

FOCAL SUMMARY OF NEWS ITEMS REPORTED ON CUBA January-December 2005

This resource is a compilation of news items on Cuba listed in FOCAL's monthly Chronicle on Cuba throughout 2005

US-CUBA RELATIONS

COMISSION FOR THE ASSISTANCE TO A FREE CUBA

(See also, Exile Community/ Relations with the US Government)

February 13: In a move likely to further aggravate tensions between Cuba and the United States, the US government is offering millions of dollars to American universities and other groups under a program aimed at ending Cuba's one-party rule. Many schools traditionally have avoided the political battle between Washington and Havana. But that is beginning to change. Chicago's Loyola University last fall became one of several universities to accept such a grant, \$425,000, which university officials say will be used to continue a program that teaches English to adults in a poor Havana neighborhood. US officials argue the money that funds such programs is crucial to building political opposition to Fidel Castro on the island and preparing for what they describe as Cuba's inevitable transition from dictatorship to democracy. (*Chicago Tribune*, 13/2/05)

February 21: As part of a broad strategy to spur political change in Cuba, the US government has been quietly sending hundreds of thousands of dollars to activists seeking to undermine Fidel Castro's one-party state, according to documents and interviews. The cash assistance is being channeled through the US-financed National Endowment for Democracy and pays the salaries of more than two dozen freelance writers for a Miami-based web site that posts articles critical of the Cuban government. The cash also supports opposition figures, human-rights activists and political prisoners and their families, including prisoners jailed in 2003 during the government's crackdown on dissidents. Supporters argue the cash payments, totaling about \$200,000 a year, help keep opposition alive in a country where most dissidents are fired from their jobs and ostracized. Elizardo Sanchez, an activist who leads the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation in Havana, said his organization would not accept funds from the US government because it could compromise the commission's independence and open it to further attacks by Cuban officials. But Sanchez said he saw nothing wrong with US funds paying freelancers for their work or supporting activists, political prisoners and their families. "It's normal that the NED helps," he said. "The function of the NED is to promote democracy in the world." (*Chicago Tribune*, 21/2/05)

March 3: The transition to a democratic Cuba is already under way, said the US State Department's Roger Noriega. In a prepared testimony before a US House of Representatives panel reviewing the situation in Cuba, Noriega said that compared to just a few years ago -- "despite the brutally repressive nature" of the Cuban regime's tactics -- "there are now more

opposition activities" occurring throughout the island nation. Noriega, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, said that although these activities are "in many ways limited and fragile, I believe that we will be able to look back at them years from now and see that they were indeed significant and the precursor to a Cuban future free of misery and repression." The official said that during the previous week, he told a group of Cuban-American supporters of a free Cuba that each of them knows something that most of the rest of the world does not: "the transition [to democracy] in Cuba is already under way." (*USINFO*, 3/3/05)

March 11: The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has presented "an additional \$1 million award to the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies to continue the vital work of the Cuba Transition Project" now under way at the university, according to a press release. The newly authorized funding is an amendment to an existing cooperative agreement between USAID and the University of Miami. It will support a project described by USAID as "a pioneer academic program that examines the complex issues surrounding Cuba's eventual transition to democracy". (*USAID Press Release*, 11/3/05)

July 28: The US administration of George W. Bush has created a new post, naming Caleb McCarry 'Cuba transition coordinator'. McCarry, a veteran Republican Party activist and old Latin America hand, is tasked with accelerating the demise of the regime of Fidel Castro. Introducing Mr McCarry at the State Department in Washington, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the US was working with advocates of democratic change on the island. "We are working to deny resources to the Castro regime to break its blockade on information and to broadcast the truth about its deplorable treatment of the Cuban people," she said. The post was recommended in a 2004 report on Cuba by a commission headed by Ms Rice's predecessor Colin Powell. (*BBC, The Guardian, Latin News Daily*, 29/7/05)

July 29: Before an audience of Cuban-American legislators, exile leaders and other supporters of US-Cuba policy, newly appointed Coordinator for transition in Cuba, Caleb McCarry said, "It is the responsibility of the civilized world to act to see that the Cuban family is reunited under political and economic freedom." Speaking on Miami's Radio Mambi, McCarry summed up his appointment with the words he said will soon be shouted from every corner of José Martí's Cuba: "Viva Cuba libre." Many Cuban Americans welcomed McCarry, calling him "a friend" of the exile mission to oust Castro. "He knows our cause well," said Horacio García, a director of the Cuban Liberty Council. "They chose a person with commitment and passion." "He's extremely bright and thoroughly knowledgeable on the issue of Cuba," said Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart, Republican-Miami. "He knows who's who and he knows where we need to go." (*The Miami Herald*, 29/7/05)

July 31: Tensions have escalated between Cuba's government and dissidents, but both sides bitterly rejected Washington's appointment of a "transition coordinator" to speed Fidel Castro's downfall. "Surely he will receive a juicy salary in his new job, but Caleb McCarry -- I assure you -- will retire without setting foot in Cuba," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said in Panama. Cuban opposition leaders were at least as forceful in their reaction. "Any transition in Cuba is for Cubans to define, lead, organize and coordinate," said Oswaldo Paya, leader of the Christian Liberation Movement and promoter of a petition seeking democracy in Cuba. Other dissident groups that opposed the appointment on the same grounds were the Progressive Arch and the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission. "It will allow the Cuban government to raise the specter of foreign interference in the internal affairs

of our country," said Elizardo Sanchez of the commission. "This appointment (...) constitutes an attack on our national sovereignty," said Manuel Cuesta Morua, spokesman for the Progressive Arch. (AFP, 31/7/05)

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

October 1: It is official US policy to "undermine" Cuba's planned succession from Fidel Castro to his brother Raúl, 74. Just how that process would unfold is not clear. "We are looking to support a genuine transition to political freedom for the Cuban people," said Caleb McCarry, the State Department official recently put in charge of transition matters for Cuba. McCarry rejects charges that Washington's assistance plan is a blueprint for US control. "The offer is not an imposition," he said, asserting that none of the proposed programs would go into place without the consent of the transitional government on the island. "We need to give Cubans the opportunity for a different future and better future," McCarry said. "What people lack under the dictatorship is hope. They have to hope there will be a better future." (The New York Times, 1/10/05)

October 18: Members of Cuban civil society, dissidents and diplomats attended a video-conference organized by the US Interests Section in Havana as part of its "Series of Conferences on the Transition" on the Communist-ruled island. The video-conference, on the Cuban health care system, was held at the residence of the top US diplomat in Cuba, Michael Parmly, and was conducted from Florida by Cuban-American physician Antonio Maria de Gordon, the co-director of Miami's Westchester General Hospital. The doctor gave a presentation about the state of Cuba's public health system and its future prospects. Among those attending the session were several well-known opposition figures including Vladimiro Roca and formerly imprisoned dissidents Marta Beatriz Roque and Oscar Espinosa Chepe, two of the 14 jailed dissidents from among the so-called Group of 75 who were released by the Cuban regime over the past year for health reasons. (EFE, 19/10/05)

October 26: US Coordinator for Transition in Cuba, Caleb McCarry, defended in Madrid the importance of the "democratic allied forces" working together to promote "a real transition" on the island and of being prepared to support that process. McCarry participated in a forum on the future of Cuba and met with "high officials" of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In a press conference he said he had a "good discussion" and pointed out that "this has been only the first visit". He added that one of his objectives is for all democratic nations to play a positive role "in favour of a genuine transition and to not be content with a mere succession". (EFE, 27/10/05)

December 14: Washington's new top diplomat in Havana sees mounting frustration and anger in Cuba and is preparing for rapid change on the communist-run island, but he cannot predict when -- or how -- that will happen. US Interests Section chief Michael Parmly believes Cubans have had their fill of Fidel Castro's rule and will not wait for his demise to see change.

From his experience as a US diplomat in Romania, where communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu was ousted in street protests, Parmly envisions revolt possibly spreading like wildfire in the streets and a dictator's authority crumbling when he is shouted at in the main square. "You cannot predict these things, but you do try to prepare for them when you are pretty sure they are coming and I am pretty sure it is coming," Parmly said in an interview. "I wouldn't try to mark a date on the calendar, but I see an awful lot of signs of frustration, even anger. When the rubber band snaps is up to the Cuban people," he said. (*Reuters*, 15/12/05)

December 19: US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, chaired the second session of a panel to "hasten and ease a democratic transition" in Cuba. Rice spoke of change partly by denying the Castro government money and supplying the Cuban people with information. In a move that puts Cuba back in the sights of the Bush administration, Rice said that she is reconvening the cabinet-level commission that last revised the overall US policy on the island. The reconvened commission will present President Bush with a new report by May 2006, "with both updated recommendations to hasten democracy and an inter-agency strategic plan to assist a Cuban-led transition," Rice said. "The work we do now will ensure that our government is fully prepared, if asked, to assist a genuine Cuban transition government committed to democracy and which will lead to Cuba's reintegration into the inter-American system," she added in a statement. The Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba issued its recommendations in May 2004 after deliberating for 18 months. Its list of ways that Washington could assist a transition toward democracy was controversial because it tightened several sanctions, including a cut in the number of trips that Cuban Americans could make to visit their relatives. (*The Miami Herald, AP*, 20/12/05)

December 20: Cuba launched a blistering verbal attack on the top US diplomat in Havana and on dissidents it accused him of organizing to overthrow the government. Washington's top diplomat in Havana met with dissidents and charged that some communist supporters acted like Nazi "brown shirts" or Ku Klux Klan members. Former communist youth leader Randy Alonso, moderator of state television's nightly "Round Table" program, said the December 10 gathering at the residence of new US Interests Section chief Michael Parmly was "a new provocation against our people." "To compare Cuba to the worst fascism, and the worst racism of the United States (...) it is very hurtful," Alonso said. Cuba regularly uses the government program to express views on everything from world events to people it doesn't like. "Up to December 10, Parmly wore the suit of a diplomat, but a change came during that speech," pro-government journalist Arleen Rodriguez said on the program. Parmly, attending a Christmas party with his adult children in Havana, declined to respond to the attack. (*The New York Times, Reuters*, 21/12/05)

December 23: Fidel Castro said that any US invasion to his country would fail and called US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "mad" after Washington announced plans for a "democratic transition" in the Caribbean island. Castro said before the National Assembly: "I am going to tell you what I think about this famous commission, for the democratic transition in Cuba: they are a group of shit-eaters who do not deserve the world's respect". "In this context, it does not matter if it was the mad woman who talks of transition - it is a circus, they are completely depraved, they should be pitied," added the 79-year-old Cuban leader. While US imperialism was in its decline, Castro said, his revolution is "uncontainable and unstoppable". "We are in transition: to socialism, to communism," Castro insisted. (*EFE, Pravda*, 23/12/05)

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS

General

January 5: The president of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, has challenged the US-designed electoral model for Cuba, saying it is meant to do away with a system based on fairness and grass-root participation. "According to this US plan there will no longer be an automatic, transparent registration by which the elector is registered without too much paperwork and without having to pay a cent for it," he added in an obvious reference to measures against the island announced by Washington in May. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/1/05)

January 18: In an echo of President Bush's "axis of evil," Condoleezza Rice named Cuba, Myanmar, Belarus and Zimbabwe as "outposts of tyranny" requiring close US attention. Cuban authorities have long said the US government is planning a military attack on the island — something US officials deny, Rice said. US-Cuba relations, never good during Fidel Castro's four decades of communist rule, have deteriorated further under the Bush administration. (*AFP*, 18/1/05)

January 19: Cuba accused the United States of lying about its treatment of inmates at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, claiming torture and cruelty occur daily at the prison camp for terror suspects. The Cuban Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it sent a letter to the US government urging authorities to immediately stop the alleged abuse at the camp, which sits on Cuba's easternmost tip. Cuba said the United States has been lying to hide "the horrendous torture, cruelty and humiliating and insulting treatment of prisoners" that are all part of the abuse "the US government commits every day." Cuban authorities were informed but not consulted about the US decision to transfer a group of prisoners from the war in Afghanistan to the US base in Guantanamo, the note stresses. On January 11, 2002, Cuba issued a statement expressing that such transfer of prisoners to the military base was not in line with regulations under which the facility came into being. It also stressed that the Caribbean nation had "noted with satisfaction public statements by US authorities that prisoners will receive an adequate, human treatment. (*The New York Times*, *Prensa Latina*, 20/1/05)

January 21: Cuba's state-run media derided US President George W. Bush the day after his inauguration, dubbing the American leader an "emperor" and "the worst president ever." *Juventud Rebelde*, the Communist Youth's daily newspaper, focused its coverage on those in Washington who marched against Bush's inauguration, printing photographs of protesters and anti-Bush signs. The newspaper called the inauguration the "coronation of the emperor" and described Bush "the worst president ever." *Granma*, Cuba's Communist Party daily, had little but disdain for Bush's speech. "Putting forth increased interventionism as the axis of foreign policy for this new era, (Bush) justified the necessity of extending his empire's hegemonic power," an article said. (*AP*, 21/1/05)

February 1: Fidel Castro said that US President George W. Bush appears deranged, and that Cubans would much rather live in the Caribbean island's "heaven" than try and survive in Bush's corrupt, capitalist "hell." In comments aired live on state-run television, Castro told thousands of teachers attending an international pedagogy conference in Havana that he closely watched Bush's inauguration speech and saw "the face of a deranged person." "If only it were just the face," he said, to roars of applause by educators in the audience hailing from 52 countries around the world. Castro criticized Bush's government, linking it to corruption

and torture. He then defended Cuba's socialist system, which Bush's administration has openly said should be replaced with a democratic, free-market one. "This country is heaven, in the spiritual sense of the word," he said. "And I say (to Bush), we prefer to die in heaven than survive in hell." (*AP*, 1/2/05)

February 2: The United States took a dim view of an EU suspension of diplomatic sanctions on Cuba, calling productive dialogue with Havana "simply not possible." "We remain concerned that suspending the restrictive measures without achieving the goals for which they were put into place will embolden regime hardliners and dishearten the peaceful opposition," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher. The United States will "encourage" the European Union to actively support Cuba's peaceful opposition and to "make more vigorous efforts to focus international attention on Cuba's egregious human rights record," Boucher said. "Our experience in terms of watching what's happened with Cuba and the Castro regime is that a productive dialogue with the Castro regime is simply not possible," Boucher added. "Past efforts by the Europeans and others have yielded neither political nor economic reforms. And therefore we believe that the kind of pressure that has existed in the past is the only approach, the best approach of trying to secure change in Cuba." (*AFP*, 2/2/05)

February 3: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcon, denounced Washington's maneuvers to destroy the island's educational system and its example of equality and social justice. In a conference during the International Pedagogy 2005 conference underway in Havana, Alarcon explained the objectives of a document drafted by the US State Department entitled: "Plan for the Assistance of a Free Cuba". The Cuban Parliamentarian pointed out that the text ignores Cuba's priority in education since it claims that one of Washington's tasks will be to teach the Cuban people to read and write as well as train its teachers and professors due to their low professional quality. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 3/2/05)

February 4: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has decided to keep Roger Noriega as the top US diplomat for Latin America despite opposition by some members of Congress, officials and legislators say. Analysts saw the decision as a victory for Cuban-American lawmakers who lobbied on Noriega's behalf and as a sign that the second Bush administration will probably take a harder line against Cuba and Venezuela. Noriega has supporters, especially South Florida Republican Representatives Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. "I consider him a true soldier in favor of liberty and justice," Ros-Lehtinen said. "He's doing everything possible to boost the Bush doctrine in Latin America, combining democracies with solid market economies." (*The Miami Herald*, 4/2/05)

February 8: The State Department denounced the selection of Cuba and Zimbabwe for a panel that will decide on the agenda for a meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission next month. "The United States believes that countries that routinely and systematically violate the rights of their citizens should not be selected to review the human rights performance of other countries," State Department press office Tom Casey said. Besides Cuba and Zimbabwe, the other members of the so-called "Working Group on Situations" are Hungary, the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia. "Despite the inappropriate membership of Cuba and Zimbabwe, we look for the working group to conduct its procedures in a balanced and transparent manner," Casey said. (*AP*, 8/2/05)

February 16: Fidel Castro called the US-led war in Iraq a "brutal bombing spectacle," and criticized the Bush administration for its spending on the war. Castro said the billions of dollars

being spent in Iraq "won't cure AIDS, won't cure any disease, won't cure anybody." Meanwhile, he said in the speech to a workers' congress in Havana, Cuba exports thousands of doctors to needy countries. "Mr. Bush put forth 15 billion dollars, and with that the world moved on to the stage of the Iraq war, that brutal bombing spectacle," Castro said in remarks lasting nearly three hours. "But what is needed over there is a man, a revolutionary doctor who can save lives. And that's what we have." (*The Washington Post*, 18/2/05)

February 17: Cartoons and time capsules are the newest weapons in a four-decade-old war of words between the United States and Cuba. Long-simmering US-Cuba tensions have heated up since last May when President Bush tightened sanctions and said he would step up propaganda against Fidel Castro and support for Cuban dissidents in a move to hasten the downfall of communist rule on the island. Cuba's state-run television has fired back by broadcasting cartoons lampooning the top US diplomat in Havana, James Cason, as the point man for a transition to a post-Castro Cuba sought by the Bush administration. The cartoons about my alter-ego "Transition Man" clearly show that the Cuban regime realizes that a transition is not only inevitable but fast approaching," Cason said in a statement. (*Telemundo, Reuters*, 17,22/2/05)

March 2: The United States should view with "concern" the advance of leftist movements in Latin America, the head of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcon, said in an interview with the press. "The least the United States should do is to look with concern upon the changes in Latin America," Alarcon said, emphasizing the importance of the coming to power in Uruguay of the Broad Front headed by Socialist Tabare Vazquez. Alarcon said that Latin America "is the region of the world that is the vanguard in the alternative struggle to globalization." He called US President George W. Bush "ignorant, with an insurmountable arrogance, but with bombs and the means to destroy." The legislative chief also referred to recent measures announced by the US Treasury Department to force Cuba to pay in advance and in cash for purchases of US agricultural products. "The objective is obvious: to try and oppose the sale of U.S. agricultural products to Cuba," Alarcon said, adding that "the only loser" with that policy is the US exporter. (*EFE*, 3/3/05)

March 4: The president of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, has asserted that Cuba will defend its sovereignty in the April elections amidst US plans geared to destroy the island's electoral system, the local press highlighted. Alarcón made his statement while talking to a group of young Cubans, who will exercise for the first time their right to vote in the April suffrage to elect deputies to municipal assemblies (local governments). (*Prensa Latina*, 4/3/05)

March 4: The US government denounced that although the Cuban government has taken "a much more aggressive posture with respect to all activities deemed illegal, including narcotics trafficking, since 2003", the primary focus of this stepped-up activity has been "the repression of political activities, including the continuing arrest and detention of civil society activists". The statement was made in the latest report by the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the State Department. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 4/3/05)

March 7: Cuba's foreign minister rejected a recent U.S State Department report criticizing the island's human rights record, saying that the United States has no moral authority to judge other countries after its own scandals over treatment of terror suspects. "We exhort American authorities to worry about their own problems," Felipe Perez Roque told a news conference.

