction, according to census data released by news agency Prensa Latina. The research findings were presented by specialists from the Botanical Garden of Cienfuegos, the oldest herbarium in the country, during a scientific workshop organized on the occasion of the 105 th anniversary of its foundation. (*AFP*, 17/11/05)

November 17: Cuba said it was considering researching a vaccine against bird flu, warning that antiviral drugs available today are barely enough to protect "the rich people in rich nations" from a pandemic. "We have taken the first steps to think about a possible vaccine for animals and humans," the deputy director of Cuba's Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Dr. Carlos Borroto, said. "We don't want to raise expectations because we are still studying this," he told reporters. Cuba has asked the World Health Organization for strains of the virus to begin work. Borroto said only two antiviral drugs made by multinational pharmaceutical firms had proved effective for bird flu, but were not being produced in sufficient quantities. (*Reuters*, 17/11/05)

November 17: Showing no visible signs of health problems and dressed in his fatigues, Fidel Castro told an audience of university students that he would not insist on remaining in power if he ever became too sick to lead the country. "If I don't feel I'm in condition, I'll call the [Communist] Party and tell them I don't feel I'm in condition (...) that please, someone take over the command," he said. But Castro also indicated such a scenario was unlikely to occur soon, saying he exercises regularly "and don't neglect myself in any way." "I could be like El Cid Campeador," Castro said, referring to the medieval Spanish warrior. "I would recommend that the [Communist] Party put me on a horse -- like Bush -- winning battles even after death." The Revolution needs the support of the people to take forward all of the measures underway at this time, not just to eliminate social inequalities, provide better living conditions and save resources like electric energy, but also to unleash a battle against crime and the breeding grounds for an infinite number of violations,

Castro affirmed. Among mistakes that have been committed in the country, he criticized the erroneous idea of those who thought that they knew all about socialism, about how it is built, as if it were an exact science, pushing into the background a fundamental principle: the dialectics of materialism. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*The Miami Herald, Granma*, 17,18/11/05)

November 17: After several days of interesting analysis on the therapeutical effects of homeopathy, the 5th Continental Congress on Natural Products and Medicine is winding up at Havana's International Conference Center. Antioxidant action and the treatment of diseases produced by some virus and parasites were among the main issues tackled by experts from more than 10 countries attending the meeting. Other topics included economic benefits, security and low toxicity of natural-origin compounds. (*Prensa Latina*, 17/11/05)

November 18: For the 9th time in less than three months, the house of non-violent opposition activist Alberto Moreno Fonseca, in Manzanillo, was stoned by Fidel Castro supporters with the tacit approval of on-looker local police. The demonstrators shouted slogans like, "Down with human rights!", "Down with the worm nest!", and "Long live Fidel Castro!" (*Cubanet*, 18/11/05)

November 19: A Cuban court sentenced three Jamaican men caught smuggling 1,340 pounds (610 kg) of marijuana to prison terms of up to 20 years, the ruling Communist Party newspaper *Granma* reported. Rudolph Allen Black, Malson Cambell and Robert Wallace were arrested last November after their speedboat ran out of fuel and was drifting near a key off Cuba's northeastern coast. Cuban officials said the men had thrown the bales of marijuana overboard. The drugs were recovered and later incinerated by Cuban officials. Cambell was sentenced to 20 years in prison, Black to 18 years and Wallace 17 years, *Granma* reported. (*Reuters*, 19/11/05)

November 20: With an outstanding performance of its super heavy weight Odlanier Solis, who won his third consecutive crown, Cuba recouped World Boxing title in Miangyang, China, by winning four golds, one silver and three bronzes. Under coach Sarbelio Fuentes, the Cuban boxers totalled 54 points to lead the competition, while reigning monarch Russia came behind with three gold and 41 points. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/11/05)

November 23: Centered on the salary, pension and social welfare increases and the new electricity rates, Fidel Castro said the moment had come to announce the measures, and that they were crucial for the future of the country. Castro spoke on "The Round Table", a nightly TV and radio program hosted by journalist Randy Alonso. Castro expressed the urgency to adopt the conservation and salary measures before the end of the year, as part of the programs being developed by the Revolution. "This is a Socialist Revolution that seeks true equality", something Castro said has not occurred with the history of humanity over the last four or five thousand years. The Cuban president said that the country needs to openly talk about these problems, that there is no culture of economics in Cuba and that most people don't understand where money comes from. The Cuban leader said that the current problems affecting Cuban society can not be fought only by legal means, and that the extent of the problem must be met with a sizeable force of conscientious individuals, like social workers, joined by another considerable corps, that of the university students. Fidel recalled that no other society in history has advanced as quickly as Cuba in eliminating social inequalities in order to offer all its citizens equity, justice and the best possible standard of living. The Cuban leader said he trusted the values present in Cuban young people and spoke highly of the human capital developed by the island over the years, which he described as "our most valuable resource." This new offensive, designed to create a "totally new society," will never include anything that does not benefit "those who live on a salary, on a pension," Castro continued. (*Granma*, 24/11/05)

November 23: Fidel Castro criticized Cuban baseball players who have left the country for multimillion-dollar contracts in the major leagues, saying the island always finds better players to replace them. During a five-hour appearance on state television, Castro remarked on those players "who cannot resist the millions of the major leagues" and acknowledged that baseball "is the sport in which we have been beaten the most" when it comes to defections. Still,

the 79-year-old leader insisted Cuban baseball has always survived the losses. "When one leaves, another 10 better players emerge," he said. Among those who have left are pitchers Orlando Hernández and José Ariel Contreras, who contributed to the recent World Series victory by the Chicago White Sox. (*MercuryNews.Com*, 24/11/05)

November 23: Dozens of young men and women were arrested in The Güinera neighborhood, in the Arroyo Naranjo municipality of Havana, during a large raid launched by the National Police. The detainees filled four trucks that were taken to a police station in the Capri neighborhood. Apparently, the police operation was directed against individuals who neither worked nor studied, engaging instead in business activities deemed illegal by the authorities. (*Cubamet*, 23/11/05)

November 24: A rabble organized by the State Security Service, the Cuban secret police, foiled a meeting of non-violent opposition activists in the house of Martha Beatriz Roque, the president of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in Cuba. More than 20 people surrounded Roque's residence and prevented several visitors from entering the premises. (*Puente Informativo*, 24/11/05)

November 25: The National Revolutionary Police (PNR) announced that it will place close to 200 newly graduated additional agents in the densely populated municipalities of Centro Habana and Plaza de la Revolución, in the Cuban capital. More than 153 police officers and 26 patrol car drivers have been hastily put through police training courses. (*World Data Service*, 25/11/05)

November 28: Cuban born Oscar Visiedo says that when he helped bring the Internet to Cuba in 1992, he faced three daunting obstacles: the US economic embargo, technological shortcomings and ominous state security. Thirteen years later, steep prices and strict government controls largely keep ordinary Cubans from the World Wide Web, while the island's authorities still blame the embargo as the reason the country stalled on the information highway. So, even while the Internet boomed in Cuba - the government alone has at least 200 sites - usage remains among the lowest in the Western Hemisphere, and the hurdles remain unchanged. "There is a fear - a fear that is practically pathological - of access to information," said Visiedo, who worked at the government office that introduced Cuba to the Internet, back when nobody there knew what it was. Visiedo currently lives in Miami. While Cuba boasts that it has computers in every school, a UN Human Development Report says nine of every 1,000 Cubans are Internet users, compared with 288 in Costa Rica and 44 in Honduras. Even Haiti, with 500,000 Internet users, has a higher rate. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/11/05)

November 29: The Catholic Church warned that the campaign against corruption launched by the Cuban government must not only target the administrative ranks, but it must also entail structural reforms and the rescue of society's moral values. "A country that wants to be rid of corruption (...) must carry out structural reforms (...) to stop the cycle of vices and find remedy for this evil," the catholic magazine "Palabra Nueva" pointed out. (*AFP*, 29/11/05)

November 29: Fidel Castro is mobilising tens of thousands of young people and threatening a Cultural Revolution-style humiliation of corrupt officials in what the Cuban leader characterises as a-do-or-die struggle against graft, pilfering and the "new rich". Thousands of student-age youths have taken over petrol stations and started working in refineries and riding in fuel trucks to monitor an industry where up to half of this precious resource was being stolen, according to receipts since the take-over began a month ago. Busloads of young people, armed with clipboards and energy-saving light bulbs, have appeared in some neighbourhoods as part of an energy-saving drive that includes stiff increases in prices. They hand out the bulbs while taking a census of the electrical appliances in each home, which they then characterise as well off, normal or poor - raising fears in the former that they are being classified as the "new rich". (*Financial Times*, 29/11/05)