"Cuba recognizes that there are violations of human rights in our country, but they are at the Guantanamo Naval Base, in territory occupied against Cuba's will," Roque said of the U.S. base used as a giant prison for terror suspects. The February 28 US report on rights practices in Cuba acknowledged there had been no extrajudicial killings or disappearances of opponents on the island last year. But it took Fidel Castro's government to task for violations of civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, press, assembly, as well as the imprisonment of dissidents. The news conference was called to discuss the annual spring meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where a U.S.-backed resolution to condemn Cuba's rights record is presented every year. (*The New York Times*, 8/3/05)

March 17: Fidel Castro has criticized Forbes magazine for the "infamy" of listing him among the world's richest people, with a net worth of \$550 million. "Once again, they have committed the infamy of speaking about Castro's fortune, placing me almost above the queen of England," Castro said in a speech to top officials of Cuba's ruling Communist Party, military and police. "Do they think I am (former Zairian President) Mobutu (Sese Seko) or one of the many millionaires, those thieves and plunderers, that the empire has suckled and protected?" he said in reference to his capitalist archenemy, the United States. (*CNN*, 18/3/05)

March 17: The United States urged Cuba's government to release its political prisoners and promised to support Cubans who want to replace Fidel Castro's government with a democratic system. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said in a statement to mark the second anniversary of the Castro government's crackdown on dissidents that at least 300 political prisoners remain in Cuban jails serving sentences averaging 20 years. The 14 people released so far were in poor health but still are subjected to daily harassment, he said. (*AP*, 17/3/05)

March 27: As relations between the US and Cuba sink to the lowest point in years, the two countries are cooperating in one key area of mutual interest: anti-narcotics operations. Despite increasing hostility and a lack of formal diplomatic ties, Cuba's top anti-narcotics officials regularly share information with the US Coast Guard on drug traffickers passing near Cuba en route to the Bahamas and the United States, according to US officials and a new State Department report. "There are opportunities for good communications on drug shipments, and there is evidence they will notify us and incidents where they are helpful," Asa Hutchinson said in an interview just before his retirement as Homeland Security undersecretary. "But overall, it is fairly limited in terms of the resource capability of Cuba and because of the lack of formal channels and relations between the two nations," said Hutchinson, who was previously director of the US Drug Enforcement Administration. (*Chicago Tribune*, 27/3/05)

March 28: Many countries in Latin America are struggling to consolidate democratic reforms and respect for human rights, a State Department report said, reserving some of the strongest language for abuses in Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Colombia. The congressionally mandated report -- Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2004-2005 -- details US actions worldwide to promote democracy and respect for human rights. (*The Miami Herald*, 29/3/05)

April 7: In a reference to US president George Bush, Fidel Castro said that the "US emperor's visit to Rome" to pay his last respects for Pope John Paul II is an affront to the deceased prelate's memory, calling it a hypocritical attitude. "Now they have gone to cry before the cadaver of John Paul II, who so opposed the war, who so opposed the Imperialist order, who

so often condemned consumerism and this brutal war in Iraq," Castro said during his televised address. "How far will this hypocrisy go. In my judgment (Bush's presence) is an outrage to the memory of John Paul II," he said. Castro made the statement at a televised and radio appearance before Communist Party, union and grass roots leaders, Interior Ministry and Armed Forces members. He harshly criticized Bush's attitude, adding that the Pontiff was a very strong critic of war, including the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, whose promoter was the US President himself, and of nuclear weapons, the largest arsenal of which is kept precisely in the United States. The Cuban leader highlighted that unless Bush had knelt down before the body of the deceased Pontiff to ask for forgiveness for all the evils he is causing on the world, his attitude was completely hypocritical. (*Radio Habana Cuba, Reuters, 8/4/05*)

April 13: Spain's foreign minister has found a generally unsympathetic audience among both Republican and Democratic US legislators in the first part of his fence-mending mission to Washington. Miguel Angel Moratinos defended the need to intensify the two nations' bilateral dialogue in his first meeting with lawmakers on his visit to the US capital, however the legislators expressed their incomprehension over Madrid's policy toward Cuba and Venezuela. Moratinos met with members of the House International Relations Committee. There, both Republican and Democratic congressmen informed the Spanish minister that they did not understand the strategy being pursued by the government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero toward Havana and Caracas, diplomatic sources said. (*EFE, 14/4/05*)

April 14: Cuban-American congressmen celebrated the passage of a resolution against Cuba by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Florida Republican Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, one of the party's four Cuban national lawmakers, expressed his gratitude to the governments who voted "in favor of human rights and dignity for the Cuban people." For his part, Pedro Lopez, the director of the Cuban National Coordinator, which groups a dozen exile organizations, told the press that "Cuba has obtained an impressive victory." "The Cuban people will be eternally grateful to the countries who voted against (Havana's) tyranny and will designate as traitors to democracy those who voted at the side of the (island's) regime," he added. In like manner, Luis Zuñiga, the director of the Cuban Liberty Council, hailed the vote on the resolution as "the only moment of justice each year for the Cuban people." (*EFE, 14/4/05*)

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April 20: A pocket-size leaflet with a reprint of Bush's January 20 inaugural address in which he vowed to free the world of tyranny, and a second pamphlet containing the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, arrived anonymously in the dead of night on "patios" and doors of Havana. They are part of an escalating US government program to spur political change in

Cuba. The clandestine, door-to-door leafleting is the latest in the Bush administration's stepped up effort to reach citizens who have little access to public information outside Cuba's government-controlled media. In Zamora, a neighborhood of concrete homes and wood shacks packed tightly together, the pamphlets were met with dread, suspicion and curiosity. Although rumors about anything out of the ordinary usually spread like wildfire in Cuba, Zamora residents have largely kept quiet about the mysterious pamphlets. Daniel Erikson, director of Caribbean programs at the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington policy group, said the leaflets are designed more to irritate Castro than to cause change on the island. Erikson said Cubans have become extremely "risk adverse" because they live in a police state. Cuban authorities have made clear that anyone associated with the US government-financed program is a traitor who could be jailed. "Cubans do not see it to be in their own interest to be accepting or reading these flyers," Erikson said. "It's not that people are not interested in democracy. But the US is not the best messenger." (*Chicago Tribune*, 20/4/05)

April 27: The US Congress urged the European Union to press Cuba on its human rights record and condemned the communist-led island for its crackdown on dissidents. The House of Representatives voted 398-27 for a resolution that "condemns in the strongest possible terms" Cuba's arrest of 75 dissidents in March 2003 and its "continuing repressive crackdown against the brave internal opposition and the independent press." It also "calls for the European Union, as well as other countries and international organizations, to continue to pressure the Cuban regime to improve its human rights record." (*AFP*, 27/4/05)

May 3: The current US administration is leading the country towards the days of Adolph Hitler's Germany, world thinkers affirmed in Havana. Delegates to the "In Defense of Humanity" meeting, held at Havana's Convention Center on the occasion of May Day festivities, agreed that this phenomenon began to be particularly noticeable after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. They gave as examples the preventive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US deep-seated contempt for the UN and international law, election frauds, and double standards in anti-terrorism, among others. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/5/05)

June 3: Citing both the positive actions and failures of governments around the world to take the necessary steps to end modern-day slavery, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice presented to the public the fifth annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) at the US Department of State. The report records the efforts of 150 nations between March 2004 and March 2005 to deal with the issue, explained Ambassador John Miller, the senior adviser on trafficking in persons in the State Department. "Burma, North Korea, Sudan and Cuba remain on Tier III, largely because they still fail to address forced labor in their countries", Miller said. Tier 3, the least favorable rating, lists countries whose governments fail to meet minimal international standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. (*Washington File*, 3/6/05)

June 5: The OAS member states cannot rest "until freedom and prosperity and security enrich the lives of all of our people," US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said as she opened the annual session of the OAS General Assembly. "Thirty-four nations have earned their rightful place in this great democratic organization. But there remains one open seat at the table -- a seat that will one day be filled by the representatives of a free and democratic Cuba". Rice added that, "In Florida, we can glimpse the future potential of a free Cuba. As recently as 1999, the 2 million Cubans in the United States earned a combined income of \$14 billion. Now compare that with Castro's Cuba, a country of 11 million citizens and a GDP only slightly larger

than \$1 billion. The lesson is clear: When governments champion equality of opportunity, all people can prosper in freedom". (*OAS Press Release*, 5/6/05)

June 6: US president George W. Bush singled out Cuba as the only non democratic nation in the Western Hemisphere during a speech to the Organization of American States, but said "the tide of freedom" would one day reach the communist island. The president, who was addressing the 34-member body at its annual summit, noted that 30 years ago, fewer than half of the OAS members had democratically elected governments. "Today, all 34 countries participating in this General Assembly have democratic, constitutional governments. Only one country in this hemisphere sits outside this society of democratic nations -- and one day the tide of freedom will reach Cuba's shores as well," Mr. Bush said. (*The Washington Times*, 6/7/05)

June 22: Hours before a neighborhood youth group was to play a team from the US mission in Havana, Cuban security agents confiscated the baseballs, bats and mitts. The agents charged into the home of activist Marcos de Miranda to grab the sports gear, family members said, in the latest and among the most bizarre in a long history of harassment targeting this family of dissidents opposed to communist President Fidel Castro. "It was to be a sports and cultural event - nothing at all political," de Miranda, 28, said in his family's crumbling apartment. "We're denied even the right to play our national sport." De Miranda's 59-year-old father, Roberto, was among 75 government opponents rounded up two years ago, though he was released for health reasons last year. His 54-year-old mother, Soledad Rivas, is a member of the increasingly audacious "Ladies in White" who have protested for the release of imprisoned dissidents. (*Boston Herald*, 22/6/05)

June 22: The United States told Cuba it would continue to "play ball", despite complaining that communist authorities blocked a friendly baseball game between US officials and youths in Havana. "It says a lot about the paranoia and insularity of the regime that it can't tolerate young kids playing baseball with Americans," said State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli. The department said that staff of the US Interests Section in Havana planned a recent baseball against a group of young people, some of whom were human rights activists. But the Cuban government confiscated baseball equipment from the youths and prevented the US envoys from lending their kit to their opponents, and blocked access to the field where the game was supposed to take place, Ereli said. Asked what the United States planned to do about the aborted game, Ereli said: "We play ball." "We will continue to try to engage. We will continue to try to bring more democracy and openness and freedom to a country that knows very little of any of this." (*AFP*, 22/6/05)

July 4: James C. Cason, the head of the American mission in Cuba, defended his outspoken advocacy of dissidents during a July 4 celebration, marking the last public address of his three-year tour on the island. Responding to criticism he has continuously provoked Fidel Castro's government since arriving here in 2002, Cason took issue with "those who think it's more dignified to protest the Cuban regime's repression behind closed doors." "Is it provocative to point out that Cubans live under one of the most repressive regimes in the world?" Cason asked several hundred people at an American Independence Day celebration at his official residence. (*AP*, 5/7/05)

July 6: James C. Cason, head of the American mission in Cuba, said he believes he accomplished everything he could during nearly three years in Havana, and will leave the

island September 10 with a clear conscience. "We've been as appropriately aggressive as we could be," Cason told the press at his luxurious home in a residential suburb of Havana. "I have no regrets." Cason said that his successor is someone who will carry out US policy in the same devout, unwavering fashion. "Fidel said there couldn't be anyone worse than me," said Cason. "He may be sorry." (AP, 6/7/05)

July 7: Michael Parmly, a career US diplomat with experience in promoting democracy and human rights, will replace James Cason as the State Department's top man in Havana, Cuba experts familiar with the matter say. Parmly, a 26-year State Department veteran, served in 2001 as a deputy assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labor, focusing on Europe, Africa, Latin America and South Asia. He recently returned from several months as the State Department's representative on the Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Afghan province of Kandahar, one of the redoubts of the former Taliban regime. He also teaches a course on Europe at the National War College. Parmly served as a peace corps volunteer in Colombia 1973-1975, but has no diplomatic experience in Latin America. This is in contrast to Cason, who was the policy director in the Western Hemisphere bureau at the State Department and a diplomat in Jamaica and Honduras before taking on his job in Havana three years ago. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/7/05)

July 11: The United States expressed its condolences to the families of those in Cuba who lost their lives as a result of Hurricane Dennis. In a statement issued by the State Department, the U.S. Interests Section in Havana informed the Cuban government that they "were prepared to provide immediate humanitarian assistance of emergency supplies to help those Cubans affected by the hurricane". Also, they offer "to deploy an assessment team to Cuba to independently help determine what relief supplies were most needed". (*Office of the Spokesman*, 11/7/05)

July 11: Fidel Castro's communist government, laboring to recover from widespread damage caused by Hurricane Dennis, turned down a US offer of \$50,000 in aid, American officials said. US State Department officials in Havana and Washington said the offer was made for emergency supplies. "Unfortunately, the Castro government declined the offer," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said in Washington. During an appearance on state television, Fidel Castro said Cuba would accept no American assistance while the US trade embargo of more than 40 years remains in place. "We would never accept," said Castro. "If they offered \$1 billion we would say no." Nevertheless, the Cuban leader said, "we are grateful" for the offer. (AP, 11/7/05)

July 13: The head of the State Department's Cuba desk in Washington since 2002 will swap jobs with the No. 2 man at the US Embassy in Venezuela in a move that one analyst said shows the administration sees the "same dynamic" at play in Havana and Caracas. Kevin Whitaker, the coordinator of the Department's office of Cuban affairs, will become deputy chief of mission in Caracas in September. Whitaker will be replaced by Stephen MacFarland, a career diplomat specializing in Latin America. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/7/05)

July 26: Fidel Castro commemorated the 52nd anniversary of his revolution by taking aim at his nemesis, the Bush administration, and bitterly accusing it of financing and promoting recent anti-government dissident demonstrations. Addressing an auditorium full of Communist Party leaders and handpicked supporters, Castro called the top US diplomat in Havana a "grotesque character," and sternly warned that future protests planned by Cuba's dissidents

will be thwarted "as many times as necessary." Castro accused the US administration of promoting subversion and destabilization in the island through the leading role of its Interests Sections in Havana. He said the administration of US President George W Bush has used over a hundred million USD for that purpose, pursuing multiple aggressions against Cuba, including interference with radio and television transmissions. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/7/05)

July 29: Roger F. Noriega, an outspoken critic of Cuba and Venezuela who has been assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs for the past two years, announced his resignation, saying he had served in government long enough. He resigned a day after the administration named Caleb McCarry, a Republican Congressional staff member, to a new position: "transition coordinator" for Cuba, with the mission of hastening a transition to democracy there. That took primary responsibility for Cuba, one of Mr. Noriega's favored issues, away from him. (*The New York Times*, 29/7/05)

July 30: Cuban Parliament Speaker Ricardo Alarcon dismissed recent personnel changes in the US State Department's Western Hemisphere bureau, saying they will not affect long-standing tensions between Cuba and the United States. Alarcon joked that Roger Noriega, head of the bureau who consistently takes a hard-line stance against Cuba, would be sorely missed. "I'm going to miss him a lot if he doesn't appear before cameras talking, saying dumb things. He's really a very funny person," he said. Noriega is to be replaced by Thomas Shannon, a career diplomat and Latin America expert at the National Security Council. (*The New York Times*, 30/7/05)

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

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

August 30: The Bush administration backed away from claims that Cuba has an offensive biological weapons effort, acknowledging in a report to Congress that "there is a split view" among intelligence analysts on the question. The report says instead that Cuba has the

"technical capability" to pursue biological weapons research and development because of its advanced pharmaceutical industry. But it leaves open the critical question of whether it has done so. The State Department report apparently marks the first time that the US government has publicly softened its earlier charge, which has been controversial from the outset. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/8/05)

September 1: Cuba's parliament, led by Fidel Castro, set aside politics momentarily and stood for one minute in silent homage to the victims of Hurricane Katrina -- before quickly returning to normal business and condemning the US occupation of Iraq. "The whole world should feel that this tragedy is its own," National Assembly speaker Ricardo Alarcon said. "The news pained and saddened Cubans. In their name, we wish to express our profound solidarity with the people of the United States, state and local authorities and the victims of this catastrophe," Alarcon added. Castro, dressed in his trademark green military fatigues, stood with his head down for the minute of silence. (*Reuters, CNN*, 1/9/05)

September 2: Fidel Castro has offered to send help to the United States in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. At a nightly roundtable program on state-run television, Castro said his nation was ready to send 1,100 doctors and 26 tons of medicine and equipment. "Others have sent money; we are offering to save lives," he said. Castro -- an enemy of US President George W. Bush and frequent subject of condemnation from the White House -- said he would not comment on the US government's response to the tragedy because "this is not the time to kick an adversary -- while he's down." Castro said the doctors he was offering have international experience. (*CNN*, 2/9/05)

September 4: Fidel Castro put on display some 1,500 doctors equipped with medical supplies in hopes of persuading the United States to allow them to treat victims of Hurricane Katrina. Castro, in a televised meeting with the doctors, said the United States had not responded to his offer to send medical workers and 26 tonnes of supplies to the devastated US Gulf Coast. The Cuban leader read out news stories describing a lack of medical attention for Katrina refugees and those still trapped in Louisiana and Mississippi a week after the storm hit. "These doctors could all already be there providing their services," Castro said. "Forty-eight hours have passed and we still haven't received any response to our offer (...) we will wait patiently as many days as are necessary," he said. (*AP*, 4/9/05)

September 6: The United States gave longtime foe Cuba the cold shoulder over its offer to send more than 1,500 doctors to help victims of Hurricane Katrina, which created a humanitarian disaster after pummeling the US Gulf Coast. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said US officials were reviewing Cuba's offer but the US Department of Health and Human Services had indicated there was a "robust" response from US doctors who have volunteered to help. Asked whether this meant Cuba's doctors would not be needed, McCormack replied: "No, I'm not saying that. What I'm trying to do is describe for you the facts of what the response has been. And in terms of the international offers of assistance, our criterion is: What's needed?"