November 29: The Cuban Communist party launched an assault two years ago on "corruption and illegalities" within its ranks and the state administration as it recentralised economic activity and control over hard currency after what it

characterised as "liberal errors" in the 1990s. Bureaucratic corruption and a booming black market are nothing new in state-run economies like Cuba's, but Fidel Castro said recently that market-oriented reforms such as decentralisation, authorisation of small private initiatives and circulation of the dollar alongside the peso, among other emergency measures taken after European communism's collapse, "increased these ills to the point where they have taken on a certain massive character (...) and inequality has grown". Oscar Espinosa, an economist recently released from prison after serving time for dissident activities, said the current campaign would simply create more hardship and more illegal activity. "What we need here is market reform, like in China or Vietnam. By returning to command economics and repression, they are simply throwing gas on the fire," he said. Raúl Castro, the defence minister and second in the Cuban hierarchy after his older brother Fidel, is reported to have told party officials 18 months ago: "Corruption will always be with us, but we must keep it at our ankles and never allow it to rise to our necks." (Financial Times, 29/11/05)

November 29: The State Security Police confiscated "counterrevolutionary" material, after conducting a search in the house of an independent journalist in the Isle of Pines. Carlos Serpa, an independent journalist and director of Lux Info Press, reported that the police was looking for publications issued by the Information Bridge Cuba-Miami Independent Press Bureau. "The search -conducted under a heavy military operative- lasted three hours and they confiscated two radio recorders, documents of the independent press bureau, "The New Herald" newspapers, and Lux-Info- Press Magazines as well as "Cartas de Cuba" Magazines. Pictures were taken of the confiscated material in front of two witnesses. The police told Serpa he was "following the steps of Favio Prieto Llorente", an independent journalist sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2003. (*Puente Informativo*, 29/11/05)

November 29: The 29th Congress of the Central American and Caribbean Pharmaceutical Federation opened at Havana's International Conference Center. During the event, Cuba detailed new vaccines and clinical trials, as well as described more than 40 years of research that has allowed pharmaceutical professionals to contribute knowledge to the improvement of health in Cuba and abroad. Dr. Eneida Pérez Santana, president of the Cuban Pharmaceutical Science Society and the organizing committee of the event, said that more than 300 delegates from 17 countries, including Cuba, participated in the Congress. (*Granma Internacional*, 29/11/05)

November 29: Traffic accidents are the first cause of death among Cuban teenagers, who accounted for 40 % of accidental fatalities in 2004, according to Department of Public Health (MINSAP) estimates. Accidents involving bicycles accounted for 57 % of the deaths, particularly among teenagers 10 to 14 years old. (*EFE*, 29/11/05)

November 30: Amid a surging wave of repression by the Cuban government, Cuba's political prisoners increasingly are resorting to "acts of desperation" - including hunger strikes, suicide attempts, and self-mutilation - in a cry for international recognition and solidarity, and to advance the cause of the island's liberation. "The prisoners are pleading to the world to pay attention as they work for liberty," said one of Cuba's leading prodemocracy activists, Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello. Late last month, Mario Enrique Mayo, a lawyer and independent journalist, locked away for more than two years in the Kilo 7 prison in Camaguey, demanded freedom from his jailers by taking a knife to his face and body. Mr. Mayo was one of 75 dissidents rounded up by the Castro regime in March 2003. In another act of self-mutilation, a prisoner of conscience in the Canaleta prison in Cuba's Ciego de Avila province, Manuel Fiallo, cut himself to protest prisoners' lack of medical care, according to a Cuban prison diary published in recent days on a Miami-based Cuban pro-democracy site, Payolibre.com. The leader of Cuba's Damas de blanco movement, Laura Pollan Toledo, told the press that other recent examples of those who carried out self-mutilation included Juan Carlos Herrera and Prospero Gainza Aguero, two of the 75 imprisoned in 2003. Mr. Herrera, Ms. Pollan said, has beaten himself repeatedly in prison to protest the horrible conditions suffered by detainees. Mr. Gainza, she said, sewed his mouth closed in an act of protest, rendering himself unable to speak or eat. (*The New York Sun*, 30/11/05)

November 30: Cuban lawyer Niurka Brito, who was fired from his job after denouncing a case of corruption, asked Cuban authorities to mediate in her case. "Right now (Fidel) Castro is heading a big national campaign against

corruption (...) I ask myself how is it that they are calling the population to fight against corruption and they haven't done anything in my case"?, Brito told the press. The Cuban lawyer worked as trade director at the Dairy Products Metropolitan Enterprise (Empresa Metropolitana de Productos Lácteos), where she was fired after denouncing five members of its staff in court for the theft of 34 tons of powder milk, dairies, and other products. Brito, 38, said that she has requested from several Cuban officials to mediate in her situation, but hasn't received any answer. She also sent a letter to UN Secretary General Koffi Annan denouncing her current circumstances. (*AFP*, 30/11/05)

Economy

November 2: Canada signed an agreement with Cuba calling for the sale of 100,000 metric tons of Canadian Western Red Spring Wheat during the 2005-2006 (August-July) crop year, according to the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). This represents the largest amount of Canadian wheat sold to Cuba since 1990-1991 and is the first since 1997, the CWB said. Valued at approximately C\$20 million, the deal is three times the most recent five-year average of CWB wheat sales to Cuba (about 37,000 tons). During the 2004-2005 season, Canada sold 77,000 tons of wheat to Cuba. (*Dow Jones*, 2/11/05)

November 2: Spanish businessmen are asking the Cuban and Spanish authorities to increase efforts to continue to expand investment in the island. The president of the Higher Council of Spanish Chambers of Commerce and the Association of Spanish Businessmen in Cuba (AEEC), which comprises 170 companies with interests in the island, requested "efforts" to increase Spanish participation at the Havana International Trade Show, FIHAV. (*El País*, 11/2/05)

November 2: Hurricanes helped flatten third-quarter profits at Sherritt International Corp., but the company was also hit by lower prices for nickel and cobalt, which together account for nearly half of its sales. Sherritt reported a profit of \$23.1-million or 13 cents a share for the three months ended September 30, compared with \$35.2-million or 20 cents for the same period in 2004. Sales from its metal division fell to \$83.8-million from \$100.9-million. Sherritt said its oil and gas, mining and power operations in Cuba were affected by hurricanes. (*Globe & Mail*, 3/11/05)

November 3: Cuba is interested in intensifying supplies of the Belarusian trucks, construction materials and equipment, household appliances, clothes, footwear and foodstuffs from Belarus. A Belarusian delegation headed by Minsk mayor Mikhail Pavlov is on a visit in Havana to discuss its plans to increase the import from Belarus and to open an assembly production of the Belarusian tractors in Cuba. (*The National Center of Legal Information of the Republic of Belarus*, 3/11/05)

November 3: Repeated equipment failure in two key power plants in Cuba is the cause of increased power outages affecting the population, announced the Electrical Union, the national power company. With one of the thermoelectric power plants undergoing maintenance and generators unexpectedly going off-line at the Felton plant, "power supply to the population is being affected significantly," representatives from the Union told the press. (*EFE*, 3/11/05)

November 3: Trade exchange between Mexico and Cuba has grown rapidly with a total value of 200 million USD for the first six months of this year, 27 million USD more than last year, said the Mexican ambassador to Cuba. Speaking to reporters at the inaugural ceremony of the 23rd Havana Trade Fair (FIHAV 2005), the Mexican ambassador said 2004 was the most difficult time for the two sides to increase bilateral trade. The import-export turnover reached only 173 million USD, a 60 percent decline in comparison with the average figure of 1990s. (*VNA*, 3/11/05)

November 4: The governments of Cuba and North Korea signed in Havana a Protocol of Commercial Exchange, during the 24th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for Economic, Scientific and Technical Consultation

between the two countries. Cooperation between the DPRK and Cuba encompasses the sectors of agriculture, sports, education, transport, oil, energy conservation, commerce, as well as scientific and technological exchange. (*AFP*, 7/11/05)

November 4: Venezuela hopes to double business with Cuba to \$4 billion (euro 3.4 billion) next year, including investments in housing projects and two Cuban oil refineries, said a commerce official attending an annual trade fair on the island. The South American country is already Cuba's top trading partner with \$1.4 billion in commerce annually -- the vast majority in exports of Venezuelan petroleum. But Roger Figueroa, Venezuela's vice foreign commerce minister, told the press that his country plans to invest at least \$2 billion more for the new projects with Cuba, and that annual commerce could reach another \$2 billion by year's end. The \$2 billion in investments includes \$1 billion to construct housing in both countries, and the rest for the operation of oil refineries in the southern region of Cienfuegos and the northern coast of Matanzas, he said. (*AP*, 4/11/05)

November 5: China is eager to increase its trading and cooperative relations with Cuba in all areas, Vice President of the Chinese Trade Promotion Council Zhang Nei said at the 23rd International Havana Trade Fair (FIHAV 2005). Nine Chinese enterprises were showcasing products, including electronics, informatics and telecoms equipment, computers, chemicals, electrical appliances and toys, at FIHAV 2005. Speaking at the China Day festival within the FIHAV 2005 framework, Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade Raul de la Nuez said that two-way trade between the two countries has so far this year increased by 48 percent over 2004. (*VNA*, 5/11/05)

November 7: Cuba's trade volume reached 7.5 billion dollars last year, with Venezuela heading Cuba's list of most important commercial partners, a Cuban official said. The communist-ruled island's imports were worth more than 5.6 billion dollars, with exports of 1.9 billion, leaving Cuba with a foreign trade deficit of 3.8 billion dollars, according to Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Antonio Luis Carricarte. Carricarte told the Cuban weekly *Opciones* that this year Cuban foreign trade grew 22 percent. "Exports tend to go down primarily because of decreased sales of sugar and its by products," the deputy minister said. "In addition, world prices for nickel have slumped. However, our exports of tobacco and non-traditional items have gone up." Meanwhile, imports including fuel, food, metals, chemicals and industrial equipment went up 34 percent, Carricarte said. The list of Cuba's main trade partners is led by Venezuela, whose share of trade reached 22 percent. It is followed by China (10 percent), Spain and Canada (both 8 percent), the Netherlands (7 percent), the United States (5 percent), Brazil (4 percent) and Vietnam, Italy and Japan (3 percent each). (*Reuters, AFP*, 7/11/05)

November 9: The governments of Cuba and Serbia and Montenegro inked an agreement of collaboration aimed at promoting tourist travel. The Cuban minister of Tourism, Manuel Marrero, said that this agreement would enable a valuable exchange of experience. (*EFE*, 9/11/05)

November 9: The Cuban government has launched a campaign against produce traders at the country's only private markets as part of a larger effort to rein in capitalist tendencies. Police and inspectors raided markets in Havana this week, shutting them down while they checked papers and fined and arrested some individuals. Similar measures in the provinces over the past few weeks have left markets bare and long lines at state markets for whatever produce and meat were available. The government strictly controls farm production but allows some sales on the open market after farmers meet state quotas. Farmers and cooperatives are expected to transport and sell their products without relying on middlemen, whom the government labels parasites. "In general the people are not happy since the most visible result is there are less products, longer lines, and prices have not declined," a professor in Central Camaguey, where the drive began a few weeks ago, said in a telephone interview, adding that attempts to increase supplies at state markets had changed little. (*Reuters*, 10/11/05)

November 10: Cuba has expressed readiness to buy five new airliners from Russia in the next two years. This is a result of the recent bilateral recent talks held in Havana, where the sides agreed on the purchase of two Il-96-300 aircraft, two Tu-204-100 liners and one Tu-204C transport plane. (*Novosti*, 10/11/05)

November 14: The Cuban government has embarked on a new anti-corruption drive, a campaign that includes searches and seizures at farmers' markets and investigations into wrongdoing in the housing sector. Just one month after an anti-corruption drive targeting Havana's gas stations, including the temporary replacement of gas station attendants with thousands of young social workers, the government has launched an effort to tackle fraud in other basic areas of the island's economy. Inspections carried out in recent days in some of Havana's main "agromercados," or government-licensed farmers' markets, revealed serious infractions and prompted authorities to seize 170 tons of goods and impound 36 trucks whose cargo had been sold to intermediaries in the vicinity of private markets, officials said. Havana Mayor Juan Contino told local media that the government-run markets were short on supplies in recent months due to climatic conditions, while in the private farmers markets "food was offered at exorbitant prices," offered by people who "do not comply with their deliveries to the government (...) and sell their wares to the private markets." The battle against corruption, said Contino, will go beyond the markets and also include areas such as housing. He said authorities would investigate irregularities in rentals, theft of construction materials and unauthorized construction. During a meeting on strategies for combating corruption over the weekend, Contino also said authorities would monitor illegal sales on public roads and "all criminal activity that disturbs citizens' tranquility." (*Reuters, Dominican Today*, 14,15/11/05)

November 14: Farmer's markets experienced an abrupt drop in the supply of products after a police operation was launched in Havana's "agromercados". The offensive immediately led to an abrupt drop in the supply of products in the city's farmers markets, which cannot be compensated for by the limited quantities sold in state-run shops at fixed prices. According to Cuban law, small farmers and cooperatives can only sell their products on the open market after they have fulfilled the quota that they are required to sell to the state. (*IPS*, 18/11/05)

November 14: Cuban nickel output is right on track, despite technical problems and heavy rains in the Moa mining region of western Cuba, the director of Cuba's state-run nickel company said. Communist Cuba aims to produce 76,000 tonnes of unrefined nickel and cobalt this year, up from 72,000 tonnes in 2004. "Thanks to the workers' efforts, we have reached 99 percent fulfillment of the production plan," the *Trabajadores* weekly newspaper reported Cubaniquel director Ricardo Gonzalez saying. The Pedro Sotto Alba plant, which is operated by a joint venture with Canada's Sherritt International, has produced 300 tonnes more than planned, Gonzalez told workers at a meeting in Moa marking the day of the geologist. A conveyor system supplying ore to the older Rene Ramos Latour plant in Nicaro will be completed before the end of the year, he said. The conveyor belt will allow output to increase from 10,000 to 17,000 tonnes a year. New boilers will improve production at the Che Guevara plant in Punta Gorda, he said. (*Reuters*, 14/11/05)

November 16: Confronted with record levels of sugar production on the world market, the Cuban Ministry of Sugar is involved in the diversification of that industry. The office is concentrating its efforts on "Operation Alvaro Reynoso" – converting old sugar mills and factories into more than 240 new facilities for the production of a wide range of food items. Work is going on in the building of huge silos that will be used for the storage of grains and cereals. The ministry will also control grain mills and plants that will be dedicated to pasta production, cocoa processing and roasting sunflower seeds. Several of these conversion operations involve close working relationships and coordination between the sugar and the food industry ministries. The Minister of sugar reported that following the prolonged drought that caused a significant decline in past sugarcane harvests, the latest production estimates for September showed an increase of 3.8 tons per hectare due to the effects of recent rainfall. "Though still at a weak level of output, it is certainly a positive indicator," the official noted. One of the objectives of "Operation Alvaro Reynoso" is to produce enough sugarcane to assure sugar for national consumption and sufficient surplus to honor foreign trade commitments, the minister explained to the participants in a seminar organized by that industry's labor union. (*Granma*, 16/11/05)

November 17: Fidel Castro has mobilized an army of young Cubans on a crusade to stamp out rampant theft hobbling Cuba's state-run economy and shore up its communist society. "In this battle against vice, nobody will be spared," Castro warned in a speech to Havana University students. "Either we defeat all these deviations and make our revolution strong, or we die," the 79-year-old leader said. Castro railed against Cuba's "new rich" spawned by reforms that allowed limited private enterprise a decade ago after the demise of the Soviet Union plunged the island of 11 million into deep economic crisis. He vowed to eliminate differences that emerged in Cuba's officially egalitarian society between those who have access to hard currency -- mainly cash remittances from relatives in Miami -- and those who do not and struggle to make ends meet. Current targets of his wrath are owners of small restaurants allowed to seat no more than 12 people, private taxis who drive gas-guzzling vintage 1950s American cars, and gas pump attendants accused of pocketing millions of dollars. "I'm not theorizing. We are acting. We are marching toward a total renewal of our society," he said. "The work of these young people will put an end to a lot of vices, pilfering and sources of dishonest money for the new rich," he said. Castro said hard currency stores could be targeted next in the drive to stop stolen goods and also subsidized medicines being sold on the black market. He indicated that Cuba might revalue its currency again, a step taken in April that reduced the purchasing power of Cubans who receive cash from relatives the United States. [[Fidel Castro's speech](#)] (*EFE, Reuters*, 17,18/11/05)

November 17: The Cuban government has launched a wide-reaching anti-corruption campaign that is aimed at curbing diversion of funds, theft and abuse of power in state-owned companies and businesses. Specialists consulted concur that the shortage of products and services available through legal channels and the high prices for goods sold in both Cuban pesos and hard currency serve to encourage theft and illegal businesses. In addition, wages are often extremely low. A survey conducted in Havana at the start of the decade found that an average family of four would require seven times the average salary - which is roughly 260 pesos, equivalent to 10 dollars a month - to meet their basic needs. (*IPS*, 18/11/05)

November 20: Cuba welcomed its two millionth visitor, 40 days earlier than last year. The news was made public by Cuban Tourism Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz, at an event held at the Varadero International Hotel in Playa Azul, which is celebrating its 55 th anniversary. The minister said that, despite this year's adverse weather conditions, so far this year tourism is up 12 percent from last year, counting for 87 percent of this year's 2.3 million target. The tourism minister indicated that these numbers are due to a significant increase of tourists from Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain and Mexico, as well as from newer markets such as the Netherlands, Portugal, Brazil, Argentina and the Nordic countries. Marrero Cruz said that this winter's tourist season will see a seven percent increase in flights to Cuba, compared to last winter, with 100 airlines in 40 cities worldwide offering direct flights to Cuba, as well as four new hotels offering a total of 1,921 rooms. (*Granma*, 21/11/05)