September 6: Cuban Foreign Ministry spokesman Jose Luis Ponce said that Cuba has yet to receive a response to Fidel Castro's offer to send to the US more than 1,500 doctors to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. Ponce said 1,586 Cuban doctors are "ready to go." He spoke to press in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where Castro was attending an oil conference. (*AP*, 6/9/05)

September 7: The White House answered Havana's offer of aid to help victims of Hurricane Katrina by saying it hoped Fidel Castro would "offer freedom to his people." Castro, who often deploys Cuban doctors abroad, has offered to send 1,586 doctors and 34 tonnes of medicine to the United States to help in the aftermath of Katrina, one of the worst natural disasters to strike the United States. White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the US State Department was handling overseas assistance offers but added: "In terms of Cuba, we would certainly hope that Castro would offer freedom to his people." The comments, which were not a rejection of Havana's offer, came after US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack did not rule out accepting the assistance, saying it would depend on the needs in the region. (AFP, 7/9/05)

September 7: Florida Republican Senator Mel Martinez said that the US government should accept Cuba's offer to send hundreds of doctors to treat victims of Hurricane Katrina, provided they are needed and "reasonably well-trained." Martinez, the first Cuban American to serve in the US Senate, said he wondered if it was "appropriate" for Cuba to send the doctors, because many had already been dispatched to Venezuela and there was a shortage of medical help on the island. Cuba sends Venezuela doctors as part of payment for subsidized oil. "But if we need doctors, and Cuba offers them and they provide good service, of course we should accept them," he said in his Washington office. "And we're grateful for that offer." (*The Miami Herald*, 7/9/05)

September 13: The United States has still not responded to Cuba's offer of 1,600 doctors to help victims of Hurricane Katrina, Cuba said. The response "has yet to arrive, and may never come," said a front-page government statement in Granma, the ruling Communist Party daily. (AP, 13/9/05)

September 19: Fidel Castro lamented that the US government had not still responded two weeks after he offered to send nearly 1,600 Cuban doctors to help Hurricane Katrina victims, saying the team could have saved lives. "It hurts to think about it," Castro told several thousand doctors gathered for a combined graduation and the formation of Cuba's new international disaster team of experienced health workers. "Perhaps some of those desperate people, situated in the water and on the verge of dying, could have been saved," the Cuban leader said. "That's a hard lesson for those whose false pride and erroneous concepts have driven them not to respond, even late, to our offer," Castro said of American officials. (*The Guardian*, 20/9/05)

September 21: The United States snubbed Cuba's offer to send about 1,600 Cuban doctors to join relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Katrina because enough American doctors have volunteered, a US official said. The offer of the Cuban government was not accepted because "there was not a match", State Department official Joseph Sullivan told reporters in Louisiana's state capital Baton Rouge. (AFP, 21/9/05)

October 5: Fidel Castro has survived 10 American presidents who wanted his Communist government to fall and he will make George W. Bush the 11th, Cuba's foreign minister said. The US State Department last year outlined an ambitious plan for a post-Castro Cuba that calls for helping its transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. "We are expecting to see Mr. Bush retire before he can fulfill that plan," Mr. Roque said yesterday after two days of meetings in Ottawa aimed at deepening ties between Cuba and Canada. (*The Ottawa Citizen*, 5/10/05)

October 9: According to dissidents who met career diplomat Michael Parmly just hours after he took command at the US Interests Section three weeks ago, the first thing he did was listen. Supporting Cuba's dogged but damaged opposition movement will be a top priority for Parmly, who starts his Havana tour at a time when US-Cuba relations are sinking to new lows. "He's very friendly, pleasant, cultured," said Oscar Espinosa Chepe, one of the dissidents who met with Parmly before the diplomatic chief had even spent his first night in Havana. When asked what he hoped Parmly would contribute, he said: "A less confrontational climate would help." Martha Beatriz Roque, another former political prisoner, proudly displays a photograph of James Cason in her cramped front room. "He was a person with a tremendous imagination. He had valor," she said, noting that he had traversed Cuba to meet with prisoners' families before the government imposed a travel ban on him. Of the U.S. propaganda campaign, she said, "My hope is that [Parmly] does the same." Miriam Leiva, who is Espinosa Chepe's wife and participates in silent, weekly marches alongside families of detained dissidents, said the United States has a fine line to walk. "What we would like is for the US government to look for a situation of less confrontation than there is now," she said. Referring to the wave of arrests, house raids, confiscated documents and ongoing arbitrary detentions, she added. "The confrontation helps the hard-liners in the Cuban government to justify their wrongdoing." (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/10/05)

October 26: The Chief of the US Interests Section in Cuba, Michael E. Parmly, said he had requested Washington's aid for those affected by Hurricane Wilma on the island. "We have offered the Cuban government our assistance in a diplomatic note sent to Havana last Monday, the 24 th", said an official from the State Department. The official added that the aid includes medical supplies and other items for emergencies, as well as a disaster assessment and control group. "Up to this moment the Cuban government has not replied", he said. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 27/10/05)

October 27: Cuba has accepted a US offer of emergency assistance following Hurricane Wilma, the first time in the memory of State Department officials that the island nation has accepted such an offer, according to State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. Cuba accepted the offer, also via diplomatic note, on October 26, and a three-person team from the US Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance currently is preparing to travel to Cuba to survey the damage and recommend appropriate assistance, McCormack said. He added that any assistance would be provided through independent nongovernmental organizations. "I think in everybody's memory this is the first time that they have accepted an offer of assistance, at least in the collective memory bank here at the State Department," McCormack said. (*USINFO*, 27/10/05)

October 27: Fidel Castro denied that his Communist government had accepted US aid for the first time in the wake of Hurricane Wilma. Havana's reply to the US offer, read out by Castro on a live television broadcast, said Cuba had not requested international aid. "That is not an acceptance of aid," the Cuban leader said. Castro, annoyed that Washington was distorting Cuba's intentions, said Havana had only accepted a visit by the assessment team in an effort to build regional cooperation in dealing with the growing danger posed by hurricanes. He agreed with the idea that the US, Mexico and other countries in the area should help each other in disaster situations, such as hurricanes, which are more frequent and stronger. "We have no objections at all to the three officials visiting us, to know their assessment and exchange views on these matters," Castro said. "We won't close the door." "This does not mean we are accepting Washington's aid," he ratified, and added that Cuba considered

cooperation must extend to all the Caribbean and Central America. (*Reuters, Prensa Latina, 27/10/05*)

October 31: During an interview with former soccer player Diego Maradona, broadcast in Argentina, Fidel Castro warned US President George W. Bush to stay away from the summit of leaders of the Americas, to which Cuba was the only nation not invited. "It would be better for him to find a pretext and not go. This is seriously an error, the FTAA is already dead and buried," Castro said during a five-hour interview. (*Reuters, 31/10/05*)

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. (*EFE, AP, 3/11/05*)

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. (*Washington Files, 16/11/05*)

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 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*)

December 5: In a harangue about how a suspected anti-Cuba terrorist entered the United States, Fidel Castro singled out Governor Jeb Bush. Castro called the governor "the fat little brother in Florida" and wondered if Bush had helped Luis Posada Carriles into the country, according to a transcript released by the Cuban press of the November 17 address to University of Havana students. The Cuban leader didn't stop there. "Forgive me for using the term 'fat little brother'" Castro said. "It is not a criticism, rather a suggestion that he do some exercises and go on a diet, don't you think? I'm doing this for the gentleman's health." The governor's office wouldn't "dignify this with a response," a spokesman said. Bush declined to discuss Castro's comments, saying questions about it were the product of a "slow news day." (*The Miami Herald, 6/12/05*)

December 6: Jeb Bush said that he was "honored" Fidel Castro had referred to him as President Bush's "fat little brother in Florida." Castro made the comment while wondering if the governor had helped a suspected anti-Cuba terrorist enter the United States in a November 17 speech at the University of Havana. Students responded with laughter. "I'm flattered and honored," Bush said with a smile, but then turned serious. "I will take any criticism from Fidel Castro, of all people, as an honor given the fact that, you know, eight million people, I believe, live on the island, eight million people are repressed and they've been that way for 40 or 50 years. "To be criticized by a man like that who has repressed people for such an extended period of time is a high honor," Bush added. "He can call me whatever he wants." (*The Miami Herald, 7/12/05*)

December 10: America's top diplomat in Havana saluted Cuban activists pushing for change on the communist-run island, highlighting what he called their bravery and perseverance in a Human Rights Day event. Michael Parmly, the chief of the US Interests Section, at the same time chided the Cuban government, accusing it of repressing its citizens' rights in order to cling to power. "Sadly, Cuba has been left behind in the global march toward democracy and greater respect for human rights," Parmly told a crowd of about 100 gathered at his residence. "The Cuban regime does not represent the people, nor does it have any interest in bettering their lives. Rather, the regime is obsessed with self-preservation." Government opponents at the gathering included pro-democracy activist Oswaldo Paya, former political prisoner Martha Beatriz Roque, and the "Ladies in White," a group of Cuban women who have been holding a weekly silent march for two years to protest the government's jailing of their activist husbands. Parmly praised them all for their leadership and vision. (*AP, 11/12/05*)

December 13: In the three months that Michael Parmly has been the top US diplomat in Cuba, he has talked to many "awfully smart people" he thinks have the pulse of the island: the leading dissidents and opposition figures. Based on those conversations, Parmly is convinced that Cubans yearn for a transition from the island's communist system to a new democratic government. "I don't know when a change is happening," said Parmly, the chief of the US Interests Section. "I just know that a change is happening." Parmly, a career diplomat who replaced Interests Section chief James Cason in September, said the United States would offer help to a new government only if Cubans on the island asked. He also said that if Cubans here were to transform their communist country into a democracy, Cubans from South Florida and other nations would help in a transition. "Every country that's changed starts with the diaspora," Parmly said in an interview with the South Florida Sun-Sentinel. "So long as it's the Cuban people who have the lead -- those with an intimate stake in what the future will look like -- they're going to reach out to Miami. They're going to reach out to Florida." (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/12/05)

December 21: Cuba's TV show "The Round Table" was particularly virulent against the US representative in Havana and the local dissident movement. It followed a broadcast on December 20 that accused US mission chief Michael Parmly of using the dissidents to carry out the Bush administration's declared goal of ousting Fidel Castro from power. "He's like a pig that puts on clothes but is still a pig. And in this case, the pig is the American policy against Cuba, a policy that attempts to strangle us one way or another", Cuban official journalist Arleen Rodríguez said. (*The New York Times*, *CNN*, 22/12/05)

December 22: Fidel Castro has called the head of the US diplomatic mission in Havana, Michael Parmly a "little gangster" for slamming the regime's human rights record. Parmly, head of the US interests section in Havana, criticized the Castro regime at a speech marking International Human Rights Day earlier this month. Castro said during a rambling speech to the rubber-stamp National Assembly that he did not know who was worse -- "that little gangster," referring to Parmly or "the previous gangster" -- meaning Parmly's hard-charging predecessor, James Cason, who Castro earlier had described as a "bully." (*The Sun Sentinel*, 23/12/05)

December 25: In an interview published in The Miami Herald, the chief of the US Interest Section in Havana, Michel Parmly, answered why he never mentions the name of Fidel Castro: "I never met the man. When I see the senior leadership performing on TV, I scratch my head, because it's surreal (...) The logic is very hard to follow. The logic is from another place. The logic is very harsh and cruel (...) My interest is the future, and the Cuban people." A career diplomat, Parmly has served in a number of countries emerging from conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. "We need to play for today while being concerned for tomorrow. That's what I think about every morning when I wake up: What can I do for people today? We stand ready to help them", Parmly said. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/12/05)

December 30: Fidel Castro and Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales said cooperation between their countries will bloom despite US worries about more nations allying with communist Cuba. During Morales' visit to the island, the two men announced a 30-month plan to erase illiteracy in the South American nation as Cuba moves to increase hemispheric cooperation without US influence. Castro anticipated that Washington would not welcome him gaining another close ally in South America, where he already boasts a strong friendship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. "Could it be that the government of the United States

feels hurt that Cuba cooperates with a brother nation?" Castro asked. "Does that offend the US government (...) is it anti-democratic, is it a crime?" (*CNN*, 1/1/06)

Venezuela-Cuba Relations

(See also, Foreign Affairs/ Venezuela)

January 18: US Secretary of State nominee Condoleezza Rice warned about the "close association" between Cuba's Fidel Castro and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, both outspoken critics of the United States. "We do have to be vigilant and to demonstrate that we know the difficulties that (Chavez's government) is causing for its neighbors, and about his (Chavez) close association with Fidel Castro," Rice told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Rice was responding to questions by Democrat Christopher Dodd about US relations with Latin America ahead of what is expected to be easy Senate confirmation. Rice was referring to a flap between Chavez and the staunchly pro-US Colombian government of President Alvaro Uribe. (*AFP*, 18/1/05)

February 12: Fidel Castro warned the United States against plotting to kill his most important ally, Venezuela's leftist President Hugo Chavez. "I say to world public opinion: if they assassinate Chavez, the responsibility will fall squarely on the president of the United States, George W. Bush," Castro said. The Cuban leader, who was the target of CIA assassination plots after his 1959 revolution steered Cuba toward Soviet Communism, gave no evidence that Chavez's life was in danger. But he said the United States would be responsible for killing Chavez even if the Venezuelan military was to carry out the assassination. He added: "If they can eliminate him, they will." "This comes from a survivor. I have survived," he said in a nearly six-hour speech that began late at night and lasted into the early hours of next day. (*The New York Times*, 12/2/05)

February 17: US Central Intelligence Agency Director Porter Goss identified Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti and Cuba as "potential flashpoints" or areas of instability in Latin America in 2005. In the case of Venezuela, Goss said that (President Hugo) "Chávez is consolidating his hold on power by using technically legal tactics to target his opponents and is meddling in the region, supported by Fidel Castro." (*La Crónica de Hoy*, 17/2/05)

February 28: The State Department listed prisoner abuse in Cuba, violence in Haiti and intimidation of the media and the opposition in Venezuela as areas of concern for human rights in Latin America. The concerns were part of the department's 2004 Human Rights Report, detailing conditions around the world. The report reserved its sharpest language for countries such as Cuba, Syria, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. During her introductory remarks at a media briefing on the report, Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, called Cuba's record "a blight on the stunning advancement of freedom worldwide." (*The Miami Herald*, *EFE*, 1/3/05)

April 29: The leaders of Cuba and Venezuela relished their roles as Washington's bad boys in Latin American and vowed to build a socialist alternative to US policies in the hemisphere. Fidel Castro and the younger and equally loquacious Hugo Chavez mocked Bush administration charges that their burgeoning partnership threatens to undermine democracy in Latin America. "I'm realizing that your friendship is hurting my image," Castro joked to Chavez during a meeting with hundreds of free trade opponents from across the Americas. Among the attendees were Bolivian coca farmer Evo Morales, whose peasant movement helped oust a US

ally from the presidency in 2003, and former Salvadoran guerrilla Shafik Handal, leader of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front. "If we are speaking of an axis, that axis is spreading in all directions and turning into masses of people that are rising up," said Chavez. We must congratulate (US Secretary of State) Condoleezza Rice for the death of the FTAA. The FTAA is dead, the ALBA is coming," declared Castro, calling her "Condolence" Rice. The only country that has joined ALBA is Cuba, which has turned to Venezuela for oil to pull up a cash-starved economy crippled by the demise of the Soviet Union. (*Reuters*, 29/4/05)

June 3: Fidel Castro said that the US government's current anti-terrorist crusade is a continuation of Operation Condor, a plan carried out in order to crush progressive forces in Latin America in the 70s. Referring to a speech by Argentinian writer Miguel Bonasso before the International Meeting against Terrorism, for Truth and Justice, Castro indicated that these plans include attempts to assassinate Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and destroy the Bolivarian Revolution. Condor is against Venezuela now, one of the current US administration's main concerns, something that cannot be underestimated if one wants to wipe out all abhorrent tragedies and events witnessed by this continent, he said. (*Prensa Latina*, 4/6/05)

July 24: A new TV station backed by Venezuela's government began transmitting in various countries across Latin America. The Telesur network, which organizers call a Latin alternative to large media outlets like CNN, was being seen in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil and Cuba as well as Venezuela, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez said. The station, funded by Venezuela and also backed by Argentina, Uruguay and Cuba, has drawn concern in the US Congress, where House members last week approved a measure to transmit radio and television broadcasts to Venezuela to ensure citizens receive "accurate news." (*AP*, 24/7/05)

July 26: Cuba and Venezuela are attempting to install leftist governments throughout Latin America and are closest to achieving their objective in Bolivia, a Defence Department official said. Roger Pardo-Maurer, a deputy assistant secretary who specializes in Western Hemisphere issues, said Bolivia has become the main target of the two leftist Caribbean countries because revolutionary conditions exist there. "There is no question" that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is "providing money and moral support" for Opposition forces in Bolivia, who are led by a populist congressman, Evo Morales. While Chavez provides the resources for the Bolivian Opposition, Fidel Castro provides the direction and organisation, Pardo-Maurer said. "They are trying to steer this revolution toward a Marxist-socialist populist state," said the Pentagon official, speaking to a gathering at the conservative Hudson Institute. (*Jamaica Observer*, 27/7/05)

July 27: US Undersecretary of State for Latin America Affairs, Roger Noriega accused Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro of meddling in Bolivia. Noriega said that the Bolivian government is fully aware of the problem. The target of Noriega's attack was Bolivian presidential candidate and leader of coca farmers Evo Morales whom Noriega alleges is being backed by Chavez Frías and Castro. "It's no secret that Evo Morales reports to Caracas and Havana," Noriega said. (*Venezuelanalysis.Com*, 28/7/05)

August 16: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accused Washington's leftist foes Venezuela and Cuba of trying to destabilize Bolivia, embroiled in indigenous revolts that have overthrown two presidents in two years. "There is certainly evidence both Cuba and Venezuela have been involved in the situation in Bolivia in unhelpful ways," Rumsfeld told reporters while

flying to Paraguay on an official visit. He gave no evidence to support his claim. (*The New York Times*, 16/8/05)

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

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

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

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

October 19: A senior State Department official said Caribbean nations have been successfully resisting efforts by Cuba and Venezuela to "drive a wedge" between the United States and nations of the region. "Caribbean countries have not been lured by failed static ideologies," said Dan Fisk, a ranking official in the State Department's Western Hemisphere Affairs bureau. But he warned that the region's particular circumstances could, over time, create opportunities for a variety of transnational threats, including terrorism and inroads by criminal

organizations. Fisk testified before a House International Relations subcommittee. Close engagement between the United States and the Caribbean is essential at a time when "Cuba and Venezuela are promoting an alternative and regressive vision for the region's future," he said. Fisk said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has two relatively recent meetings with Caribbean counterparts and plans are under way for another meeting early next year. (*AP*, 19/10/05)

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)

EMBARGO, TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, REMITTANCES, AND RADIO AND TV TRANSMISSIONS

(See also, Exile Community/ Relations with the US Government)