November 22: Progressive Arch, a group of moderate opposition organizations, called upon the government of Fidel Castro to implement reforms to eradicate corruption in the country. "Fighting such wide-spread and deep-rooted corruption will be no easy endeavor either under the current government or the next" and the only way to succeed is by implementing reforms that root out the underlying causes, said Progressive Arch spokesman Manuel Cuesta Morúa. (*AFP*, 22/11/05)

November 23: A week after announcing a government campaign against stealing and "skimming" by workers in the state-run economy, Fidel Castro decreed hikes in wages, pensions and electricity rates. The wage hike - the third this year - will bring the average worker's monthly salary to about 16 dollars, up two dollars from the previous rate. Wages are extremely low in Cuba, with the average worker earning in a month what a plumber in the United States makes in a half-hour. "A wage system has been established based on the principle of socialist distribution," said a note from the Labor Ministry accompanying the decree. The note described that system as: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his work," which is a modification of the classic Marxist paradigm of "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his need." The ministry note said the system was "aimed at making the salary the main

material stimulus that the worker receives for his contribution to society." The raise in pensions for some 1.2 million retirees brings their monthly stipend to about \$6.80 from the previous \$6. (EFE, 23/11/05)

November 23: A decree signed by Fidel Castro increased the cost of electricity for small consumers from 20 to 30 cents of a Cuban peso (\$0.01) per kilowatt-hour (kwh). Cubans who consume more than 300 kwh a month will see their rate rise from 30 *centavos* (cents) to 1.30 pesos (\$0.06) next month. "The lack of concern about electrical consumption is evident in our country due to the very low rates," the decree published in the ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said. Power outages are frequent in Cuba whose thermoelectric generators built decades ago are obsolete and do not produce enough electricity to meet demand at peak consumption. Castro warned that rates would have to go up in a speech in which he attacked private businesses, such as family restaurants, for benefiting from subsidized electricity and using up too much power. Foreign companies, which pay a higher rate and will not be affected by the new increase, praised the move as realistic. "It's a step in the right direction, to get people who can afford it to pay for electricity, as opposed to everybody not having any," said a foreign company executive. "They cannot afford to subsidize everybody, and the fact is that everybody was getting very little electricity," she said. (CNN, 23/11/05)

November 24: Cuba's economic growth may surpass nine percent in 2005, said Economy Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez, identifying tourism, international medical assistance, technology and computers as the island's key income sources. He explained that 2005 has involved significant economic changes, such as centralizing hard currency management to develop programs to meet domestic priorities. One of the major factors attributable to the country's economic growth this year is the export of services, particularly medical services, he said. According to the minister, Cuba has set a target of welcoming 2.3 million foreign tourists this year, with earnings of more than 2 billion USD. The nickel, cigar and rum industries are the country's hard currency-earning sectors, with strong growth. However, the sugar industry, once the economy's spearhead sector in the 1980s, has been in recession due to droughts and the sugar yield in the 2004-05 crop just stood at 1.3 million tones, the lowest since 1960. (VNA, 24/11/05)

November 24: PetroChina Great Wall Drilling Co., Ltd. and Petroleum Company of Cuba held a ceremony for signing two drilling service contracts on November 3, 2005. It is the second-time cooperation between Great Wall Drilling Co., Ltd. and Petroleum Company of Cuba after the signing of a one-year petroleum service agreement on one 1500HP drilling rig and one 2000HP rig on April 8 this year. The contract signed this time includes three 2000HP drilling rigs. The contract has a period of one year and a value of over US\$24 million. The project will be launched in January 2006. (China Chemical Reporter, 24/11/05)

November 25: The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) has recognized Cuba as among regional countries which direct most of their GDP to social spending. According to CEPAL calculations, Cuba, along with Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica and Uruguay, devotes more than 18 percent of its GDP to social spending, while Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic allocate less than 7.5 percent. Cuba devotes 80 percent of her budget to health, education, sports and culture. [[Desarrollo Social de América Latina 2005](#)] (Prensa Latina, 25/11/05)

November 26: The president of the Central Bank, Francisco Soberón, affirmed that in the course of the last year, US dollar bank accounts held by the population decreased by 57 %, while National Peso and Convertible Peso accounts grew by 35 % and more than three-fold respectively. Delivering the closing remarks at the Congress of Economists and Book-keepers of Cuba, Soberón added that there has been a substantial reduction in the country's US dollar cash intake. "While in the past the US dollar accounted for more than 80 % of the nation's foreign revenues, today it only represents about 30 %, with other currencies such as the Euro, the Canadian dollar and the pound sterling now taking its place." (AFP, 26/11/05)

November 27: For the first time in nearly a generation, Cuba's moribund economy is showing signs of life because of a new program financed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to provide residents across Latin America and the

Caribbean free eye surgery. Called Mision Milagro, or Miracle Mission, the campaign has provided more than 122,000 cataract and other eye operations this year to patients from Venezuela to Jamaica to Bolivia. It is part of a major shift in the Cuban economy away from traditional foreign investment and mainstream tourism to a web of favorable agreements with Venezuela, an oil-rich nation that now is Cuba's closest ally. Though neither country has released official numbers, economists and diplomats believe Cuba could be earning \$1 billion a year from eye operations and other medical treatment provided to foreigners under Venezuelan-financed programs such as Mision Milagro. The revenue is used to cover the cost of receiving 98,000 barrels of discounted Venezuelan oil daily, essentially canceling what traditionally has been Cuba's largest import bill and its greatest drain on hard currency resources. "This is an excellent business for Cuba," said Pedro Monreal, an economist at the University of Havana. "This is like striking gold." While Monreal argues that the Venezuelan assistance gives Cuba its first opportunity in years to develop economically, others say hitching Cuba's economic wagon to Venezuela risks repeating the mistake Castro made by aligning himself with the Soviet bloc after he took power in 1959. (*Chicago Tribune*, 27/11/05)

November 28: Cuba temporarily cut prices on selected food and other products at state-run hard currency stores as part of a campaign to make goods more accessible to Cubans of lesser means. The temporary markdown added to good news for government workers who recently received pay raises. It covers all stores selling goods in a currency known as "the convertible Cuban peso" until December 9, according to a government announcement published by state media. A survey of some stores found that prices on some, but not all products had been marked down by 10 to 20 percent, including canned and other packaged goods. A bottle of cooking oil was marked down from 2.20 (\$2.37US or euro2) to 1.95 (\$2.10US or euro1.80) convertible Cuban pesos. The vast majority of consumer products in Cuba are sold in these stores, all of which are run by the communist government, in convertible Cuban pesos. The convertible peso replaced the US dollar as a major form of currency during the island last year. (*AP*, 28/11/05)

November 29: Losses from Hurricane Wilma surpassed \$704 million in Cuba, the government announced, for the first time offering a damage estimate on the devastating storm that flooded Havana before taking a swipe at South Florida in October. Granma, Cuba's Communist Party daily newspaper, said the storm cost \$704.2 million, including seven days of lost productivity in the days before and after the storm. After several days of preparations and evacuations, the hurricane hit Cuba on October 23, causing an unprecedented storm surge in the capital, leaving many blocks in waist-high water. More than 7,500 homes were damaged, 446 of them destroyed, the paper said. The tobacco industry in the western Pinar del Río province lost some 2,000 storage facilities and 54,000 seed boxes. Although the paper did not offer details, it said the fishing, wood, honey, transportation and construction industries suffered either directly or indirectly. (*The Miami Herald*, 29/11/05)

November 28: The Uruguayan-Cuban bilateral commission began a working session, attended by representatives from both nations' Foreign Affairs Ministries. This is the first time that both nations' official delegations meet since the re-establishment of diplomatic relations on March 1, 2005. Uruguayan exports to the island stepped up 30 percent in these eight months, and Cuba's sales to this nation increased. (*Prensa Latina*, 28/11/05)

November 29: The Trinidad business sector plans to dominate the Cuban market while an embargo restricts US businesses from conducting any business in and with Cuba, with a few exceptions. Minister in the Ministry of Trade in Trinidad, Diane Seukeran in a statement says the idea that Cuba is a security threat to the region because of its communist ideology, as being sometimes touted by the United States, is no reason for Trinidad and Tobago not to increase trade with Cuba. The Minister's views follows the passing of a Bill in the Trinidad Parliament which allows for trade and economic co-operation agreement between Caricom and Cuba. Trinidad and Tobago from January to August this year has exported TT\$83 million in goods and services, while importing TT\$599,600 in goods and services from the communist state. (*Caribbean Net News*, 29/11/05)

November 29: A sting operation against pedicab drivers in the municipality Old Havana resulted in confiscated pedicabs, fines, arrests and deportations to different provinces. One hundred and fifty detainees were taken to a police station on Dragones street. (*Cubamet*, 29/11/05)

November 30: South Korean Hyundai Heavy Industries Co., the world's largest shipbuilder, said it has clinched a US\$ 130 million order from Cuba to install diesel power generators on the island. Hyundai said it plans to complete installation of diesel power generators across the nation by the end of 2007 to meet the dispersed generation plan of the Cuban government. (*Yonhap*, 30/11/05)

Exile Community

November 1: A federal appeals court jolted Miami with another electrifying ruling in the case of five Cuban men accused of spying for Fidel Castro -- reinstating their original convictions in the 2001 trial. Now the appeals process starts all over again. The Atlanta appellate court must decide whether the five Cuban defendants -- convicted of infiltrating Miami's exile community and trying to pass US military secrets to Havana -- received a fair trial in a community that despises Castro. José Basulto, founder of Brothers to the Rescue, praised the 11th Circuit's decision to rehear the appeal, saying exile politics did not poison Miami jurors. "The Cuban-American population is open-minded enough not to exert any type of pressure on jurors," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/11/05)

November 10: Cuban-American ballet dancer, choreographer and artistic director Fernando Bujones died in Miami of complications from malignant melanoma, friends said. He was 50. Bujones, the Miami-born son of Cuban exiles, ranked alongside Rudolph Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov as one of the top ballet soloists of the third half of the 20th century. For the past three months, the artist had been on sick leave from his job as artistic director of the Orlando Ballet, fighting lung cancer. (*EFE*, 10/11/05)

November 13: Popular salsa singer Willy Chirino celebrated the 35 th anniversary of his artistic career with a concert in Miami broadcast to Cuba via Radio and TV Martí. Recordings of the artist's songs are circulated underground on the island and they are even chorused and danced to in street festivities. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/11/05)

November 17: Two Cubans are suing Fidel Castro in Florida for 60 million dollars, claiming they were tortured at a psychiatric hospital on the communist-run island, their lawyers said. Both plaintiffs claim they were tortured at the Mazorra psychiatric hospital in Havana more than 30 years ago. Nilo Jerez, who filed a lawsuit at a Miami court, claimed he was subjected to electroshocks on his testicles, which left him sterile. Belkis Ferro, 51, who filed suit in Tampa, said she was also subjected to electroshocks, and was given injections that made her lose consciousness. Both said the torture sessions were supervised by Eriberto Mederos, a nurse at the hospital. Mederos had migrated to the United States in 1980, and was later found guilty of torture and of hiding his links with Cuba's Communist Party, but he died in 2002, shortly after his trial. (*AFP*, 17/11/05)

November 21: Santiago Alvarez, a longtime anti-Castro activist and key supporter of exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, was arrested in Miami on federal weapons and passport charges. Alvarez's arrest shocked his friends and many in the exile community who say it was a major propaganda victory for Castro. One Cuban exile group, Vigilia Mambisa, plans to protest Alvarez's arrest outside the federal courthouse in downtown Miami, Mambisa President Miguel Saavedra said. "Every time Castro complains about something, this government does whatever they have to so that he doesn't get mad," Saavedra said. The case against Posada's close associates has the potential to create a political firestorm for the White House, with hardline exile activists vowing to protest and defend Alvarez against what they see as an attack by Castro. "We are seeing signals that indicate that the administration of President Bush is forgetting the promises they made to the exile community in order to cater to Castro," said Cuban American National Foundation

President Francisco "Pepe" Hernandez. Added Brothers to the Rescue founder Jose Basulto: "This is an action against our community and our people. There is no difference between Bush and Clinton. There is basically one party with two names. The US is falling to a moral low point." (*The Miami Herald*, 21, 22/05)

November 22: The election of US Senator Jon Corzine, a Democrat, to the governor's office in New Jersey has created a rare open seat in the US Senate, and Hispanic groups are agitating for the post to go to US Representative Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat born to Cuban parents. The pro-Menendez campaign is making waves in Miami, where the 51-year-old politician is a familiar face at fundraisers and a reliable bulwark in Congress against efforts to water down the economic embargo against Cuba. Across party lines, Menendez enjoys close ties with South Florida's three Republican Cuban-American Congress members -- attending the May funeral of Rafael Díaz-Balart, patriarch of one of the nation's leading Cuban-American political families. If appointed, Menendez would be the second Cuban-American -- and third Hispanic -- US senator. Republican Mel Martinez, the other Cuban-American, was elected from Florida in 2004. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/11/05)

November 22: Manuel Vázquez Portal, a recipient of the International Press Freedom Award in 2003, has finally been able to collect the honor personally. Vázquez Portal had been imprisoned as a result of the crackdown on dissidents in March, 2003. He has been living in Miami after the Cuban authorities allowed him to leave the island. (*AP*, 22/11/05)

Exile Community

November 1: A federal appeals court jolted Miami with another electrifying ruling in the case of five Cuban men accused of spying for Fidel Castro -- reinstating their original convictions in the 2001 trial. Now the appeals process starts all over again. The Atlanta appellate court must decide whether the five Cuban defendants -- convicted of infiltrating Miami's exile community and trying to pass US military secrets to Havana -- received a fair trial in a community that despises Castro. José Basulto, founder of Brothers to the Rescue, praised the 11th Circuit's decision to rehear the appeal, saying exile politics did not poison Miami jurors. "The Cuban-American population is open-minded enough not to exert any type of pressure on jurors," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/11/05)

November 10: Cuban-American ballet dancer, choreographer and artistic director Fernando Bujones died in Miami of complications from malignant melanoma, friends said. He was 50. Bujones, the Miami-born son of Cuban exiles, ranked alongside Rudolph Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov as one of the top ballet soloists of the third half of the 20th century. For the past three months, the artist had been on sick leave from his job as artistic director of the Orlando Ballet, fighting lung cancer. (*EFE*, 10/11/05)

November 13: Popular salsa singer Willy Chirino celebrated the 35 th anniversary of his artistic career with a concert in Miami broadcast to Cuba via Radio and TV Martí. Recordings of the artist's songs are circulated underground on the island and they are even chorused and danced to in street festivities. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 14/11/05)

November 17: Two Cubans are suing Fidel Castro in Florida for 60 million dollars, claiming they were tortured at a psychiatric hospital on the communist-run island, their lawyers said. Both plaintiffs claim they were tortured at the Mazorra psychiatric hospital in Havana more than 30 years ago. Nilo Jerez, who filed a lawsuit at a Miami court, claimed he was subjected to electroshocks on his testicles, which left him sterile. Belkis Ferro, 51, who filed suit in Tampa, said she was also subjected to electroshocks, and was given injections that made her lose consciousness. Both said the torture sessions were supervised by Eriberto Mederos, a nurse at the hospital. Mederos had migrated to the United States in 1980, and was later found guilty of torture and of hiding his links with Cuba's Communist Party, but he died in 2002, shortly after his trial. (*AFP*, 17/11/05)

November 21: Santiago Alvarez, a longtime anti-Castro activist and key supporter of exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, was arrested in Miami on federal weapons and passport charges. Alvarez's arrest shocked his friends and

many in the exile community who say it was a major propaganda victory for Castro. One Cuban exile group, Vigilia Mambisa, plans to protest Alvarez's arrest outside the federal courthouse in downtown Miami, Mambisa President Miguel Saavedra said. "Every time Castro complains about something, this government does whatever they have to so that he doesn't get mad," Saavedra said. The case against Posada's close associates has the potential to create a political firestorm for the White House, with hardline exile activists vowing to protest and defend Alvarez against what they see as an attack by Castro. "We are seeing signals that indicate that the administration of President Bush is forgetting the promises they made to the exile community in order to cater to Castro," said Cuban American National Foundation President Francisco "Pepe" Hernandez. Added Brothers to the Rescue founder Jose Basulto: "This is an action against our community and our people. There is no difference between Bush and Clinton. There is basically one party with two names. The US is falling to a moral low point." (*The Miami Herald*, 21, 22/05)

November 22: The election of US Senator Jon Corzine, a Democrat, to the governor's office in New Jersey has created a rare open seat in the US Senate, and Hispanic groups are agitating for the post to go to US Representative Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat born to Cuban parents. The pro-Menendez campaign is making waves in Miami, where the 51-year-old politician is a familiar face at fundraisers and a reliable bulwark in Congress against efforts to water down the economic embargo against Cuba. Across party lines, Menendez enjoys close ties with South Florida's three Republican Cuban-American Congress members -- attending the May funeral of Rafael Díaz-Balart, patriarch of one of the nation's leading Cuban-American political families. If appointed, Menendez would be the second Cuban-American -- and third Hispanic -- US senator. Republican Mel Martinez, the other Cuban-American, was elected from Florida in 2004. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/11/05)

November 22: Manuel Vázquez Portal, a recipient of the International Press Freedom Award in 2003, has finally been able to collect the honor personally. Vázquez Portal had been imprisoned as a result of the crackdown on dissidents in March, 2003. He has been living in Miami after the Cuban authorities allowed him to leave the island. (*AP*, 22/11/05)

Terrorism

October 7: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said that prisoners were on hunger strike at the US Guantanamo Bay prison camp and that the situation there was serious. The humanitarian agency, which last visited the US naval base in Cuba in late September, was in contact with US authorities about the situation, ICRC chief spokeswoman Antonella Notari said. "There is a hunger strike, the situation is serious, and we are following it with concern," Notari told the press. (*Reuters*, 11/10/05)