January 5: Commerce Secretary nominee Carlos Gutiérrez sailed through his Senate confirmation hearing as lawmakers praised his climb from refugee to chief executive of Kellogg Co. Gutiérrez, 51, left Cuba as a child when communists seized power and rose through the ranks of Kellogg. He is credited with transforming the maker of Frosted Flakes cereal and Eggo waffles from a giant but sleepy food company to one of the best-managed US businesses. Gutiérrez promised Senator Byron (Democrat-North Dakota) to look into the senator's concerns about pending Treasury Department regulations that could effectively cut off US food sales to Cuba allowed under a bill passed by Congress in 2000. But he made clear he would not be an advocate for easing the Bush administration's hard line toward the island nation. "I support the president's policy on Cuba," he said. (*Reuters*, 5/1/05)

January 14: President Bush notified Congress that he would maintain a ban on lawsuits by US citizens whose property was taken by the Cuban revolution. Bush said in a letter that the action was "necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba." The lawsuit provision was included in a 1996 law aimed at tightening sanctions against Cuba. Secretary of State Colin Powell recommended that Bush renew the waiver, but some officials urged that the provision be allowed to lapse, thus opening the way to lawsuits. (*The New York Times*, 15/1/05)

February 11: An administrative law judge fined a Michigan couple \$5,250 for traveling to Cuba in 2001. The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control had asked Administrative Law Judge Irwin Schroeder to fine Michael and Andrea McCarthy \$9,750. The McCarthys, of Port Huron, went to Cuba through Canada in April 2001. They are devout Catholics who considered the trip a missionary effort as well as a vacation. They brought medicine to a group of nuns in Havana, as they had done on similar trips to Mexico and Haiti, and participated in religious services. "Here are five thousand reasons to repeal the ban on travel by Americans to Cuba," Sarah Stephens, an advocate for the couple from the Center for

International Policy, which opposes the Cuba travel ban, said in a written statement. (AP, 11/2/05)

February 14: During the past year, the Bush administration has exerted pressures and imposed fines on several foreign banks doing business with Cuba. Specifically designed to prevent Havana from depositing US dollars abroad to fulfill its trade obligations, US enforcement actions are part of a broader attempt to further disrupt Cuba's limited access to international financing and hasten the demise of Fidel Castro's decades-long rule over the island. According to the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), claims of foreign banks on Cuba, which refer to financial assets such as loans, debt securities and equities, rose more than 30 percent between 2000 and 2003. By September 2003, these claims totaled \$1.97 billion, with European banks accounting for about 85 percent of all international credit to Cuba. Last May, the U.S. Federal Reserve imposed a fine of \$100 million on USB, Switzerland's largest bank, for allegedly making transactions in American dollars with Cuba in violation of U.S. sanctions. Additional fines were levied against the Italian group Banca Commerciale Italiana and the Spanish bank Santander for illegally transferring funds to the island. As the United States stepped up pressures on banking institutions to curtail their relations with the Castro government, one would expect a substantial reduction in the flow of international credit to Cuba. (*Orlando Sentinel*, 14/2/05)

February 14: A couple will appeal a judge's fine of \$5,250 for a trip to Cuba they say had a humanitarian purpose, their attorney said. Attorney Kurt Berggren said the fine was excessive, and he will file the appeal for Michael and Andrea McCarthy. The McCarthys, of Port Huron, are devout Roman Catholics who traveled to Cuba in 2001 for a vacation but also took medicines with them and participated in religious services. (*The Seattle Post*, 14/2/05)

February 24: A Cuban government tobacco company lost its right to the Cohiba cigar name in the United States, allowing New York-based General Cigar Holdings to market cigars bearing the famous trademark in this country. The US Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Cubatabaco could not hold the trademark in the United States because of the trade embargo with Cuba. In its ruling, the appeals panel reversed a lower court's opinion that had stopped General Cigar from selling products under the Cohiba name in the United States. "We hold that the Embargo Regulations bar Cubatabaco's acquisition of property rights in the US," the appeals court said. (*Reuters*, 24/2/05)

March 3: During a hearing by two House International Relations Committees US Congress was sharply divided over policy to Cuba. Farm state lawmakers from both parties and liberal Democrats say more than four decades of US embargoes have failed to end Castro's dictatorship and that policies of engagement are more likely to produce changes. But Cuban-American lawmakers and Republican congressional leaders favor Bush's hard line. Bush, seeking to deny Castro US dollars, has tightened the embargo, making it harder for Americans to travel to or do business with Cuba. Democrats charged the Bush administration has failed to develop a coherent Latin American policy, and said its effort to isolate Cuba while engaging with other non-democratic government was inconsistent. Representative Diane Watson of California suggested initiating "strategies to talk with Fidel Castro," and said the United States needs "to clean our act up" in dealing with many other non-democratic countries. (*The New York Times*, 3/3/05)

March 8: Despite the Bush administration's crackdown on exiles' trips back to Cuba, there are still ways to travel to the island without restriction. Religious groups can get licenses with little trouble. And the head of at least one group that says it practices the Afro-Cuban religion Santeria acknowledged that his congregation has exploded in size since the new travel restrictions kicked in. Jose Montoya, head of the Sacerdocio Lucumi Shango Eyeife in Miami, said between 1996 and July 2004, he took about 60 people to Cuba under his religious travel license. Since the restrictions took effect in July, he has taken about 2,500, he said. Exiles who support the restrictions - which cut exile trips to Cuba from once a year to once every three years - say the Santeria groups are abusing their religious privilege. (*The Miami Herald*, 8/3/05)

March 17: The US Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of YM BioSciences Inc.'s experimental TheraCIM drug in a clinician-sponsored study to treat a child with advanced brain cancer. The drug earlier achieved a 35-per-cent response rate in the second of three clinical trials conducted in Germany, allowing YM's European partner to proceed to pivotal testing. TheraCIM was developed in Cuba and has been precluded from clinical testing in the United States because of trade legislation with Cuba. (*The Globe and Mail*, 17/3/05)

March 20: UN Food Organization Rapporteur Jean Ziegler said in Havana that Washington's blockade against the island is genocide. Ziegler, a renowned Swiss lawyer and sociologist, denounced this policy as "a flagrant violation of human rights", adding that as a UN Rapporteur he has the right to ask governments for a response on certain policies, but the Bush administration had turned down a visa request when the world body requested the US State Department for permission so he could visit Washington to discuss the blockade issue. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/3/05)

March 24: Two Republican lawmakers promised to try to ease US restrictions against Cuba, saying tourism and trade can do more to undermine Fidel Castro's hold on the country than current US policy. Representative Jeff Flake of Arizona said he will attempt to get Congress to eliminate funding for enforcement of the US travel ban against Cuba, allowing more Americans to travel to the communist island. "I don't think that for the next four years we can maintain this policy," Flake told a group of international journalists. Referring to US' four-decade old policy of isolating Cuba, Flake and Representative Wally Herger of California said that US policy-makers needed to take a more creative approach. "We need to do what we did in Eastern Europe" by putting more Americans in contact with Cubans, said Herger. "Change will not come from the policies we've had in the past." Both lawmakers said they would also back other legislation aimed at making it easier for American food producers to sell to Cuba by easing new limitations on how communist Cuba pays for the goods. (*AP*, 24/3/05)

March 28: The best way to promote freedom in Cuba remains trading and promoting tourism in Cuba. That's because personal freedom follows economic freedom, and Cubans want and need American products, Representative Jerry Moran said in Salina. Moran visited the island nation again last week, where he met two other congressmen on a fact-finding trip concerning markets for US agricultural products. Moran has been a strong supporter of easing economic sanctions on Cuba. He pushed legislation in 2000 that allowed Cuba to purchase American food, agricultural products and medical supplies for cash. "Cuba has become a market for US agricultural commodities that ranks twenty-third in countries we sell the most to," he said. "Since my amendment became law, nearly \$1.4 billion dollars US agricultural commodities (have been sold)." (*The Salina Journal*, 29/3/05)

April 6: The President of the US company Calhoun Foods, Gregory Calhoun, underlined the need to put an end to the US embargo on Cuba. At the opening in Havana of a food business exhibit organized by this Alabama company, Calhoun said: "we are working to end the trade obstacles with the island. Calhoun and Buffy Donlon, president of Ala Caribe Initiative Inc., also from Alabama, are heading a US delegation to the food exhibition in Havana. (*Prensa Latina, ABC, 6/4/05*)

April 6: The US Senate voted to keep the government-backed broadcasts aimed at Cuba. The broadcasts by Miami-based Radio and TV Marti are funded though the US Information Agency and the budgets are often disputed in Washington. An amendment on a State Department spending bill this year would have cut the \$21.1 million budget for Radio and TV Marti, including \$8 million for airborne TV broadcasts. The Senate defeated the amendment by a 65-35 vote. US Senator Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota), called the broadcasts a "colossal waste of taxpayer money." "It is absurd to spend \$21.1 million to send TV signals to Cuba that no one sees," Dorgan said. But US Senator Bill Nelson said the money will help the messages reach Cubans. (*AP, 6/4/05*)

April 8: The US government is cracking down on certain religious organizations that promote licensed travel to Cuba, restricting the number of visitors they can send to ensure that limits on US citizen travel to -- and spending in -- Cuba are enforced. The Office of Foreign Assets Control sent letters to dozens of organizations that have US-issued religious licenses for travel to Cuba, warning them not to abuse their privileges and announcing investigations into alleged wrongdoing. The regulators also imposed a limit on the number of people who can travel to Cuba under the auspices of these religious groups: 25 every three months. There were no limits previously. (*The Miami Herald, 8/4/05*)

April 25: A move to limit travel from Florida to Cuba died in the Florida Senate when committee members said they don't want to stop anyone from visiting a sick or dying relative. The plan championed by Representative David Rivera, Republican-Miami, was designed to stop Floridians from traveling to and helping the economy of terrorist nations, mainly communist Cuba. It would have stripped Cuban expatriates of any state and federal benefits if they returned home within three years of arriving in Florida and called for stiff fees on charter flights to the island nation. "You'd be able to travel to a terrorist country, just not do it on the taxpayer's dime," said Rivera, one of South Florida's most vocal supporters of President George W. Bush's tough restrictions on travel and gift parcels to Cuba announced last May. But members of the Senate Commerce and Consumer Services Committee openly wondered why they should stop someone from visiting family. (*Sun Sentinel, 25/4/05*)

April 26: In a show of the growing clout of Cuban-American lawmakers in Washington, a bipartisan group of legislators is forming a caucus to strengthen measures designed to weaken Fidel Castro's regime and to promote Cuba's civil society and pro-democracy movement. The Cuban Democracy Caucus had yet to finalize its agenda and membership, but a draft of a 10-point agenda shows the caucus may push for aggressive new tactics to undermine Castro. Among the moves being pushed, the agenda supports current US law behind the embargo and fight legislation that would allow US tourists to visit and spend money in Cuba; insists that US interests be allowed to lobby the Havana government as much as Washington allows lobbying by the Cuban government; demands accountability for crimes committed by the Cuban government against US citizens, such as the shoot-down of the Brothers to the Rescue planes in 1996, which resulted in four US civilian deaths. (*The Miami Herald, 27/4/05*)

April 27: Activists from across the country gathered in Washington to protest US sanctions against Cuba. In a ballroom of the Hyatt Regency hotel, more than 700 activists gathered to hear members of Congress talk about legislation that would repeal travel restrictions to the island. One of those members said that those who support sanctions against Cuba are organizing because they are worried about losing ground in the fight. In reference to the creation of the Congressional Cuba Democracy Caucus, an organization that focuses attention on human rights violations in Cuba and on the dissident movement in Cuba, Representative Jeff Flake said as he left the Hyatt ballroom, "they look at a group like this and they say, Hey, this issue is slipping away from us." (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/4/05)

May 4: Bowing to criticism that it could get sucked into the battle between Washington and Havana, Chicago's Loyola University has suspended a US government-funded program to provide English language courses to adults in a poor Havana neighborhood, a university spokeswoman said. Since 1999, students at the Jesuit school have paid their own expenses to teach English for two weeks during the summer at a Catholic community center in Cuba. But last fall Loyola signed a \$425,000 grant with the US government to continue the courses under a program managed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) that seeks to spur political change on the communist island. In Cuba, even a modest and benign educational program like Loyola's garners scrutiny because it is being financed by the US at a time when relations between the two nations are at their lowest point in years. Maeve Kiley, a Loyola spokeswoman, said the university informed faculty and students early last month that its Cuba program was suspended "at the request of our Cuban partners." (*Chicago Tribune*, 5/5/05)

May 8: Hundreds of British holiday makers have had their travel plans wrecked after Ebookers cancelled all its bookings to Cuba. The travel agency group also owns Travelbag, Flightbookers and Bridge the World, all of which have cancelled every holiday or flight booking they hold to Cuba. The group was bought by Cendant, a large American corporation, in February, and has decided it must now comply with the US trade embargo prohibiting trade with or travel to Cuba. "It seems utterly ridiculous", said one traveller who was called by Ebookers and told it would no longer be taking him on his honeymoon to Cuba. "The Iberia plane we were booked on is still flying to Cuba, but we're now having to re-book with another company. Ebookers didn't give any explanation - they just said it was something to do with their new owners." (*The Observer*, 8/5/05)

May 10: The Cuban government was in a High Court battle with an American company over the rights to music heard on the award-winning album Buena Vista Social Club and the film of the same name. A company run by the communist state's interior ministry had tried to register itself as the copyright owner of the songs in the UK. The US company, Peer International Corporation, which has claimed ownership of the songs since the 1930s, took its battle to the British courts, saying it had always paid the writers and their heirs a fair price. But Editora Musical de Cuba (EMC) said the poor Cubans got virtually nothing. The contracts should not be recognised in law as they were "unconscionable bargains". In papers submitted by Peter Prescott, QC, EMC said it would show that "these contracts were so cunningly contrived as to allow the publishers to get away with paying the composers practically nothing". The composers got "nothing or, at most, a few pesos and maybe a drink of rum". (*The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, 11/5/05)

May 12: In conversations with the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the US Department of Treasury, K.B. Forbes, the Executive Director of the Consejo de Latinos Unidos, a national non-profit advocacy group that educates and assists Hispanics, called on the office to investigate Sacerdocio Lucumi Shango Eyeife (a Miami for-profit corporation) with ties to the Yoruba Cultural Association (Asociacion Cultural Yoruba de Cuba) -- an organization based in Havana, Cuba that appears to collect hard- currency and useful intelligence for Fidel Castro's government while fraudulently masquerading itself as a "cultural" group and recruits members in the US. Forbes said, "All travel privileges to Cuba under the auspices of Sacerdocio Lucumi Shango Eyeife and known Yoruba Cultural Association members in the United States should be thoroughly investigated." (*PRNewswire*, 12/5/05)

May 24: A former top Defense Department official born in Cuba has pleaded guilty to lying about his visit to the island last year, having told US officials that he was visiting a sick aunt when he really went to see a woman his lawyer described as a "girlfriend." Alberto R. Coll, a longtime specialist on US-Cuba relations, had his security clearance temporarily suspended at the Naval War College in Newport, RI, where he serves as chairman of the strategic research department. "His security clearance is not revoked but his access to classified information has been suspended for the time being," Susan Haeg, a spokeswoman at the college told the press. "This is a matter between him and the district attorney. We're not going to make any decisions until this matter takes its course." Coll is charged with making "false statements to representatives of the US Department of State and the US Department of Defense concerning the purpose of a proposed visit to the nation of Cuba," according to court documents. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/5/05)

May 25: Cubans living in the United States still send an estimated \$460 million a year to relatives on the island despite restrictions tightened by the Bush Administration last summer, according to a poll released by a Coral Gables firm. The results of the Bendixen survey, presented during a forum at the think tank Inter-American Dialogue, indicate that 69 percent of respondents continue to send the same amount of money as before President Bush tightened restrictions on remittances to Cuba. Bendixen's survey was conducted in February and results were based on telephone interviews with 1,000 Cuban adult immigrants throughout the United States. But a separate survey by an Inter-American Dialogue researcher, based on interviews with some 200 people who live on the island, showed that while 58 percent of recipients said they continue to receive the same amount of money from relatives abroad, 29 percent reported that they are getting less funds. The island respondents were nearly evenly split in their views on what prompted changes in cash flow: 13 percent blamed new measures imposed by the Cuban government while 11 percent pointed to tightened US restrictions. (*The Miami Herald*, 26/5/05)

June 7: A naval professor was sentenced to a year of probation for lying about a visit to Cuba to see his mistress. Alberto Coll, the Cuban-born chairman of the Strategic Research Department at the US Naval War College in Newport, pleaded guilty in March to lying about the purpose of the visit in 2004. Coll told federal authorities he was visiting an ailing aunt. US District Judge Ronald Lagueux also fined Coll \$5,000, calling the crime an aberration and an "error in judgment." (*AP*, 7/6/05)

June 9: Arizona Republican Representative Jeff Flake's efforts succeeded when the Foreign Relations Committee of the Lower Chamber of Congress passed an amendment to the State Department's proposed authorization bill to include Cuba among the countries that would

benefit from US government-sponsored study abroad program funding. The amendment proposes to assign \$5 million USD to Cuban or US citizens seeking to study in the US or Cuba within the grant framework provided by Fellowships from the Fulbright Program, EducationUSA, Gilman (study abroad programs), Humphrey Fellowships, the International Visitor Leadership Program, as well as the professional, cultural and youth programs managed by the Office of Citizen Exchanges. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/6/05)

June 10: Participants in the National Summit on Cuba were told that lifting the embargo on Cuba would be a financial boon to the United States, and particularly the South. The fourth annual summit drew about 300 people to the Mobile Convention Center to hear from political and academic leaders who generally advocated lifting of the embargo. A handful of officials from Cuba participated with live feeds from Havana. Semoon Chang, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of South Alabama, and Tim Lynch, director of the Center for Economic Forecasting and Analysis at Florida State University, both provided numbers showing the financial benefit of trade with Cuba. (*The Sun Herald*, 11/6/05)

June 14: In seeking to pass a resolution to normalize US relations with Cuba, Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson faced indignation - not from Cuban exiles, but from New Jersey mayors. During the US Conference of Mayors annual meeting last week in Chicago, four mayors from the Garden State attacked the resolution while it was being discussed in the conference's international affairs committee, the Trentonian reports. The reason: A woman who killed a New Jersey trooper in 1973 escaped from prison and fled to Cuba, where she has been protected from extradition, according to the newspaper. The mayors' committee eventually tabled Anderson's proposal, which says the US economic embargo harms children and the elderly and that the policy has further isolated Cuba. It "urges the normalization of diplomatic and economic relations." Anderson said the committee formed a five-member task force to work on a new Cuba resolution for next year. (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, 15/6/05)

June 15: A \$61.3 billion appropriations measure, which also funds the State and Commerce departments, figured in a second battle over Commerce Department rules restricting gift packages mailed from the US to Cuba. In a 216-210 roll call, lawmakers reversed the trend of taking a more open approach to Cuba, instead voting to uphold the rules after strong pressure from Majority Leader Tom DeLay. Mr. DeLay held his Republican defections to just 35, 11 fewer than last year when he lost on the same issue. "To deny the Cuban people toothpaste and toilet paper will not bring down Fidel Castro," chided Representative William Delahunt (Democrat, Massachusetts). Mr. DeLay said lawmakers risked undercutting the plight of dissidents in Cuba. (*The Wall Street Journal*, 16/6/05)

June 20: The New York state Assembly is calling for eased restrictions on Americans' travel to Cuba, advocating a policy some observers of Cuba say enriches Fidel Castro's communist regime and exploits ordinary Cubans. The Assembly passed a nonbinding resolution calling on the Bush administration to encourage "streamlining licensing procedures for qualified United States persons traveling to Cuba" for "people-to-people" visits. Such visits, members of the Assembly argue, establish meaningful ties between ordinary Americans and Cubans, sowing the seeds for cross-cultural exchanges that will promote democracy on the island. (*The New York Sun*, 20/6/05)

June 23: A yearlong delay in the purchase of an airplane to broadcast TV and Radio Marti's signals to Cuba has stoked concern on Capitol Hill that the C-130 currently being used may be

reassigned to Iraq. The possible loss of the airborne broadcasts -- touted by President Bush as a key strategy to break through Havana's jamming and hasten the island's transition to democracy -- has prompted foes of Fidel Castro to send pleas to the White House and Pentagon. In letters to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President Bush, Miami Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen cited "grave concerns about reports that the C-130 Commando Solo airborne platform transmission currently dedicated to Cuba-related activities may be reassigned." (*The Miami Herald*, 23/6/05)

June 23: The US military aircraft broadcasting TV and Radio Martí's signals to Cuba will not be diverted to Iraq, at least until a replacement plane is bought and equipped, a senior State Department official said. "The president has made the decision that we would do what we could to break through the information blockade imposed by the Castro regime," the official said after the press reported concerns raised by Miami Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen that the Pentagon's C-130 Commando Solo plane could be sent to the Middle East. "As far as we know (...) until the permanent platform is available, the C-130 is flying," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of sensitivity surrounding the issue. The official added that negotiations are under way with legislators to win approval for President Bush's \$10 million budget request for the purchase of the plane. "The president is fully committed to securing a permanent platform for Radio and TV Martí," Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart, Republican-Miami, said. "And I am not aware of anyone in the administration challenging the president on issues where he has clearly made his intent known, such as this one." (*The Miami Herald*, 23/6/05)

June 30: Reversing years of congressional votes that showed supporters of easing US sanctions on Cuba gaining strength, the US House of Representatives rejected three such proposals and gave a categorical win to supporters of a tough line on Havana. An amendment seeking to overturn limits on Cuban-Americans' family travel to Cuba was defeated 211-208 -- the first time such an initiative was beaten back in a congressional vote. A similar amendment, also submitted by Florida Democrat Jim Davis, was approved last year on a 225-174 vote. A proposal to ease restrictions on US student travel to Cuba, presented by Representative Barbara Lee, Democrat-California, was defeated 233-187. Last year it was so heavily backed that it passed by a simple voice vote. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/7/05)

July 4: The US Pastors for Peace set off its 16th occasion protest caravan against the US embargo through Canada and the US, reported Granma newspaper. During their tour, the organization's members aim to collect 80 tons of humanitarian aid, particularly medical equipment, school items and computers, which will be donated to Cuba. (*AIV*, 4/7/05)

July 11: Leaders in both the Cuban-American and Haitian-American communities were divided over how -- or whether -- humanitarian aid should be sent to their respective, politically beleaguered homelands. Opposed to tough US rules tightening remittances and travel to Cuba, Silvia Wilhelm, executive director of the Cuban American Commission for Family Rights, said a letter-writing campaign was under way to have the travel restriction rescinded for a few months. The proposed freeze, she said, would allow those with family in Cuba to travel to the island to assist in disaster relief. Wilhelm said for those who can't visit, the government should also consider broadening the items that Cuban-Americans can send to the island. In a joint statement, US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Díaz-Balart and Mario Díaz-Balart, all Miami Republicans, encouraged local residents to donate to local organizations licensed to

send unlimited amounts of humanitarian aid to Cuba through non-governmental organizations. Still, some were skeptical about the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations, saying aid would end up in the wrong hands or simply refused by the communist government. "Every time the exile community has wanted to send aid, Castro has said he doesn't want it," said Ninaska Perez Castellon, a conservative commentator on Radio Mambí. She also said that some relief supplies sent after Hurricane Lillie wound up in tourist gift shops in Havana. (*The Miami Herald*, 11/7/05)

July 12: Ramón Saúl Sánchez, the president of the Democracy Movement, an organization of Cuban exiles based in Florida, called on Washington to suspend the travel and shipment restrictions to Cuba "so that those Cubans who have gone to the island within the last three years can travel there again." "We have to concentrate on achieving the political will on both sides of the Florida Strait so that the exiles can directly help the Cuban people," said Sánchez, while noting that his proposal to dispatch aid to the storm-ravaged island had caused a "political storm." While Consenso Cubano, a recently-created coalition of exile organizations, supports the temporary lifting of the restrictive measures, other groups and South Florida's three Cuban-American US legislators, Republicans Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and brothers Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart, strongly oppose the idea. (*EFE*, 13/7/05)

July 12: As efforts to weaken US sanctions on Cuba seemed to gain strength on Capitol Hill last year, a young Cuban-American lobbyist and a first-term congresswoman from Florida swung into action to quash the initiatives. Mauricio Claver-Carone, a director of the US-Cuba Democracy Political Action Committee, contacted more than 120 lawmakers, donated money to their campaigns and urged them to reject any easing of the trade and travel sanctions. With first-term Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a Pembroke Pines Democrat, urging her brethren to vote against the initiatives, Congress rejected five of the initiatives. Together, Claver-Carone and Wasserman Schultz represent a reorganization of the Cuban-American lobby in Washington that seems to be recovering the clout it had when the late Jorge Mas Canosa ran the Cuban American National Foundation. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/7/05)

July 16: American filmmakers who shot a movie in Cuba and screened it at the American Black Film Festival may have violated the 45-year-old economic embargo. What may be the first American feature film made in Cuba since Fidel Castro's revolution screened at the American Black Film Festival on Miami Beach. Not since 1959, when actor Errol Flynn made his last picture, "Cuban Rebel Girls" (tag line: "Filmed during the heaviest fighting of the Cuban revolution"), has an American filmmaker shot a movie on the communist island, said the creators of "Love & Suicide", a romantic drama shot in Havana over 12 days in December 2003. Cuba has been off-limits to American filmmakers with commercial motives since the US government imposed an embargo against the island in 1960. Luis Moro, a Cuban American filmmaker from Los Angeles, filmed "Love & Suicide" while attending the 2003 Havana International Film Festival, which was screening one of his earlier movies, "Anne B. Real". Moro traveled to Cuba with about 10 Americans -- actors, a director, a cinematographer. While there, they used wireless microphones and a digital camera the size of a shoebox to film 15 hours of scenes in the streets and parks of Old Havana, in cabs, bars and homes. The filmmakers say they did not cooperate with the Cuban government. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/7/05)

July 17: Wayne Smith, former chief of the US Interests Section in Havana, spoke in Coral Gables urging normal relations between the United States and Cuba. During an event at the

Biltmore Hotel, Smith called for a change in US policy toward Cuba beginning with the easing of travel restrictions and, ultimately, ending the trade embargo on the island. "We should reduce tensions, not aggravate it, making it clear to the Cuban government that we do not have hostile intentions toward them," Smith said during a 40-minute speech at a conference titled Cuba and the United States: Relations in Permanent Conflict, Causes, Effects and Solutions. "I did not say lift the embargo without conditions," he said. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/7/05)

July 17: Cindy Domingo has been to Cuba a dozen times, but hopes she isn't pushing her luck too far for her 13th trip, when she'll travel without US government permission to protest tight new restrictions on visiting the communist country. Domingo, a longtime Seattle activist dedicated to humanitarian and feminist causes, will accompany three other Seattle-area women on the July 21 trip and expects to join hundreds of other defiant travelers in a "travel challenge." Domingo has been an active organizer for women's rights since attending the UN International Conference on Women in 1995. She sees Cuba as the site of great progress for women in labor, medicine and farming. She gave presentations at international conferences in Havana in the previous two years. (*Seattle Post*, 17/7/05)

July 18: The number of US travellers to Cuba has dropped more than 60% since last July (2004). This is the harshest consequence of tougher restrictions imposed on dealings with the island by President George W. Bush's administration to promote a democratic transition on the island. For the precarious Cuban economy this represents losses of \$95 million, excluding other restrictions on packages and family remittances. According to figures from the Treasury Department and organizations linked with the air travel industry, in the past 12 months some 55,000 people travelled from the United States to Cuba, about 35.7% of the number that had been visiting the island annually before the travel restrictions were imposed. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 18/7/05)

July 21: A humanitarian group's annual caravan to Cuba was interrupted when border officials started confiscating electronic items on aid-filled school buses trying to cross into Mexico. The group Pastors for Peace draws international attention each year to the US economic blockade on the communist country. Customs and Border Protection officials have in recent years cleared the group to cross the border, where they skirt US travel restrictions to the impoverished island by flying from Mexico. (*Daily Sentinel*, 21/7/05)

July 24: The European Union decision towards Cuba has only brought about more repression, and the policy should be reconsidered, one Cuban-American leader in Congress, Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart, said. Mr. Diaz-Balart, a Republican of Florida, will be introducing legislation in the House to that effect, a spokeswoman said. "The resolution," Mr. Diaz-Balart said, "will denounce the most recent barbaric acts of repression by Castro's terrorist regime and call for greater solidarity from the international community with the Cuban people." The resolution will also call on the European Union to re-examine its current policy of "constructive" engagement with the Castro regime before the scheduled revisiting of the subject in June 2006, and urges America's representative to the United Nations to work with the world body's Human Rights Commission and other diplomatic organizations to secure international condemnation of the most recent crackdown. (*The New York Sun*, 25/7/05)

July 28: Stefan E. Brodie, president of Bro-Tech Corp., a company that manufactures water-purification materials under the name Purolite, pleaded guilty to engaging in illegal trade with

Cuba. As part of a plea agreement, Brodie, 63, admitted to a single charge relating to the payment of travel expenses for a Bro-Tech salesman to travel to Cuba in the mid-1990s. He was fined \$10,000 and sentenced to one year on probation by US District Judge Mary A. McLaughlin in Philadelphia. Brodie's plea brought to an end a tangled criminal prosecution that began five years ago. In 2000, a federal grand jury issued a 77-count indictment against Stefan Brodie; his brother, Donald, Bro-Tech's vice president; James E. Sabzali, company marketing director; and Bro-Tech, charging they violated the 1963 Cuban trade embargo. The company had sold water-purification materials to Cuba in the 1990s. The government charged that the sales violated the federal Trading with the Enemy Act. (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29/7/05)

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

September 27: The intensified US "economic war" on Cuba has meant more fines for Americans visiting the Communist-run island and foreign firms doing business there, a Cuban government report said. Sanctions adopted by the Bush administration since June 2005 to speed change in Cuba by denying it funds included a ban on the purchase of Cuban cigars and rum by US citizens, even in third countries, the report to the United Nations said. Pleasure craft owners leaving US ports for Cuban waters face fines of up to \$25,000 or five years in jail, it said. The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control fined 307 US citizens in the first quarter of 2005, compared to 316 in all of 2004, for unauthorized travel to Cuba, the report said. The number of US tourists who visited Cuba dropped 40 percent last year to 51,027 from 85,809 in 2003, it said. More dramatic was the drop in the number of Cuban residents of the United States who returned to visit, which fell 50 percent from 115,050 in 2003 to 57,145 last year. (*Reuters*, 27/9/05)

October 10: The world's largest "wealth management" firm, UBS, will be investigated by Congress for possibly laundering money for two state sponsors of terrorism, Cuba and Iran, lawmakers told the press. The Swiss bank, which operates a large financial services business in America, will be pressed about \$3.9 billion deposited in UBS accounts by the Castro regime, according to Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican of Florida, who first announced the impending investigation on Friday. Possible improper financial dealings with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq will also be subject to scrutiny, she said. In 2003, American soldiers liberating Iraq discovered \$762 million in American currency stashed in hideouts belonging to Saddam. According to Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, a Federal Reserve Bank probe traced the cash to UBS and other international financial firms. While investigating the Swiss bank's possible business relationship with Saddam's dictatorship, it was discovered that the firm - as part of a program with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in which UBS allowed clients to retire old banknotes and replace them with fresh currency - had also conducted transactions with Cuba, Iran, Libya, and Yugoslavia. (*The New York Sun*, 10/10/05)

October 13: The Cuban government has taken its campaign against the US embargo on trade and travel to the Internet. Representatives of the island government were online to answer inquiries and comments about the four-decade old policy. Officials were on hand to answer the comments and questions in a bulletin board-type forum, mostly in Spanish. Many of the messages were from people opposed to the embargo, including groups such as the Kenya-Cuba Friendship Association. Cuban embassies from around the world also posted messages. (*Sun Sentinel*, 14/10/05)

October 14: Cuba accused the United States of waging "radio and television aggression" by bombarding the island with thousands of hours of propaganda every week, repeating a frequent complaint. The Cuban representative to the United Nations' political and decolonisation committee said the US is violating Cuba's national sovereignty with an "obsessive and sick" policy of seeking to topple Fidel Castro. The delegate said the United States beams 2,300 hours each week from 16 stations in 24 frequencies, programmes that are "totally alien to culture, scientific development and wholesome entertainment, let aside truthful and objective information," said Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca, Cuba's representative to the UN committee. (*The Hindu Times*, 15/10/05)

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 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)

December 20: The US government continues to ignore reiterated requests by the International Telecommunications Union to stop interfering with Cuban Television broadcasts, Cuban experts said. Experts from the Cuban Information Technology and Telecommunication Ministry told the press that the 2004 and 2005 congresses on Information Technology warned that US military aircraft beaming the so-called TV Marti, blocks Cuban TV signals. In view of the violation, specialists maintain that the island has the right to jam subversive broadcasts that go against State security, since they call for violence and openly promote the practice of terrorism. (*Prensa Latina, Radio Habana Cuba*, 20/12/05)

LUIS POSADA CARRILES CASE

(See also, Foreign Affairs/ Asia/ Philippines, Latin America/ Mexico)

March 30: According to non-confirmed sources cited by "El Nuevo Herald", Luis Posada Carriles, has been in Miami for several days negotiating his permission to remain in the US with the American Immigration authorities. The Department of Territorial Security's office of Immigration and Customs Control would not comment on the subject. Luis Posada Carriles was released from prison last August by a pardon bestowed by former Panamanian president Mireya Moscoso. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 30/3/05)

March 31: A Coral Gables immigration attorney hired to represent Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles said he plans to ask the Department of Homeland Security for asylum and parole for his client so he can live in the United States without fear of extradition. Attorney Eduardo Soto said he expects a tough battle on behalf of the controversial 77-year-old -- hailed by some as an anti-Castro icon, but wanted by two countries as a terrorism suspect. Posada, thought to be in hiding now in South Florida, has been accused of blowing up a Cuban airliner in 1976 when he lived in Venezuela and trying to kill Fidel Castro in 2000 when he visited Panama. "I anticipate a huge struggle here, both on the immigration front and in other matters," Soto said, referring to the possibility that Venezuela may seek Posada's extradition as a result of his 1985 escape from a prison where he was held in connection with the airliner bombing. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/3/05)

April 11: A militant, anti-Communist Cuban exile who was jailed in Panama and then pardoned in connection with a plot to kill Fidel Castro is in the United States and will apply for asylum, his lawyer said. Luis Posada Carriles is an archfoe of Cuba's Communist government, which views him as a terrorist and has linked him to a series of attacks on Cuba, but is seen as a hero by some hard-line exiles in Florida. Lawyer Eduardo Soto confirmed media reports in Miami that Posada Carriles was in the country, saying he entered illegally across the US-Mexican border. A spokeswoman for US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Nina Pruneda, said the agency did not comment on such databases. She said the agency was "working with law enforcement partners reviewing his case. We can confirm he's not in our custody." Soto did not say when his client arrived in the United States or where he was. He said Posada Carriles had good grounds for asylum because if he were deported he would be

"squarely in the path of danger." "Mr. Posada Carriles has done nothing that would make him inadmissible (to the United States)," Soto said. (*Reuters*, 11/4/05)

April 11: In a nationally broadcast speech Fidel Castro said the United States was harboring anti-Cuban terrorists. "That monster has been living there for 19 days," Castro said of Luis Posada Carriles, who was convicted and sentenced to eight years in jail in Panama for trying to murder Castro during a Latin American presidential summit in 2000. Carriles, 76, was pardoned and released from jail by Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso last year. Press reports said he recently moved to Miami, Florida, together with three accomplices. Castro wondered what motives "that perverse empire" -- the United States -- may have to hide a terrorist in its territory after proclaiming to the world "its alleged commitment to fight terrorism." Changing a well-known phrase, he said that "the devil raises them and the same devil unites them" referring to links between some Cuban American organizations based in the US and the successive US administrations. "That is clear, they treat him like a son", said Fidel Castro with irony. Castro said Cuba delivered a diplomatic note demanding that Carriles be arrested and deported to Cuba to face charges of international terrorism, or if that proved politically impossible, that he be tried in the United States. (*AFP, Prensa Latina, Reuters*, 11/4/05)

April 12: Luis Posada Carriles, a CIA-trained Cuban exile implicated in a series of terrorist incidents, applied for political asylum in the United States, prompting at least one congressman to assert that granting the request would undermine the nation's credibility in the war on terrorism. Posada is in hiding after recently slipping into the United States, said Eduardo Soto, the Miami area lawyer handling Posada's asylum application. "If he is in the United States, he should be arrested and deported under the norms of international law," said Representative William D. Delahunt (Democrat-Massachusetts), who wrote a letter to leaders on the House International Relations Committee calling for an investigation into how Posada entered the country. "Given the enmity between the Cuban and US governments, it is possible that US officials may have turned a blind eye to Posada's entrance into our country -- or even worse, facilitated it," Delahunt wrote. "If that were true -- and even if it were not and Posada is allowed to remain here -- it would obliterate America's credibility in the war on terrorism, because it would suggest that we share the views of those who support al Qaeda and Iraqi insurgents that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.'" (*Washington Post*, 13/4/05)

April 13: Venezuela said it would demand Washington hand over an anti-communist Cuban exile wanted for terrorism by Havana after his attorney said he had travelled to the United States to apply for asylum. Luis Posada Carriles, who holds Venezuelan citizenship and who once escaped from jail in Caracas, has been accused by Havana of several attacks, including the bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed dozens of people. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had called for Posada's extradition after he was arrested in 2000 in Panama. "We're going to step up our demands for extradition," Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel told reporters. "I hope Mr Bush will take note of his own anti-terrorism policies and hand over Posada Carriles." (*ABC Online*, 13/4/05)