Chronicle on Cuba - November 2005

Security

November 1: President Hugo Chavez warned he might share Venezuela's US-made F-16 fighters with Cuba and China, accusing the United States of making it difficult for his country to obtain spare parts for the aircraft. Any exchange of military hardware to those countries would break an agreement with the US government on the transfer of technology without Washington's permission and further strain fraying ties between Venezuela and the United States. "If they don't comply with the contract (...) we can do whatever we want with these aircraft, whatever the hell we want. Maybe we'll give 10 planes to Cuba or to China so they can study the technology," Chavez said. "We don't need any US imperialism," he said. The United States does not trade with Cuba and keeps a tight rein on any technology transfers to China. (*CNN, Reuters*, 2/11/05)

November 1: Communist Cuba said it had no need for F-16 fighter jets offered as a gift by leftist ally President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. "We do not need the planes, and he (Chavez) has not made a formal offer," said Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque. Chavez said his government may give its US-made F-16 fighters to Cuba or China and replace them with Russian or Chinese aircraft after accusing Washington of blocking purchases of US military parts. "The idea sounds legitimate, because Chavez is quite right in rejecting the United States for refusing to sell spare parts," Perez Roque told reporters. The Cuban minister said Venezuela was not a military threat to the United States. "The US government does not have the moral authority nor the legitimacy to demand arms control by other countries: it is spending no less than 500 billion dollars this year on weapons," he said. Perez Roque said he was certain Venezuela would come to Cuba's defense if it was attacked. (*Reuters*, 5/11/05)

November 5: Cuban and Chinese military leaders have met in Havana to reaffirm ties between the two communist countries. In a meeting at Cuba's Armed Forces Ministry, the country's military chief, Raul Castro, stressed the long-standing friendship between the two nations. He said China's presence on the island will help strengthen relations between Beijing and Havana. His Chinese counterpart, General Liang Guanglie, said his visit will help strengthen what he called the "historic" ties between the government, armed forces and people of both countries. Following the meeting, the high-level Chinese delegation toured a tank base on the outskirts of Havana, where members were given details on the structure, mission and history of the military facility. (*VOA*, 5/11/05)

US-Cuba Relations

November 1: A US trade delegation led by Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman has signed agreements to sell nearly \$30 million worth of food to Cuba. The delegation signed the deal in Havana with Cuba's food importing company, Alimport. Nebraska farmers agreed to sell wheat, beans and soy products to the Cubans. The signing took place during Havana's annual trade fair. Governor Heineman said it is a big boost for farmers in his state to find a new market. (*VOA*, 1/11/05)

November 1: Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman said he met with Fidel Castro after a trade delegation from his state finalized deals to sell wheat, beans and soy products worth about \$27 million to the communist-run island. Heineman declined to provide details about the hour-long meeting at Castro's offices, which the Cuban leader requested. The Republican governor has been striving to keep a low political profile during his trip and has steered away from discussing US-Cuba relations, emphasizing instead the economic benefits of the Cuban market for Nebraska farmers. (*AP*, 2/11/05)

November 2: The state of Alabama clinched deals to sell \$19 million worth of chicken, minced meat and wooden utility poles to the Cuban government at the communist country's annual trade fair. Initially, Cuba's food import company Alimport signed an agreement with Ron Sparks, Alabama's agricultural commissioner, to buy \$15 million of goods from the state. Shortly after, officials inked the deals surpassing the amount in the agreement. Sparks led the Alabama delegation, which included business representatives and several state lawmakers. (*AP*, 2/11/05)

November 2: Two Miami men pleaded guilty in federal court to smuggling 29 Cubans in a speedboat that overturned and claimed the life of a young boy who got trapped beneath the capsized vessel. Rather than face trial, Alexander Gil Rodriguez and Luis Manuel Taboada-Cabrera cut quick plea deals with federal prosecutors, who didn't have enough evidence to charge them with the October 13 death of 6-year-old Julian Villasuso. The men, Cuban immigrants who arrived in South Florida during the past year, could face up to six years in prison at a January 24 sentencing hearing before US District Judge K. Michael Moore. The boy's death could be a factor in the sentencing of Rodriguez, 25, and Taboada-Cabrera, 28. (*The Miami Herald*, 3/11/05)

November 3: A plan to send three American relief specialists to Cuba to assess damage from Hurricane Wilma has been suspended because Cuba wanted to turn the visit into a discussion of unrelated issues, the State Department said. Cuban officials wanted to use the mission to discuss their vision for "regional disaster response," said Sean McCormack, a spokesman. "We are unwilling to turn a humanitarian mission into a political dialogue," he said. Before McCormack's statement, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque told the press in an interview in Havana that his government was ready to issue visas to the US team. "We're still waiting," he said. (*The New York Times*, AP, 3/11/05)

November 3: Cuba rejected Washington's claim that it wanted to politicize a visit -- now on hold -- by three US relief specialists to tour areas of the island damaged last month by Hurricane Wilma. In a statement defending its position in the dispute, Cuba's communist government said it made clear from the start that it accepted the visit as a way to discuss sharing information about hurricane preparedness and improving disaster assistance among countries in the region -- not as a way to get US aid. "Cuba rejects the accusation of having changed the purpose of the visit (...) as well as the insinuation that our acceptance of the visit means we are seeking to gain political advantage and open a channel for the discussion of bilateral problems between the two countries," said a Foreign Ministry statement published by state-run newspapers. [[Declaración del ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores](#)] (*EFE*, AP, 3/11/05)

November 3: A US Coast Guard cutter docked at a Cuban port to return 25 Cubans intercepted in the Florida Straits during a smuggling voyage last month that ended when the boat carrying them capsized and a six-year-old child drowned. The crew of the Coast Guard cutter Key Biscayne deposited the 25 Cubans at the port of Bahía de Cabañas, in western Cuba, at 10 a.m. Thursday, according to a Coast Guard statement issued in Miami. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/11/05)

November 3: A Granma daily editorial criticized the judicial decisions made in the United States in two cases involving the island. The newspaper accused President George W. Bush's administration of "obstructing" justice in an effort to return political favors to Cuban exile sectors of Miami. The editorial alludes to the position taken by the US Attorney General's Office during the process of the appeal submitted by anti-Castro firebrand Luis Posada Carriles and to the agreement of the Court of Atlanta to review in full the records of five Cuban intelligence agents serving lengthy prison sentences in the US. [[Declaración del ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores](#)] (AP, 4/11/05)

November 4: The United States is trying harder than ever to isolate Cuba and is leaning on countries to back its economic embargo on the communist-run island at the United Nations, Cuba's ambassador to Britain said. While the US trade embargo on Cuba has been in place since 1962, three years after Fidel Castro came to power in a revolution, President George W. Bush's administration has been tightening the screws to try and bring about political change. "This is the 10th administration to carry over the blockade measures against Cuba it is certainly the most aggressive and the most explicit about it," ambassador Rene Mujica Cantelar, said in an interview, calling the US steps "economic warfare". (*Reuters*, 4/11/05)

November 4: The United States will be Communist-run Cuba's biggest food supplier this year, despite trade restrictions and onerous regulations, the head of the state's food importing monopoly said. Alimport Chairman Pedro Alvarez said in an interview that about \$500 million of his \$1.5 billion budget this year went to buy US cereals, grains, poultry and other products. That compares with second place Vietnam at more than \$150 million, in large part due to its sale of 600,000 tonnes of rice to the Caribbean island. China, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and some European countries were important suppliers as well, Alvarez said, with many at around \$100 million. (*Reuters*, 5/11/05)

November 5: Two Cuban women died when they were trapped underneath a boat that capsized during a suspected migrant smuggling operation in the Straits of Florida, the US Coast Guard said. The 28-foot speedboat with 37 people aboard was taking on water in 4-to-6-foot seas when a Coast Guard cutter found it, Petty Officer Dana Warr said. A rescue boat was launched, and crew members gave life jackets to everyone aboard, Warr said. The Coast Guard crew

removed 15 people from the boat and transferred them to the cutter on the scene, about 65 miles south of Key West. As the rescue crew returned to the boat, it capsized under a wave and dumped 22 people into the water. All but two people were rescued, and the bodies of two women wearing life jackets were found under the boat, the Coast Guard said. [[US Coast Guard Press Release](#)] (CNN, 5/11/05)

November 5: The US Interest Section in Havana (USIS) blamed the Cuban government on the death of two women when their overloaded vessel capsized trying to reach the coast of Florida. In an official statement the USIS says that, "The culpable parties in this tragic accident were the smugglers in question, who dangerously overloaded their vessel, and the Cuban regime." "The regime continues to drive its citizens to risk their lives at sea by denying them economic opportunities and political freedoms. Cubans stream to the United States, and to other democratic countries, because they know they can realize their personal aspirations in a climate of freedom, which does not exist in Cuba", the statement says. (USIS Press Release, 5/11/05)