April 14: Fidel Castro urged the United States to refrain from granting political asylum to Luis Posada Carriles, saying the Cuban militant should instead be sent to an international tribunal or Venezuela, where he is wanted for a 1976 Cuban airliner bombing. In his second speech on the Posada case this week, Castro said that the government has no intention of trying to bring

Posada, who is also linked to assassination plots against the Cuban leader, to the island. "We are not going to ask for him, the whole world knows we won't," he said. "Send him to Venezuela (...) or an international tribunal in a neutral place where criminals are judged." Castro negated the possibility that Cuban intelligence agents would be after him. "We don't want him to disappear from the face of the earth," Castro said. "What we want is for him to appear -- him and all those who trained him." (*Reuters, AP, 15/4/05*)

April 15: A Cuban official demanded that the United States immediately arrest and try "international terrorist" Luis Posada Carriles, who has sought political asylum and is believed to be hiding in Miami. Dagoberto Rodríguez, Cuba's top diplomat in the United States, also said that Cuba would not abide by a US-sponsored resolution passed in Geneva extending a 2003 mandate charging a UN expert with examining Cuba's human rights situation. "For us, the resolution passed on Cuba is just garbage. It is a piece of poor quality toilet paper. We are not going to abide by that," Rodríguez said, questioning the moral authority of the United States to sponsor such a resolution. (*AP, 15/4/05*)

April 17: Fidel Castro denounced obscure dealings by some US government officials and the "anti-Cuban terrorist mafia" based in the United States. Castro pointed his finger at the US government for its relations with terrorists such as Luis Posada Carriles, who is currently requesting political asylum in that country. Fidel Castro included John Bolton, Otto Reich and Roger Noriega on the list of US officials who have ties with terrorists. He said they have been characterized by their aggressive stance against the Cuban revolution from their government posts. Castro sustained that possible asylum granted to Luis Posada Carriles in the United States would undermine the country's alleged struggle against terrorism around the world. (*Prensa Latina, 17/4/05*)

April 18: Fidel Castro demanded that the United States immediately arrest and deport an alleged terrorist who is a former US army officer and ex-CIA agent. Castro in a speech commented on the reported presence in Miami of Cuban-exile radical Luis Posada Carriles, who he said should be sent to Venezuela to be tried there by an international tribunal. "What would be best for the United States, for its prestige, for the war on terrorism, would be to display no vacillation on this, to look for Posada Carriles," he said. "We already waived our right to try him, though no one has more of a right to do so, but we don't want anyone to think that we want to put on a show. We are not interested in any of that," Castro said. He also repeated his proposal to have an international court try Posada Carriles in Venezuela, where there is no death penalty. Castro has dedicated five televised speeches to the topic of Posada, whose exact whereabouts are not known, over the last week (*EFE, AP, 19/4/05*)

April 20: Fidel Castro called on the governments of Guatemala and Honduras to reveal what they know of the whereabouts of anti-Castro activist Luis Posada Carriles, whom Cuba accuses of terrorism. "Guatemala and Honduras, I beg you not to hold back from explaining what you know of Posada Carriles' comings and goings," Castro said in his seventh televised speech in just over a week given over to demanding the CIA-linked anti-Castroite be brought to trial. "It would be good to ask both governments whether the monster was there or not, and how it was possible not to find him despite the stench and the nauseating smell of death he carries about him," Castro said. (*EFE, 20/4/05*)

April 21: Fidel Castro charged that Washington might be planning the deportation of international criminal Luis Posada Carriles to El Salvador. He said that sending the terrorist to

the Central American nation would be like sending him home, since, according to the Cuban leader, Posada Carriles planned many of his terrorist actions there, including the bomb explosions in several Havana hotels in 1997. Fidel Castro made the statement at a televised and radio presentation before victims and survivors of US terrorism against the Caribbean island, Communist Party, union and grass-roots leaders and Armed Forces and Interior Ministry members. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 21/4/05)

April 25: The Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations demanded that the United States arrest and extradite a Cuban-born militant who supposedly arrived in Miami. Ambassador Orlando Requeijo considered Luis Posada Carriles "one of the most monstrous terrorists on this continent." At a UN Security Council meeting on terrorism, Requeijo said that the alleged militiaman was trained and used by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to plan attacks against Cuba for 40 years. (*AP*, 25/4/05)

May 1: Fidel Castro ripped the US government in his May Day address for harboring Cuban-exile radical and admitted bomber Luis Posada Carriles, who the Cuban leader said was "a time bomb" for Washington. Castro continued to push his campaign of recent weeks against Posada in an address to some 1.3 million people in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution for the May Day celebration. The US administration "is involved in one of the most embarrassing and delicate episodes of its terrorist adventures, aggression and lies against Cuba," Castro said. The Cuban leader accused President George W. Bush of being "a cheat and a fraud." (*AP, EFE*, 1/5/05)

May 3: Venezuela's Supreme Court ruled the government should seek extradition from the United States of an anti-communist Cuban exile wanted by Havana on terrorism charges. Luis Posada Carriles, who has Venezuelan citizenship and escaped from prison in Caracas in 1985, has been accused by Cuba of several attacks, including the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed dozens of people. His attorney said last month Posada had applied for asylum in the United States, although US officials said he was not in their custody and they were reviewing his case. (*CNN*, 3/5/05)

May 3: A top State Department official denied Cuban allegations that the United States is providing a haven for a man Cuba accuses of perpetrating a terrorist bombing against a Cuban airliner in 1976. "I don't even know that he is in the United States," said Roger Noriega, the top State Department official for Western Hemisphere affairs. Noriega said Cuban claims about Posada "may be a completely manufactured issue." The United States, he said, "has no interest in giving quarter to someone who has committed criminal acts." Unlike Cuba, Noriega added, "we are a country that respects the rule of law." (*CNN*, 3/5/05)

May 5: Wayne Smith, former Chief of the US Interests Section in Havana between in 1979 and 1982, issued a statement taking issue with the remarks of Roger Noriega, assistant secretary of state, on the question of whether accused terrorist Luis Posada Carriles is in the United States. "On May 2, Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega stated that he did not 'even know if he (Luis Posada Carriles) is in the United States.' Cuba claims that Posada Carriles is here, said Noriega, 'may be a completely manufactured issue'. "Well, not quite, Mr. Noriega. On April 13, Posada Carriles' lawyer did state categorically that his client was in the US and requested political asylum for him so that he can remain here. Mr. Noriega offers no explanation as to why his attorney would lie about Posada Carriles being here in the US", Smith said in his statement. (*US Newswire*, 5/5/05)

May 5: Venezuela formally requested the extradition of a radical Cuban exile who is reportedly hiding in Florida and is wanted in Venezuela in an airline bombing that killed 73 people. Bombing suspect Luis Posada Carriles' April 13 petition for US asylum has roiled Washington's strained relations with Venezuela and sparked anger in Cuba, the target of the attacks blamed on him. The asylum request said Posada, 77, managed to slip into the United States. (*Los Angeles Times*, 6/5/05)

May 7: The father and brother of an Italian tourist killed by a bomb in a Havana hotel in 1997 say they are outraged that Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles, implicated in the attack, is seeking asylum in the United States. Livio Di Celmo, whose brother Fabio died in the hotel blast, says he's willing to travel to Miami to testify against Posada in any asylum or extradition proceeding. Posada has never been charged with the bombing. He has alternately admitted to the attack and then denied it. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/5/05)

May 9: In the latest twist to the presence in South Florida of controversial Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles, a former Miami police detective said Posada is lying when he denies involvement in the bombing of a Cuban passenger jet in 1976. Diosdado C. Diaz, who left the force in 1999, told the press that one of his top informants -- exile Ricardo "Monkey" Morales -- stated to him in 1982 that he supplied the explosives and that Posada prepped them to bring down the plane. But on another occasion, Morales denied Posada was involved. He said another militant prepared the explosives -- Gustavo Castillo, a suspect in the 1976 car-bomb attack on Miami exile radio commentator Emilio Milián. Castillo said he had nothing to do with the plane bombing. (*The Miami Herald*, 9/5/05)

May 9: The United States has no idea of the whereabouts of anti-Castro Cuban Luis Posada Carriles and has received no request for his extradition from Venezuela. "In terms of where he presently is, I think it's fair to say we don't know," US State Department spokesman Tom Casey told reporters. "Certainly the United States has no interest in allowing anyone with a criminal background to enter the United States," he said. Although Venezuela's Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez said that he would ask the United States to extradite Posada Carriles "within hours," the US spokesman said that the State Department had received no such request. (*AFP*, 9/5/05)

May 9: A Cuban exile long regarded as a violent opponent of Fidel Castro has applied for asylum in the United States, a government official said. Luis Posada Carriles, a suspect in the bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in 1976, reportedly slipped into South Florida several weeks ago but the Bush administration says it cannot confirm his whereabouts. To be eligible for political asylum, Posada must prove that he has a well-founded fear of persecution in his native country, said a Department of Homeland Security official. The official, asking not to be identified, said consideration of asylum requests includes national security and law enforcement criteria. A person who seeks asylum need not be in the presence of a US government official when applying. (*AP*, 9/5/05)

May 10: Luis Posada Carriles attended at least two planning meetings for the bombing of a Cuban jetliner in 1976 that killed 73 people, according to once-secret documents provided to the press by the private National Security Archive in Washington. "There is no way the Bush administration can ignore the historical record as it evaluates his petition for safe harbor," said Peter Kornbluh, a senior analyst and Cuba specialist at the archive. One FBI document dated November 3, 1976, quotes a confidential informant saying Luis Posada Carriles was among a

group that discussed "the bombing of a Cubana Airlines airplane" before an attack at a hotel bar in Caracas, Venezuela. Posada, a former senior officer of the Venezuelan intelligence service, denies involvement in the bombing, which killed 73 people, including 24 members of Cuba's national fencing team, according to his lawyer, Eduardo Soto. Soto did not immediately return a call for comment. Other documents that will be published confirm that Posada worked for the CIA through the late 1960s and was an informant for the agency until the mid-1970s, Kornbluh said. (*The New York Times, The Miami Herald, 10/5/05*)

May 10: Cubans will stage a giant march passing by the United States Interests Section headquarters in Havana to demand the US administration to arrest the terrorist of Cuban origin Luis Posada Carriles. The march was announced by Fidel Castro in a televised address to the nation, dedicated to denounce the presence in US territory of Posada Carriles. "Let's see if this gentleman [George Bush] does what is most convenient for him and does what he must", Fidel Castro said that the march would serve to "demand punishment for the murderers". Fidel Castro has held about 20 televised appearances over the past two months, many of them to accuse US President George Bush and his administration of coddling terrorists and of claiming not to know where Posada -- a former CIA employee -- is hiding in the United States. He referred to Bush as "the little Hitler" and suggested he wanted to dominate the world. Castro dedicated more than an hour to reading for Cubans a New York Times story about the Posada case and again listed numerous terrorist actions that that Cuban officials attribute to Posada or his associates. He even suggested that Posada and his friend Orlando Bosch might have ties to the 1963 assassination of former US President John F. Kennedy. (*Prensa Latina, AP, 10/5/05*)

May 10: Fidel Castro has rejected calls to hand over a fugitive who US officials put on a terrorism list this month, saying she is an innocent victim of racial persecution. "They wanted to portray her as a terrorist, something that was an injustice, a brutality, an infamous lie," Castro said in a television address. While Castro did not identify the woman by name, he was apparently alluding to Assata Shakur, the former Joanne Chesimard, who was put on a US government terrorism watch list on May 2. On the same day, New Jersey officials announced a \$1 million reward for her capture. Castro's remarks were his first comment on the new US actions. A member of the Black Liberation Army, Shakur, 57, was convicted in 1973 of killing New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerster as he lay on the ground. She escaped from prison in 1979 and fled to Cuba. Castro referred to her as a victim of "the fierce repression against the Black movement in the United States" and said she had been "a true political prisoner." (*CNN, AP, 10/5/05*)

May 11: Fidel Castro stepped up his denunciations of the US government for failure to arrest a suspected airplane bomber and said other alleged terrorists also should face trial. In a televised appearance that lasted nearly four hours, Castro read summaries of newly released US intelligence documents linking Luis Posada Carriles and other anti-Castro militants to terrorist attacks beyond the 1976 bombing of a jetliner that killed 73 people. Castro repeated his demands that the United States locate, arrest and extradite former CIA agent Posada for trial in Venezuela, where he is wanted for trial in the airplane attack. But Castro also increasingly turned the focus to other militants, several of them linked to Posada. Chief among those is Orlando Bosch, a man termed a terrorist in some US intelligence documents, which also link him to the 1976 bombing. He was pardoned by the first President George Bush. Both Posada and Bosch deny involvement in the bombing, but Bosch has several times said that the jetliner was a legitimate target in the war against Castro. Castro said he would accept an

international trial for the men to avoid defense claims they would risk death if returned for trial in Venezuela -- though Castro noted that country has no death penalty. He long ago renounced Cuba's right to try Posada. But he said that Bosch, too, should be tried. "That pardon cannot be accepted," Castro said. "Bosch should be judged." (*AP*, 11/5/05)

May 12: Fidel Castro said that the US people will never forgive their rulers for their lies and deceit about Cuban-born terrorists who operate in that country. In a new call for Washington to take actions against Posada Carriles, Orlando Bosch and other terrorists, Castro accused the White House of covering up the truth. "Who is going to believe that the government does not know how and why Posada Carriles entered US territory, or where he is at present?" he wondered. "I think that US public will never forgive the government for how much it has lied," said Fidel Castro. (*Prensa Latina*, 13/5/05)

May 13: Venezuela asked the United States to extradite a Cuban exile and former CIA collaborator for his suspected involvement in the downing of a Cuban airliner in a case that tests the U.S. commitment to combat all forms of terrorism. Luis Posada Carriles, who has Venezuelan citizenship, has applied for asylum in the United States, according to his lawyer, but US officials say they do not know the fugitive's whereabouts. The Venezuelan Embassy in Washington delivered a letter requesting the Bush administration hunt down the 77-year-old, and deport him to face trial for a 1976 airliner bombing that killed 73 people. He was arrested in Venezuela more than 20 years ago but escaped from prison without being convicted. The top Venezuelan and Cuban diplomats in Washington reaffirmed the countries wanted to see Posada face justice in Venezuela -- not in Cuba. (*Reuters*, 13/5/05)

May 13: Relatives of victims of the 1976 Cubana jet bombing that killed 73 people urged the United States to arrest and extradite fugitive terror suspect Luis Posada Carriles, who has asked for US asylum though he is wanted in Venezuela and Cuba. "This was not a faceless crime. Our whole lives were disrupted. We never really had closure," Trevor Persaud of Guyana told reporters, remembering the death of his brother Raymond, who was killed in the bombing as he headed to medical school in Cuba. "He was on the way to accomplish his lifelong dream," Persaud said, adding of Posada Carriles that "this guy deserves to be extradited and tried for his crimes in Venezuela." "My mother is still grieving over what happened," almost 30 years on, another brother, Kenrick Persaud, added. (*AFP*, 13/5/05)

May 16: Fidel Castro once again spoke to the nation, hammering on the Luis Posada Carriles case and criticizing growing US support for Cuba's internal opposition. Sometimes angry, sometimes laughing in ridicule, Castro in his nighttime talk dismissed US government claims that Posada cannot be found and might not be in the United States at all -- even as the fugitive's attorney and friends have confirmed his presence. And he demanded that President Bush -- whom he called "the little fuhrer" -- live up to his promise to fight terrorism wherever it occurs. Night after night, Fidel Castro has been on television demanding the United States arrest Posada. Speaking for up to four hours at a time, Castro thunders with indignation and laughs at the absurd as he reads the news before a live audience of Communist officials -- occasionally pausing to flip through a scattering of papers in front of him hunting for a quotation. The result is remarkably like a televised version of an Internet blog -- references to outside news sources tightly wrapped in personal commentary. (*AP*, 16/5/05)

May 17: A Cuban militant in hiding while seeking asylum in the United States denied any involvement in an attack on a Cuban airliner in 1976 but was less forthcoming about a series

of bombings targeting Cuban tourist sites in 1997, a newspaper reported. Luis Posada Carriles, who is being sought by Cuba and Venezuela, gave his first interview to The Miami Herald in a surreptitious meeting at a luxury downtown condominium after arriving in Miami in March following an illegal trip through Central America. "They accused me of being the intellectual author of fabricating a weapon of war and of treason to the homeland. No one saw me make a bomb," Posada said in a two-hour interview last Wednesday. "Sincerely, I didn't know anything about it." "I feel that I've committed many errors, more than most people," he said. "But I've always believed in rebellion, in the armed struggle. I believe more and more every day that we will triumph against Castro. Victory will be ours." (*AP*, 17/5/05)

May 17: Hundreds of thousands of Cubans answered Fidel Castro's call to file past the American mission in a "March against Terrorism," demanding that the United States arrest a Cuban militant in the deadly bombing of an airliner. Dressed in his traditional olive green military uniform and cap, the 78-year-old Castro showed up in the crowd outside the US Interests Section minutes before the march was to start. "Down with terrorism!" Castro shouted in brief comments before he stepped off to lead the march. "Down with Nazi doctrines and methods! Down with the lies!" Protesters were calling for the arrest of Castro's longtime foe, Luis Posada Carriles, an elderly Cuban exile who recently traveled to the United States where he is seeking political asylum. Venezuela is seeking the extradition of Posada in the 1976 airliner bombing that killed 73 people. (*CNN, EFE*, 17/5/05)

May 17: US authorities arrested a Cuban exile who slipped into the country in March and is wanted by Venezuela over the bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people nearly 30 years ago. Luis Posada Carriles, 77, a former CIA collaborator and anti-communist activist who has sought political asylum in the United States, was arrested in Miami just hours after he emerged from hiding to give a series of media interviews. "Today, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement took Mr. Luis Posada Carriles into custody, pending review of his immigration status," the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement, adding that it had 48 hours to decide on Posada's status. The Homeland Security department statement threw into question whether the United States would approve Venezuela's extradition request. "Under certain circumstances, there are additional legal restrictions on removal due to international treaty obligations," it said. "As a matter of immigration law and policy, ICE does not generally remove people to Cuba, nor does ICE generally remove people to countries believed to be acting on Cuba's behalf". (*The New York Times, The Globe and Mail*, 18/5/05)

May 17: A key associate of Fidel Castro welcomed the news that the US picked up Luis Posada Carriles, but questioned why it took two months to arrest an escaped militant sought for two decades in a deadly airliner bombing. Parliament speaker Ricardo Alarcon spoke with the press as Castro led hundreds of thousands of Cubans past the US mission to demand Posada's arrest and extradition from the US. "Do you want us to applaud the fact that he has been arrested after his presence (in the US) was burning for two months?" Alarcon said in an interview. "Now Mr. Bush has to prove he is sincere about terrorism." Alarcon said. "What the United States has to do now is clear: if there is a request for his extradition it has to attend to it according to its own laws." (*The New York Times*, 18/5/05)

May 17: In a letter made public by the Venezuelan embassy in Washington, twenty Democrat Representatives asked US President George W. Bush to extradite to Venezuela anti-Castro firebrand Luis Posada Carriles, who has been accused of planning and executing acts of international terrorism. "Not only must the United States reject the asylum application of Luis

Posada Carriles, a known international terrorist, but Posada should also be returned to Venezuela for a proper adjudication of the case against him," wrote the legislators in the letter to Bush. (*AFP*, 23/5/05)

May 18: Fidel Castro called the detention of his old nemesis Luis Posada Carriles two months after his arrival in the United States a "farce," a face-saving move the US government was finally forced to make after Posada's presence became an embarrassment. Speaking on a nightly current events show on state TV, Castro said it was impossible for President Bush's administration to be unaware for so long that Posada, sought in Venezuela for retrial in a deadly plane bombing, was in Miami. "What has occurred is a big farce, a big lie, an attempt to escape from a difficult situation," Castro said of the detention of Posada, a Cuban born militant who has spent much of his life trying to topple Castro and his communist government. The Cuban leader also expressed doubt that his old foe would be returned to Venezuela, which is seeking Posada's extradition, to be retried in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner off the coast of Barbados, killing all 73 people aboard. "The goal of the United States government is to protect him, to keep protecting him and prevent (him) from going to court," said Castro, who for several weeks had repeatedly decried Posada's presence in Miami and what he said was the US government's failure to hold him. (*AP, Reuters*, 19/5/05)

May 18: In Miami's Little Havana, exile leaders said they anticipated few protests of Luis Posada Carriles' arrest -- though many exiles view him as a patriot for the cause of Cuban freedom and hope he is granted asylum. "We don't want to play into Castro's hands and have him start criticizing us," said Enrique Carrazana, 72, a Bay of Pigs veteran sitting at a barber shop. Indeed, Castro has daily branded Posada a terrorist and ridiculed President Bush as a hypocrite for waging a war on terrorism while harboring Posada. Ninoska Pérez Castellón, an influential radio personality and founding member of the hard-line Cuban Liberty Council, said the community was reassured by the Bush administration's statement that Posada would not be deported to Cuba or Venezuela. Some saw a partisan political factor in the exiles' restraint. Chin Martinez, a community activist and the father of Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez, said exiles, who favor the Republican Party, should be defending Posada more vocally. "If a Democratic president was in power, there would be demonstrations," said Martinez, 80, who is a registered Democrat. "This is about partisanship." (*The Miami Herald*, 19/5/05)

May 18: If the United States extradites a Cuban exile wanted in a 1976 airliner bombing, he would not be turned over to Cuba but would remain in Venezuela to face justice, Venezuela's vice president said. "There is no possibility that Venezuela would turn him over to another country if Posada Carriles' extradition to Venezuela is approved," Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel said. "I think it's an excuse, a subterfuge, that they are using precisely in order to not approve the extradition. Bringing up that he could be sent to Cuba (...) in this way they elude the commitment and the obligation they have to approve the extradition." (*The Houston Chronicle*, 18/5/05)

May 19: US immigration officials charged Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles with entering the United States illegally, which could lead to his deportation to another country. Venezuela wants Posada in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials also said that Posada would be held without bond pending a hearing before an immigration judge scheduled for June 13. The precise location of that hearing was not specified. "At such a bond hearing, ICE would present its arguments for holding him without bond," said an agency statement. (*CNN*, 19/5/05)

May 19: Homeland Security Department officials said that they had charged Luis Posada Carriles, the violent anti-Castro militant, with illegally entering the United States. United States officials have not said whether or not they want to deport Mr. Posada. They have indicated that they would not willingly send him to Venezuela, Cuba's closest ally in the Western Hemisphere. "This is a case that the Department of Homeland Security now will handle," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said. "The issues here concern understanding the record of Mr. Posada and then making judgments about what that means about his request" for asylum. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement division of the Department of Homeland Security said Mr. Posada had been charged with illegally entering the country, was being held without bond and would see an immigration judge on June 13. (*The New York Times*, 20/5/05)

May 19: A former leftist guerrilla in Venezuela claimed that Luis Posada Carriles ordered that he be tortured and also ordered the murder of another guerrilla when Posada was a senior intelligence officer for a Venezuelan police agency in the 1970s. Posada, a militant Cuban exile in US custody accused of illegally entering the country, said in an interview with *The Herald* that he had not ordered anyone's torture while he headed a special operations unit at the agency known as DISIP. Posada also denied ordering the other guerrilla's murder. The allegations from Jesus Marrero, the former Venezuelan guerrilla, are difficult to verify, but they could open a new front in the U.S. government's case against Posada in immigration court. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/5/05)

May 19: The US government has too many nuclear weapons but it lacks ideas, and what is worse, it lacks brains, Fidel Castro stressed when denouncing Washington's complicity with terrorist Luis Posada Carriles. Castro spoke on a special program broadcast live on national radio and television from Havana's Karl Marx Theater. He accused the administration of US President George W. Bush of hiding many secrets of his commitments to Cuba born terrorists. Referring to the conditions in which US authorities arrested Posada Carriles, Fidel Castro asked: "Would they have taken Bin Laden in a golf cart, without handcuffs, to a center where he even has access to recreation?." He described the alleged global crusade the United States has unleashed against terrorism as a lie. In denouncing that the group that today holds the US presidency has resorted to lies, the Cuban leader accused Bush of using terrorism to gain and retain power. He impugned how timely the broadcast of a Bin Laden's video was, four days before the November elections, in which the sinister figure bragged about the attacks of September 11, 2001. He added that four years earlier, anti-Cuba counterrevolutionary groups had helped him to win the White House with the fraud in Florida, insisting the same thing happened last November. (*Prensa Latina*, 20/5/05)

May 20: Cuba and the United States shared extensive information in hotel bombings and other terrorist attempts in the late 1990s, Fidel Castro said, adding that the past collaboration has been forgotten in the current case involving militant Luis Posada Carriles. Speaking to several thousand government supporters gathered for his evening address, Castro read extensively from declassified Cuban documents that indicated frequent exchanges of information between the countries after the bombings of Cuban tourist installations in 1997. Castro said that in May 1998, his friend Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez personally delivered a message to then US President Bill Clinton's advisers alerting them to plans by violent exile groups to plant bombs on flights between Cuba and the United States. (*The New York Times*, 21/5/05)

May 20: New information links detained Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles to a 1976 meeting where a former US prosecutor says a group of exiles discussed acts of terrorism. In June 1976, Luis Posada Carriles took part in a meeting in the Dominican Republic where Cuban exile militants discussed anti-Castro terrorism, including plans to bomb a Cuban airliner and target a leftist Chilean dissident, a former US prosecutor told the press. E. Lawrence Barcella Jr., who was the lead prosecutor in the federal investigation of the assassination of former Chilean Foreign Minister Orlando Letelier, told the press that his probe had placed Posada at the meeting in Bonao in the Dominican Republic. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/5/05)

May 21: Federal agents grilled Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles for more than two hours in El Paso, Texas, where he is being held, one of his lawyers said. Attorney Renee Soto said officials asked Posada about involvement in terrorist attacks, his illegal entry into the United States and other issues. Posada declined to answer many questions, she said. Soto, a cousin of Posada's lead immigration lawyer Eduardo Soto and an associate in his firm, said Posada was more forthcoming about how he entered the country. A hearing was tentatively scheduled for May 24 th to decide whether to transfer Posada closer to South Florida, and whether to release him on bail. (*The Miami Herald*, 22/5/05)

May 22: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said he will consider breaking diplomatic ties with the US if it fails to hand over a Cuban-born terror suspect. Venezuela said Luis Posada Carriles must stand trial over the 1976 bombing of Cuba's plane that killed 73 people. Mr Chavez said Washington would be guilty of protecting international terrorism if it refused extradition. (*BBC*, 23/5/05)

May 24: Despite accusations that Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles has carried out deadly attacks in his four-decade battle against Fidel Castro's government, most Cuban exiles in South Florida think he is a patriot who deserves political asylum in the United States, according to a poll released. The poll of 300 Cuban-born people in Miami-Dade and Broward counties was conducted May 13-22 by Bendixen & Associates, which asked respondents about their views on Posada. More than 60 percent said they had a positive view of the aging exile and former CIA operative who has been accused of a number of violent acts, but they also said they preferred that a future transition to democracy in Cuba be peaceful rather than violent. The poll's margin of error was 6 percent. (*Sun Sentinel*, 24/5/05)

May 25: The United States would be obliged under international law to try Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles on terrorism charges if it fails to extradite him to Venezuela to face trial for a bomb attack 30 years ago, a senior Cuban official said. Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon repeated Havana's support for Venezuela's demand that Washington hand over Posada, a militant foe of Fidel Castro, to be tried for the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people. Alarcon said without extradition Washington would be forced to put Posada, 77, on trial because it is a signatory to the Montreal Convention on international airline liability. "Extradite him to Venezuela, or if they don't want to extradite him, then no excuses, they will have to try him themselves, but as if the victims were Americans and the aircraft American," Alarcon told reporters in Caracas. "Judge him and punish him with the same severity they impose on people with Arab names or who are Muslims. Imagine we are talking about Luis bin Posada or Osama Posada Carriles," he said, referring to Osama bin Laden. (*The New York Times*, 26/5/05)

May 27: The Bush administration has rejected Venezuela's request to keep under arrest with an eye to extradition a notorious anti-Castro militant wanted by Caracas on terrorism charges, Venezuelan diplomats said. Rejection of the request does not mean Luis Posada Carriles, who is wanted by Caracas for retrial for his alleged role in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people, will not remain under arrest. It relates only to the grounds on which he is being held. "The State Department has denied Venezuela's request for his arrest with an eye to extradition, but it left the door open to pursuing extradition at a later date," a Venezuelan diplomatic source told the press. (EFE, 27/5/05)

May 28: Tens of thousands of Venezuelans backing President Hugo Chavez marched through Caracas demanding that the United States extradite a Cuban militant wanted for his alleged role in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner. Waving Venezuelan flags, and dancing to songs celebrating Chavez's rule broadcast over loudspeakers mounted on flatbed trucks, the president's supporters accused US President George W. Bush of harboring terror suspect Luis Posada Carriles and of a double standard in dealing with terrorists. (CNN, 28/5/05)

May 30: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez condemned as "negative" the United States' rejection of an initial attempt by his government to extradite a Cuban exile accused of bombing an airliner. Chavez repeated a warning made just over a week ago that he would review relations with the United States, Venezuela's biggest oil buyer, if Washington did not agree to the extradition of Luis Posada Carriles. "They've given a sign, a negative one," Chavez said. "It's a worrying sign," he said during a cabinet meeting broadcast live on state television. Chavez accused Bush, whom he mockingly referred to as "Mr Danger," of "sheltering a terrorist." (Reuters, The New York Times, 30/5/05)

May 30: The United States does not object to the Philippines assisting Cuba in its effort to extradite a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent, US embassy chargé d'affaires Joseph Mussomeli said. Speaking to reporters on the occasion of Memorial Day at the Manila American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio, Makati, Mussomeli said the matter is a "bilateral issue" between the Philippines and Cuba. "I know there was a request and it's up to the Philippine government how they want to handle that," he said. Cuban Ambassador Jorge Rey Jimenez said the Philippines is in a position to help out with the repatriation of Posada since it heads the Anti-Terrorism Committee of the United Nations Security Council and chairs the anti-terrorism task force of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). (The Philippine Star, 31/5/05)

May 30: A new demonstration was held in Miami urging the Bush administration to deny political asylum to terrorist Luis Posada Carriles and instead extradite him to Venezuela where he is wanted on several criminal charges. The protest took place in front of a Florida Immigration Office in Miami and is the second in a month sponsored by members of the Jose Marti Association, says a report in Granma daily newspaper. (Radio Habana Cuba, 30/5/05)

June 2: Fidel Castro accused the United States of protecting his old archenemy, Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles, implying that the former CIA operative might have secrets American officials may not want revealed. "This empire is letting itself be blackmailed by its accomplices," Castro said of Posada and other Cuban exiles who were active in efforts to topple the island's communist government during the Cold War. Although he wasn't on the agenda, Castro spoke several times during the first day of an antiterrorism meeting that drew about 400 participants from abroad, mostly from Latin America. (The Miami Herald, 3/6/05)

June 4: Luis Posada Carriles said he will fight to remain in the United States, and he wants to live a quiet life, supporting himself by selling his paintings, a newspaper reported. In an interview with The Miami Herald, Posada did not say if he would give up violence in his campaign against Cuba's Fidel Castro. "In the United States, I want to lead a normal life," Posada said. "I will paint and work for my fatherland. That's what I'm going to do." Posada, 77, is in US custody in El Paso, Texas, facing deportation on charges of entering the United States illegally earlier this year. (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/6/05)

June 4: A two-and-a-half hour speech by Fidel Castro was the final salvo fired in an international conference that accused the United States of hypocrisy in the fight against terrorism. "The empire has to be forced to hand over its henchmen, to comply with treaties, with UN and bilateral accords and those with the nations of the Caribbean, that it hand over the criminals," Castro declared, referring to Luis Posada Carriles, a CIA-trained Cuban exile wanted in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cubana commercial jet that killed all 73 on board. This case has the United States in a bind, Castro said at the conference closing, but "we have to demand that they talk, that they explain, that they say how he entered [the country] and then we'll know a whole lot of things." (*Prensa Latina, CBS*, 5/6/05)

June 5: International leftist leaders, academics and activists joined the Cuban government's campaign to demand the extradition of anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela, where he is wanted in connection with the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner. During a four-day Havana conference that drew 500 participants from the United States, Latin America and Europe, speakers slammed the Bush administration for rejecting Venezuela's arrest request for Posada and said Washington is trying to protect the former CIA operative. (*Sun Sentinel*, 5/6/05)

June 6: US President George W. Bush met with exiled Cuban doctor Alberto Hernández, a personal friend of anti-Castro firebrand Luis Posada Carriles. Nothing transpired from the brief discussion, whose images were broadcast by US Hispanic TV station Canal 51. (*Notimex*, 6/6/05)

June 9: Four days before anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles is scheduled to appear before an immigration court in Texas, the private National Security Archive posted a declassified CIA document from 1976 that quotes Posada as saying, "We are going to hit a Cuban airplane." The source of that information is not known, although it is described as "a former Venezuelan government official" who is "usually a reliable reporter." The new documents also suggest that Posada was spying on Cuban exiles for the CIA. One 1976 memo from the CIA to the FBI said, "Posada also was used as a source of information on Cuban exile activities." Posada is asking the US government to grant him political asylum, arguing that Cuban government agents want to kill him. (*The Miami Herald*, 10/6/05)

June 11: The Venezuelan government said it has provided the US with key information on the role of a former CIA agent in the downing of a Cuban airliner. Venezuela is seeking the extradition of Cuban-born Luis Posada Carriles, who is currently in jail in the US. The new documents purportedly prove his role in masterminding the 1976 bombing in which 73 people died. (*BBC*, 11/6/05)

June 11: Fidel Castro characterized Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles as a symbol of past US-backed terrorism in the region, reiterating his earlier insistence that American officials turn

his old nemesis over to Venezuela for prosecution in a deadly airliner bombing three decades ago. "If they were intelligent, the first thing they would do is send that man to Venezuela," Castro said at the presentation of a new collection of interviews and stories by Argentine journalist and politician Miguel Bonasso. "They are searching where to send him," Castro said of US officials, who he has accused of trying to protect Posada, and of seeking another country that will take him. (*AP*, 11/6/05)

June 13: Supporters of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez presented thousands of signatures demanding the United States extradite a Cuban exile wanted in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban jet. Jesus Marrero, a former leftist guerrilla who helped organize a signature drive to demand the extradition of Luis Posada Carriles last month, said at least 40,000 Venezuelans signed the petition. (*CNN*, 13/6/05)

June 13: Cuban exiles are split along generational lines in their opinions about Cuban militant Luis Posada Carriles, a recent poll shows. Older Cuban exiles tend to feel strongly that Posada is a patriot who should be given asylum in the United States. Younger exiles are much more likely to think Posada is a terrorist and have a negative opinion of him. The poll, conducted by Coral Gables-based Bendixen & Associates, gives an idea of where sentiments on Posada lie in the politically sensitive Cuban-American community. Sergio Bendixen said he funded the poll. "Cuban exiles feel that when Posada was committing all of these acts of violence, that was the strategy then and he was following orders from the CIA," Bendixen said. "And they don't think it's fair to punish him now because the strategy has changed." According to the poll, 65 percent of Cuban exiles have a positive opinion of Posada. Exiles over 50 are much more likely to feel that way. Less than half of exiles under 50, or about 47 percent, have a positive opinion of Posada; 75 percent of exiles 50 or older view him in a positive light. Altogether, 61 percent of exiles feel that he is a patriot instead of a terrorist. Bendixen questioned 300 Cuban exiles living in Miami-Dade and Broward from May 12-23. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus five percentage points. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/6/05)

June 13: A US immigration court ruled that anti-Castro militant and accused terrorist Luis Posada Carriles must remain in custody while it studies his case and determines whether or not to deport him. In a hearing held in El Paso, where Posada was transported after his arrest in Miami, immigration Judge William Lee Abbott postponed his bail hearing until June 24. He also set July 29 as the date for Posada's trial for immigration violations. At the hearing, Posada's attorney, Eduardo Soto, requested political asylum for his client as well as the transfer of his trial to Miami, which has a very large Cuban exile population. However, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) prosecutors opposed that move, and the judge made no ruling upon the matter. (*EFE*, 13/6/05)

June 15: Venezuela has made a formal request to the US to extradite a militant Cuban exile wanted over the downing of an airliner which killed 73 people. Caracas says Luis Posada Carriles is a "terrorist" and is urging the US not to protect the ex-CIA informant. "It is up to the state department to decide if it will protect a terrorist or not," said Venezuelan Vice Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez. The Venezuelan note asks that the extradition request take precedence over the immigration charges against Posada. The request was based on a 1922 bilateral extradition treaty and other international accords, said the Venezuelan ambassador in Washington, Bernardo Alvarez. (*BBC, Sun Sentinel*, 16/6/05)

June 20: Immigration proceedings for a Cuban exile accused of planning the deadly bombing of an airliner in 1976 will remain in El Paso, a judge ruled. Lawyers for Luis Posada Carriles asked that the case be moved to Florida, where Posada was staying before his arrest and where his lawyer lives. Posada is charged with entering the country illegally in a case that has sparked an international battle. US Immigration Judge William L. Abbott issued a written ruling to lawyers in the case, said Greg Gagne, a spokesman for the Executive Office for Immigration Review in Washington. Posada's attorney said he wanted the trial moved because holding it in El Paso would cause Posada hardships. He also said his client wants to be closer to family in Miami. Prosecutors said holding Posada in South Florida would be a security risk. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/6/05)