November 6: Cuba signed 270 million dollars in contracts with US firms at Havana's International Trade Fair (FIHAV 05), Cuba's import chief Pedro Alvarez said. Cuba plans to buy 500 million dollars worth of food from the United States this year, Alvarez said. He said the figure could have been bigger without new restrictions imposed in February by President George W. Bush's administration requiring Cuba to pay in advance for US goods. "What we sign today is insignificant compared to what we could sign if trade restrictions did not exist," he said. The fair was attended by 188 US companies with 370 executives from 31 US states, according to organizers. (Business Today Online, 7/11/05)

November 7: Federal investigators interviewed survivors of a botched Cuban migrant smuggling, and the Monroe County medical examiner scheduled autopsies on two women who perished when a speedboat carrying them capsized in the Florida Straits. It was the second time in less than a month when Cuban migrants perished on the high seas after the boat carrying them capsized. On Oct. 13, 6-year old Julian Villasuso died off the Keys. At least one suspected smuggler and 34 passengers remained aboard a Coast Guard cutter off Key West as US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents interviewed survivors. The boat reportedly departed from Havana province on Cuba's north coast. A number of small children were on board, according to sources. It's not clear whether the government will decide to bring any of the survivors into the United States as potential witnesses in a possible criminal case against the alleged smugglers. (The Miami Herald, 8/11/05)

November 8: Cuba received a record UN General Assembly vote of 182 nations opposed to the four-decade US embargo against Havana. Four countries -- the United States, Israel, Marshall Islands and Palau -- voted "no" and Micronesia abstained on the resolution calling for the lifting of the embargo, including penalties against foreign firms. The assembly has adopted such a resolution for the past 14 years. Last year 179 countries voted in favor of it. Introducing the resolution, Cuba's Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said that over the decades-long blockade, the measures had not been enforced with such brutality as in the last 18 months. As a result, for the first time an American would be barred from smoking a Cuban cigar even when traveling to another country. "Such insanity should go into the Guinness Book of World Records," he said. The Foreign Minister claimed the strengthened embargo was an economic war against Cuba, carried out on a global scale. (Reuters, UN News Centre, 8/11/05)

November 8: The United Nations General Assembly voted for the 14th consecutive year to call for an end to the 43-year-old US trade embargo against Cuba, drawing a rebuke from John Bolton, the new US envoy to the world body. "This is a complete exercise in irrelevancy," Ambassador Bolton told reporters in New York. "For a General Assembly that has not yet seriously attempted to reform the UN Human Rights Commission to adopt this exercise in Cuban propaganda really tells you something." The Bush administration said the resolution was an attempt to shift blame for Castro's shortcomings and that the General Assembly should not deal with the question. "The United States trade embargo is a bilateral issue and should not come before the General Assembly," US envoy Ronald Godard said. "If the people of Cuba are jobless, hungry or lack medical care, as Castro admits, it is because of his economic mismanagement, not the embargo." Godard said the US would ease restrictions on trade and travel after Cuba allows

"free and fair" elections and the formation of independent trade unions. He said the US since 1992 has licensed \$1.1 billion in sales and donations of medicine and medical equipment to Cuba. In the past five years more than \$5 billion in U.S. farm commodities have been exported to Cuba, he said. (*Bloomberg*, 8/11/05)

November 8: Two more dancers from the Ballet Nacional de Cuba defected. Octavio Martin, a principal dancer, and his wife, Yahima Franco, who ranked slightly above the corps de ballet, left after the company's final performance at a festival in Villahermosa, Mexico. "I want to begin a new chapter in my career," Mr. Martin said by telephone from Miami, where he and Ms. Franco, who uses the stage name Vanessa Franco, are staying with his brothers. He said he had asked Alicia Alonso, the company's general director, for permission to dance abroad permanently, but she said no. Both dancers have applied for asylum and plan to audition for ballet companies in the United States. (*The New York Times*, 8/11/05)

November 8: The US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor issued its annual report on International Religious Freedom stating that, "there was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom" during the period covered by the report. However, the report signals that, "There were some tensions among religions, often because some religious groups perceived others to be too close to the Government". "Tension within the Pentecostal movement continued due to the establishment of house churches, which some religious groups believed was divisive", the report says. [[International Religious Freedom Report 2005](#)] (*Washington Files*, 16/11/05)

November 10: A Cuban scientist who invented a synthetic vaccine against meningitis could not pick up a prestigious award in California because the State Department denied him a visa, the museum giving him the prize said. Vicente Vérez Bencomo was one of 25 scientists around the world honored by the Tech Museum of Innovation in San Jose for using technology to benefit mankind. Vérez was among 580 applicants for the award. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/11/05)

November 10: The US Coast Guard repatriated 79 Cuban migrants. The migrants were taken to Bahia de Cabanas on board cutter *Metompinkin*, according to the Coast Guard. Among the 79 were 34 Cubans on an overloaded 27-foot boat that overturned November 5 in rough seas about 65 miles south of Key West. The bodies of two women who drowned were found beneath the boat. Thirty six others, were interdicted at sea on November 4, south of Marathon, and nine other Cuban migrants interdicted at sea on November 6, south of Key West. Two Cuban migrants associated with these incidents are awaiting transfer to officials at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel*, *The New York Times*, 11/11/05)

November 11: Final negotiations between the Senate and US House of Representatives on a bill to fund the Transportation and Treasury Departments snagged over food sales to Cuba. Representative Joseph Knollenberg, a Michigan Republican and chairman of the House transportation appropriations subcommittee, said the Cuba provision and language on business reforms for the national passenger rail service, Amtrak, were the only outstanding issues in \$141 billion legislation. Both houses passed measures this year to overturn a Treasury Department ruling that US farm and trade groups say has slashed agricultural exports to Cuba by making it more difficult for the Communist-ruled nation to pay for shipments. Congress authorized food sales to Cuba in 2000 if Havana paid in cash, an exception to the four-decade-old US trade embargo. But a Treasury Department rule issued in February requires Cuba to pay for American goods before they leave a US port. House members of the transportation conference committee voted overwhelmingly to maintain the rule, while Senate counterparts voted to drop it. The split created deadlock and a new round of closed-door talks. Knollenberg stressed the White House had made it clear President George W. Bush would veto the bill if the pre-payment provision for Cuba was overturned. Senate lawmakers were firm, with Democrats saying Bush has yet to veto a bill and was unlikely to derail the spending plan over one provision. (*Reuters*, 10/11/05)

November 13: Cuba, now a significant market for US corn, is nearing a new purchasing milestone, according to representatives of the Iowa Corn Promotion Board. Gary Woodley, from the ICPB's grain trade committee, and Don Mason, ICPB staff, said FCStone, a Des Moines-based commodity risk management and trading company, has sold nearly \$100 million worth of commodities to Cuba since trade rules were eased in 2000. As corn producers, we've been

well aware of the potential in this market," Mason said. "Our checkoff has worked since 1998 to build Cuban contacts that lead to Iowa corn sales." Chris Aberle, FCStone's director of sales, said the ICPB's ongoing participation in trade fairs and missions has been especially valuable in Cuba, where many normal avenues for building business relationships are blocked. Most recently, Mason and Woodley shared a booth with Aberle at the 23rd Havana International Fair. (*The Daily Nonpareil*, 13/11/05)

November 14: A Cuban woman who arrived in Miami as a stowaway inside a wooden crate on a cargo flight from the Bahamas is being allowed to stay permanently in the United States. Sandra De los Santos was granted political asylum, nearly 15 months after a crew unloading the filing cabinet-sized DHL crate discovered her at Miami International Airport. "Now I really feel that I am firmly here, without fear," De los Santos, 25, said after her hearing in immigration court. "I am still nervous, but today I consider myself touched with happiness." De los Santos said she was studying English and hoped to become an ultrasound technician. (*AP*, 15/11/05)

November 15: With some Republican lawmakers from Texas taking opposite sides, a clause that could have revived sales of Texas rice to Cuba was abruptly removed from a spending bill. President Bush, whose administration is steadfastly opposed to expanding trade with the communist country, had threatened to veto the measure if House and Senate negotiators let the clause remain. US Representative Ted Poe, (Republican-Humble), whose district includes most of the 41,500 acres of rice farms in Southeast Texas, said the removal of the provision was a mistake: "It doesn't punish the communists in Cuba, it punishes the rice farmers in Texas." "It's devastating," said Ray Stoesser, a third-generation rice farmer who has 3,000 acres of the crop in Liberty County and is president of the Texas Rice Council. "We need that Cuban market and we need it bad. "It was the second-best export market for rice behind Mexico in 2004, and we were growing," he said. "It's silly for us to be so close to people who want our rice, and our government won't let us sell to them." (*Houston Chronicle*, 15/11/05)

November 16: The CIA has alerted policymakers over the potential eroding of Fidel Castro's health. The CIA recently concluded that Fidel Castro suffers from Parkinson's disease and has warned US policymakers to be ready for trouble if the 79-year-old ruler's health erodes over the next few years. If true, the CIA's assessment of the nonfatal but debilitating condition would mean Castro may be entering a period where doctors say the symptoms grow more evident, medicines are less effective and mental functions start to deteriorate. Although Castro's brother Raúl, head of the armed forces, has been anointed as his successor, Cuba analysts fear the possibility of a tumultuous period during which an incapacitated Castro refuses to give up power but can no longer project his overpowering personality to Cuba's 11 million people. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/11/05)

November 16: Midwestern lawmakers expressed disappointment after a measure to ease restrictions on agriculture trade with Cuba was dropped -- under the threat of a presidential veto -- from a massive spending bill. The dispute is over a recent Treasury Department rule that requires Cuba to pay in advance for food shipments before they are sent from US ports. The Bush administration wants the stiffer rule to punish Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba, but opponents in Congress say it just hurts farmers. American agriculture sales to Cuba have dropped more than 25 percent since the rule was announced in February, as Cuba turned to other suppliers. "It shows huge hypocrisy," Missouri Representative Jo Ann Emerson said of the White House position. "They say 'we want open markets,' but on the other hand they allow rules to go into effect that prevent the opening of markets." The \$140 billion spending bill to fund Transportation, Treasury and Housing programs was held up over the Cuba provision. (*AP*, 16/11/05)

November 17: The US Coast Guard searched for a Cuban rafter reported missing a few miles off the Lower Keys after five others he had traveled with were found. The migrants were trying to make it to Florida on at least one, maybe two, homemade boats. At least one of the Cubans was found on a flimsy vessel near a reef. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/11/05)

November 17: Fidel Castro dismissed a CIA assessment he is suffering from Parkinson's disease as a fabrication by his US enemies who wish to see him dead. "They say Castro has this or that illness. The last thing they invented is that I

have Parkinson's," he said in a speech to University of Havana students. The 79-year-old Cuban leader spoke for more than five hours standing at a lectern. A recent analysis by the CIA concluded Castro had Parkinson's and could have difficulty coping with the duties of office as his condition worsens, an official in Washington told the press. "They have killed me so many times," he said, referring to frequent rumors about his health that originate in the United States, usually in the anti-communist Cuban exile community in Miami. "They kill me every day. The day that I really die, nobody will believe me," he joked in the speech marking the 60th anniversary of the day he began his university studies. Fidel Castro blasted US President Bush and the CIA for the war in Iraq and the use of secret jails to house terror suspects. (*The New York Times, The Miami Herald, 17/11/05*)

November 17: Dozens of US scientists lacked their government's permission to attend a biotechnology conference in Havana, organizers said. "It is a shame what happened, that the US scientists could not come," Carlos Borroto, president of Biotechnology Conference Havana 2005, told reporters. Not to allow scientific interchange "is a crime," he said. Borroto said "dozens" of US biotech professionals who were interested in attending the conference could not obtain US permission, with the sole exception so far professor John Benemann, who will speak about possible biofuel substitutes for petroleum. (*AFP, 17/11/05*)

November 17: The US Government believes that democracy in Venezuela faces a "serious threat" due to President Hugo Chávez's actions and his relations with countries like Cuba and Iran. In his first appearance before the Chamber's Latin America Sub-committee, Thomas Shannon, US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, warned against a growing centralization of power in Chávez's hands and possible repercussions of his closer ties to countries like Iran or his support to the Iranian nuclear program. Cuban-American Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen warned against the threat that the Chávez-Castro alliance poses for regional stability. (*La Hora, 18/11/05*)

November 19: Santiago Alvarez, a longtime anti-Castro activist and key supporter of exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, was arrested in Miami on federal weapons and passport charges. Alvarez, a wealthy developer, is charged with possession of automatic weapons, including some with the serial numbers obliterated; a silencer not properly registered; and a false passport, Matthew Dates, spokesman for the US attorney's office in Miami, said. The US government was already in the uncomfortable position of being accused of harboring Posada, who is suspected of terrorism, even as it wages a global war on terrorism. Federal agents arrested Alvarez at his Belle Meade home, just hours after executing a search warrant in his Hialeah office, said Kendall Coffey, Alvarez's lawyer. (*The Miami Herald, 21/11/05*)

November 20: American companies signed deals worth \$259 million to provide food and agricultural products to Cuba at a trade fair, according to the head of the island's food import company Alimport. Pedro Alvarez said his company expects to sign contracts worth \$40 million more by year's end. Tight US restrictions on trade with the communist-run island make it difficult to do business with the United States, but Cuba has no plans of halting the purchases, Alvarez told the press. (*AP, 20/11/05*)

November 21: The US government's case against Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat, two close allies of Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, contains the kind of intrigue that turned the terrorism suspect's own life into the stuff of Cuban exile lore. US Magistrate Judge Andrea Simonton refused to release the pair because their mere possession of automatic weapons, grenades and rounds of ammunition amounted to a "crime of violence" and posed a danger to the community. Federal agents found some of those firearms at a Broward County apartment complex owned by Alvarez, and other weapons on Mitat himself after a government informant made a delivery to him in Miami-Dade. Mitat's attorney, Dennis Kainen, said that when federal agents arrested his client, he was with Gilberto Abascal, a friend of both Mitat and Alvarez. Kainen said Mitat thought Abascal was arrested along with him -- but that did not turn out to be the case. Abascal, along with Alvarez and Mitat, was one of the five passengers aboard the fishing boat Santrina that Fidel Castro has repeatedly said smuggled Posada into the United States in March. (*The Miami Herald, 21/11/05*)

November 21: Reverend Lucius Walker, leader of the Pastors for Peace organization, is in Cuba heading a group of relatives of US youths who are studying medicine in Havana. Reverend Walker described his visit as an example of the friendship existing among the people of the US and Cuba. He noted that no measure adopted by the White House will ever damage such bonds. (*Ahora*, 28/11/05)

November 23: Santiago Alvarez, a permanent resident, could face deportation proceedings and be denied US citizenship if convicted of federal weapons and fraudulent passport charges. Alvarez, a close ally and benefactor of Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, is being held on charges of possession of a cache of machine guns, grenades, rounds of ammunition and a fake Guatemalan passport and identification papers. His immigration status could be further complicated by a prior aggravated assault conviction stemming from weapons charges, according to experts on US immigration law. Alvarez's attorney, Ben Kuehne, said his client is not "a convicted felon" because his 1988 case was settled when the judge withheld adjudication. Immigration attorneys, however, say that such a ruling is considered a conviction for the purposes of immigration law. During Alvarez's bond hearing, Kuehne revealed his client is not a US citizen but was applying for citizenship. Alvarez's co-defendant in the case, Osvaldo Mitat, is a US citizen. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/11/05)

November 24: Fidel Castro has given the go-ahead for Cuba to play in the World Baseball Classic next March, vowing a clash between Cuban amateur sport and American professionalism that has lured away many Cuban stars. The 16-nation World Cup-style baseball event is the first international tournament to include major-league players and will begin on March 3 in Tokyo and end in San Diego three weeks later. A Cuban team last played in the United States in 1999 in an exhibition game in Baltimore against the major-league Orioles. "Yes, of course, we accept the challenge (...) count on us at the party," Castro said in a television appearance. The World Baseball Classic is being organized by the International Baseball Federation, Major League Baseball, and the Major League Baseball Players Association. (*Reuters*, 24/11/05)

November 26: US authorities blocked dozens of US experts from attending a major Cuban biotechnology conference that opens in Havana, its Cuban chairman said. Carlos Borroto, chairman of the Havana Biotechnology Conference 2005 which opens with some 550 specialists from 35 countries, said US authorities' lone exception was the permission to travel granted renowned US professor John Benemann. The United States and Cuba do not have full diplomatic ties, and the United States has had a full economic embargo on the only communist-ruled country in the Americas since 1962. (*AFP*, 26/11/05)

November 27: More than a thousand Thanksgiving holiday revelers cruising within view of Cuba had to make an unexpected stop to rescue 10 Cuban migrants from a 15-foot boat foundering in the Florida Straits, passengers said. Among the migrants the crew of the *Zenith* plucked from the sea was a young girl named Jennifer. The 7-year-old won the hearts of passengers during her 10 hours on board the ship, owned by the Miami-based Celebrity Cruises. But for the girl and her family, the upgrade from a boat powered largely by homemade oars to the luxury liner was brief. The seven men and two women in the group were taken off the cruise ship by a US Coast Guard cutter, where they remained, Petty Officer Dana Warr said. Their names have not been released, and their relatives have not come forward. The group was being questioned by immigration authorities who will determine whether they will be repatriated or eventually allowed to resettle in a third country. (*The Miami Herald*, 29/11/05)

November 30: Chucho Valdés will pay tribute to New Orleans and the victims of Hurricane Katrina with an original composition during Cuba's annual international jazz festival. The Grammy-winning pianist will host this year's event, Jazz Plaza 2005, Cuba's state media reported. The tribute concert, featuring Valdes' composition "Canto a Dios," will be performed at the event's closing by the pianist, his quartet, Cuba's National Symphonic Orchestra and Cuba's National Chorus. The words to the new song were written by Cuban folk singer Pablo Milanes. (*AP*, 30/11/05)