July 20: A lawyer for anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles is asking an immigration judge to throw out the US government's case against his client, arguing that it hangs on hearsay testimony that Posada masterminded the bombing of Cuban tourist sites and other terrorist acts. Attorney Eduardo Soto is also fighting Posada's deportation, saying that his client has had a relapse of skin cancer and has a worsening heart condition. US immigration authorities declined to comment on the motion. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/7/05)

June 24: Several dozens of American philosophers and social scientists participating in the 18th Conference of Cuban and US Philosophers and Social Scientists demanded the extradition of terrorist Luis Posada Carriles from the United States to Venezuela. Participants in the Conference that concluded at the University of Havana also demanded a revision of the pardon granted to also terrorist Orlando Bosch by former US president George Bush Sr. In addition, they demanded the lifting of the US economic blockade against the island, the release of the five Cuban prisoners incarcerated in the United States and the elimination of travel bans that prevent American citizens from visiting the island. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 25/6/05)

July 25: Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles used a false Salvadoran passport to fly to South Florida in the spring of 2000 -- about six months before using the same passport to travel to Panama, where he was arrested in connection with an alleged plot to kill Fidel Castro. Posada's April 26, 2000 trip to Miami, revealed in documents from the US Department of Homeland Security, may become a point of contention during deportation proceedings that resume for Posada, who has been accused of acts of terrorism. Use of a false passport to enter the country is a deportable offense in its own right. (*The Miami Herald*, 25/7/05)

July 25: A US immigration judge has denied a request for bail from the militant Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles. Judge William L. Abbott cited allegations that Posada is a terror suspect and concerns he would flee if granted bond. Listing a series of terror allegations against Posada over the years, Abbott said even Posada's participation in operations against Cuba in the early 1960s could be considered terror under today's standards. Abbott's statement seemed to catch by surprise Posada's lawyer, Matthew Archambeault, who interpreted it to mean the judge would include the Bay of Pigs invasion -- sponsored by the US government -- as an act of terror under today's definition of terrorism. Another issue Abbott cited was Venezuela's extradition request for Posada. He said that according to US law, a person detained in the United States for being illegally in the country and who is suspected of terrorism in another country must remain in custody. The judge rejected a request by Posada's lawyers to throw out the government's evidence against Posada on the ground it's hearsay. Abbott said hearsay was admissible in immigration court. (*BBC, The Miami Herald*, 25/7/05)

July 27: Venezuelan Vice-president José Rangel Vicente affirmed that his government asked the US Justice Department to pass the case of Luis Posada Carriles on to the federal system. In a communiqué, Rangel affirmed that his government's request seeks Posada Carriles standing trial for the sabotage of a Cubana passenger plane in 1976, which killed 73 people, and not for the minor crime of violating US immigration regulations. (*Granma International*, 27/7/05)

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

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

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

August 31: An anti-Castro militant accused of illegally entering the United States withdrew his request for asylum. A lawyer for Luis Posada Carriles, Matthew Archambeault, told Immigration Judge William L. Abbott that his client, a former C.I.A. operative, decided to withdraw the asylum request to avoid embarrassing the American government. Some questions about his background that government lawyers asked Mr. Posada "may step in areas

sensitive to the US government" and other governments, Mr. Archambeault said. Mr. Posada's lawyers said they would now focus on trying to prevent his deportation to Venezuela. (AP, 31/8/05)

August 31: Anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles may not be deported to Venezuela, where he fears he would be tortured, if his plea for protection in the United States fails. The judge overseeing his asylum and deportation trial in El Paso said that on the face of it, Posada had presented enough evidence to persuade him that he could qualify for a form of US protection. But Judge William Abbott said he would defer a ruling. "He has made a prima facie case," Abbott said. Unless Judge Abbott changes his mind, the striking development in immigration court could allow Posada to stay in the United States -- although he could be subject to indefinite detention. Posada's attorneys argue that he qualifies for the protection, known as "deferral" of deportation, under terms of the Convention Against Torture, widely called CAT by immigration lawyers. "If Adolf Hitler applied for CAT, this court would have to grant deferral," Abbott said. "Not that your client is like Hitler," Abbott added quickly, noting that no matter how terrible a deferral applicant's criminal or terrorist past is, it does not disqualify him from the benefit if he can show likely torture in the country to which he is expelled. (*The Miami Herald*, 1/9/05)

September 1: El Salvador, mentioned as a possible destination for a Cuban anti-Castro alleged terrorist in the event his deportation is ordered by a federal judge in Texas, has said it doesn't want him. Salvadoran President Tony Saca said that in his country, "we do not receive terrorists." He was referring to Luis Posada Carriles, jailed in Texas on illegal immigration charges and subject to deportation proceedings. "Our government is a responsible government," Saca told a press conference. "We do not receive terrorists nor are we interested in associating ourselves with people who have been involved with acts that clash with the law." (*EFE*, 1/9/05)

September 1: The Cuban parliament declared that the US government will violate international terrorism accords if it does not extradite an anti-Castro militant to Venezuela for allegedly plotting a Cuban jetliner bombing that killed 73 people. The resolution, approved unanimously by lawmakers, comes as the Cuban-born Luis Posada Carriles fights attempts to extradite him from the United States to Venezuela, where he is a naturalized citizen and once served as a top intelligence official. (AP, 1/9/05)

September 1: What is taking place in the case of Luis Posada Carriles is a legal farce and an insult to the many victims of this international terrorist, noted a Granma newspaper editorial. Posada's attorneys are trying to take advantage of the Bush administration's growing hostility toward Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, by claiming he would not receive fair treatment in the South American country where he allegedly organized the bombing of a Cuban airliner that took the life of 73 persons. "It is evident that everything has already been settled between the defense and the prosecutors," assured Granma. (*Ahora*, 1/9/05)

September 18: José Pertierra, a Washington lawyer representing the Venezuelan government, said in Miami that if Luis Posada Carriles is neither deported nor extradited to Venezuela the Cuban exile militant could end up testifying in the retrial of five Cuban spies whose convictions were recently reversed on appeal. "The five were sent [from Cuba] to penetrate extremist organizations in the United States that were financing the campaign of terror -- bombings [in Cuba] that Posada Carriles was organizing with money from Miami and

the support of organizations in Miami," Pertierra said after addressing about 60 people, mostly sympathizers of the so-called Cuban Five. It isn't clear, however, just how closely the two cases are connected. Pertierra said the five convicted spies -- Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, René González and Antonio Guerrero -- were sent to Miami because of the 1997 bombings. But FBI documents indicated the Cuban agents had been under surveillance in Miami since at least 1994. (*The Miami Herald*, 19/9/05)

September 26: The extradition process of Luis Posada Carriles, presently detained in the United States, drew closer to an end with the judge giving the prosecution office two weeks to present its accusations against Carriles after his defence concluded its plea. An opponent of the regime of Cuba's Fidel Castro, Carriles is wanted in both Cuba and Venezuela on terrorist charges. (*Global Insight Daily Analysis*, 27/9/05)

September 27: A US immigration judge ruled that anti-Castro militant Luis Posada Carriles may not be deported to Cuba or Venezuela, citing the UN Convention Against Torture as a basis for the ruling. Immigration Judge William Lee Abbott drafted the decision, according to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which said that Posada, 77, would remain in ICE custody as authorities considered how to proceed. "The judge's decision did not rule out the removal of Mr. Posada to another country," ICE spokeswoman Leticia Zamarripa said in El Paso. The ruling was announced one day after the judge gave ICE attorneys more time to refute the assertions of the defense that Posada would be tortured if he were deported to Venezuela. (*EFE*, 27/9/05)

September 28: Venezuela blasted as "vile and sinister" a US ruling that a Cuban exile wanted in connection with a 1976 airliner bombing could not be deported for trial in Caracas. "They have taken a decision as vile and sinister as the actual act of terrorism. Once more the US government has been unmasked as a farce in the war on terrorism," Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel told reporters. "The saga of the Bush family is always linked to terrorism," he said. Rangel said attorneys were working on a legal response to the decision. (*The New York Times*, 29/9/05)

September 29: Cuba accused the US government of protecting a Cuban exile wanted for the bombing of a passenger plane while prolonging the imprisonment of five Cubans accused of spying. In the case of Luis Posada Carriles, the decision showed the "falsehood and hypocrisy" of the US government's "supposed anti-terrorist crusade," Cuba's ruling Communist Party newspaper Granma said in an editorial, in the first official Cuban reaction to the ruling. "The same government that has unleashed wars and sent its soldiers to die in the name of the fight against terrorism is today protecting one of the most notorious terrorists of our times," the front-page editorial said. A US immigration judge ruled that Luis Posada Carriles, a former CIA operative and anti-Castro militant, could not be deported to Cuba or Venezuela where he is sought for trial in the 1976 downing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people. Meanwhile, the US Federal Office requested the revision of Atlanta Court of Appeals judgement in Florida, which last August 9 reversed the convictions of the five Cubans and demanded a new trial. "Cuba will continue denouncing the cruel kidnapping of Gerardo Hernandez, René Gonzalez, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez for them to be released," concluded the text. (*AFP*, 29/9/05)

October 6: Family and friends of 73 people killed when a Cuban airliner was blown out of the sky 29 years ago marked the tragedy's anniversary by bitterly accusing the United States of

harboring the bombers. Some 200 people gathered at Havana's main cemetery to remember the victims of what Cuba views as its own 9/11. "What happened September 11, 2001, in the United States is not foreign to us," said Margarita Morales, whose father and the junior Cuban fencing team he coached died in the 1976 plane blast. "The families of the victims in the United States are waiting like we are for justice (...) We demand to stop looking for excuses to protect (Luis) Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch," she told the mourners, many of whom, with tears in their eyes, wore T-shirts or carried placards with pictures of the dead. (*The New York Times*, 7/10/05)

October 9: The US government has a plan to provide shelter for terrorists working against Cuba who seek protection in that country, denounced Juventud Rebelde newspaper. The daily claims that what is no less than a circus, apparently legal, has worked for Luis Posada Carriles in El Paso, Texas, and Orlando Bosch Avila years ago, who was even pardoned by George Bush senior. "It is tragic enough that justice be sullied for one murder, but what is worse is to design a strategy to protect everyone inside Operation Condor doing US dirty work," asserts the newspaper. (*Prensa Latina*, 9/10/05)

October 27: Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles no longer needs to worry about whether the US government intends to deport him to Venezuela, his adoptive country. The 30-day deadline to appeal an immigration judge's September 26 ruling against Posada's removal to the South American country expired; the federal government did not appeal the decision, Posada's lawyers said. This means that unless the Bush administration finds a third country willing to take Posada or pursues Venezuela's extradition request in federal court, Posada is now virtually guaranteed permanent protection in the United States. Deportation to Cuba, Posada's country of birth, was ruled out earlier. US officials had no comment on the lack of appeal, but noted that the immigration judge ordered Posada removed -- albeit neither to Venezuela or Cuba. "The immigration judge has ordered that Mr. Posada be removed from the United States," said Dean Boyd, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman. "ICE intends to carry out that order." José Pertierra, an attorney who represents the Venezuelan government in Washington, said the Bush administration can still pursue the case in federal court if it decides to file Caracas' extradition request for Posada. "We expect the US government to follow this route," Pertierra said. Posada's attorneys said it would be unlikely that a federal court would consider such a request because Posada could be tortured if returned to Venezuela. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/10/05)

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 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: 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 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)

December 8: Thousands of Cuban exiles congregated in a mass held in the church of Saint John Bosco, in solidarity with the anti-Castro activists Santiago Alvarez and Osvaldo Mitat, arrested by the federal government for possession of a small arsenal of weapons. Monsignor Emilio Vallina called Alvarez and Mitat "two victims of the injustices of many men". Alvarez is considered to be the benefactor of Luis Posada Carriles, who is in an immigration jail in El Paso, Texas. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 9/12/05)

December 13: A prominent Cuban-American linked to a militant accused of blowing up a Cuban airliner in 1976 pleaded not guilty to weapons charges in federal court in Miami. Santiago Alvarez, a close ally and benefactor of Cuban exile militant Luis Posada Carriles,

could face 20 years or more in prison if convicted of possessing automatic rifles, a grenade launcher and other weapons. "His spirits are very high and he is confident that justice will prevail," said Vivian Alvarez, the defendant's wife. The outcome of the case also may have a strong bearing on the future of Posada, who is being held in federal detention in El Paso, Texas. (*Chicago Tribune*, 14/12/05)

December 28: The criminal trial against Santiago Alvarez Fernandez-Magrinat and Osvaldo Mitat has been set for May 8, 2006 to take place at the Fort Lauderdale Federal Court. Lawyers for the defense continue to try to get the case moved to Miami. The office of judge James I. Cohn officially announced the date when six charges of illegal arms possession will be heard against the accused. During a December 13 court hearing, both defendants entered a plea of innocent. Fernandez-Magrinat was a main supporter of Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban born anti Castro militant now under arrest in a US migration detention centre. (*Granma, El Nuevo Herald*, 26/12/05)

MIGRATION

(See also, Domestic Affairs/ Migration)

January 13: The US Supreme Court has ruled that about 2,000 foreign nationals held in indefinite detention in US jails must be freed. Most of those affected by the decision are Cuban migrants US authorities have been unable to deport back to Cuba. There are between 700 and 1000 Cubans held in US jails in indefinite detention. Nearly all of them came to the United States in the 1980 Mariel boatlift when more than 100,000 Cubans fled the communist-run island from the port of Mariel in Cuba. The Cubans, and other foreign nationals affected by the decision, were languishing in US jails because their countries of origin refused to take them back. Nearly all had been convicted of crimes in the United States and deemed "excludable" by US immigration authorities, making them ineligible to remain in the country once they had served their sentences. (*VOA*, 13/1/05)

January 18: The number of Cubans who manage to slip by US Coast Guard patrols and reach US soil remains on a steady decrease. Only 955 Cuban illegal migrants reached US territory last year, as compared to 1,072 in 2003. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/1/05)

January 28: The US Coast Guard Service has confirmed that, at least 30 Cuban illegal immigrants, including several children and a baby, were rescued from an islet just yards away from the Florida coast and remain in Border Patrol custody. (*AFP*, 28/1/05)

February 12: Two US residents have been detained in Cuba after a friend reported them missing on their 22-foot boat, but how they reached Cuban waters is unclear. A man called the Coast Guard on February 5 to report his friends were in trouble at sea. He "had been in contact with the two individuals by satellite phone. We talked to this friend to try to get a position. He was telling us they were in distress and adrift, basically broken down," said Coast Guard Lt. Tony Russell. The initial location he offered was near Crooked Island in the Bahamas, but "that just didn't make any sense," Russell said. "The second location given was 18 miles off the coast of Cuba, and then 45 minutes later it was 1,200 yards off the coast of Cuba." That's when the man said his friends had been stopped by Cuban border guards. The boaters' names have not been released. Russell had no explanation for the boat trip, but US-registered boats are required to get permits to enter the waters off Cuba. (*AP*, 12/2/05)

February 15: Nearly 150 Cuban refugees convicted of crimes and imprisoned in the years following the 1980 Mariel boatlift have been released. The Miami Herald, citing an unnamed federal official, reported that at least 147 Mariel convicts have been released since last month's Supreme Court decision that found the indefinite detention of illegal immigrants is unconstitutional. About 600 Mariel convicts remain in prisons and jails nationwide, said Manny Van Pelt, spokesman for the federal Department of Homeland Security. Most are expected to be released in the next few months, he said. (*AP*, 15/2/05)

February 17: Immigration advocates claimed US federal immigration officials were doing too little to help newly released Mariel detainees adjust to life outside a cell. Federal officials said they've heard only isolated complaints, but they acknowledge that more may come as more Mariel refugees are released in the next few months. Celestino Leyva Núñez and Carlos Bueno Rodríguez said they are Cuban Mariel refugees released under the recent Supreme Court ruling, men who spent long months in detention and were finally freed -- only to become homeless. "The Cuban Mariels are being released without work cards to communities where they have no ties and have no desire to live," said Sue Weishar, director of immigration and refugee services for Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans. "It is not fair to the Cubans and it is not fair to the communities." (*The Miami Herald*, 17/2/05)

February 26: The US Department of Homeland Security is denying a published report that Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, the archbishop of Havana, was detained at Miami International Airport for three hours and threatened with deportation back to Cuba. El Nuevo Herald, citing two unnamed eyewitnesses, reported that immigration authorities at MIA harassed the prelate, who was traveling on a diplomatic passport issued by the Vatican. Zack Mann, spokesman for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said that Ortega was "detained briefly" for about an hour after he arrived aboard a charter flight from Havana about 11:50 a.m. "We can confirm that he did arrive and was processed just as any other foreign arrival would be processed when visiting the United States," Mann said. "All procedures were absolutely followed. He was treated in the utmost courteous manner." Neither Ortega nor the Archdiocese of Miami could be reached for comment. (*The Miami Herald*, 27/2/05)

March 3: The Roman Catholic Church in Cuba said that US immigration authorities rudely treated its top prelate, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, during a visit to Miami. A US official said only routine procedures were followed. "During the exchanges with immigration officials, the treatment received by Cardinal Jaime Ortega was brusque and discourteous," read a communique issued by Cuba's Catholic Bishops Conference. "Nevertheless, it must be clarified that there was no type of reference made to the cardinal's beliefs about the political situation in Cuba or in the United States," said the statement about the prelate's February 25 arrival. It added that US immigration officials never mentioned a "deportation order," as was suggested by some media at the time. Ortega was traveling on a diplomatic passport issued by the Vatican and a multiple entry American visa from the US Interests Section in Havana. (*AP*, 3/2/05)

March 22: The mastermind behind the "trucknauts," whose gutsy voyages to freedom from Cuba aboard 1950s-vintage vehicles failed, has finally made it to Miami. He did it the hard way. By land. Luis Grass' first two attempts were aboard a modified 1951 Chevy truck and a 1959 Buick car. He made international headlines when photographs of migrants on the amphibious contraptions surfaced. Last week, Grass' third and successful attempt was by land, crossing the US border with Mexico. (*The Miami Herald*, 23/3/05)

March 23: Jorge de Cárdenas Agostini, arrested in June on suspicion of supervising a team of torturers in Cuba, has been released from the Krome detention center, where he had been held for months awaiting deportation to Cuba -- a country that generally refuses to take back Cuban exiles. Sources familiar with the case said de Cárdenas Agostini had indicated during testimony in a previous deportation case that he had worked for a Cuban intelligence unit and supervised a team that allegedly tortured dissidents opposed to Fidel Castro. Linda Osberg-Braun, the immigration attorney who represents de Cárdenas Agostini, has denied the allegations. She declined to discuss the case in detail on or the reasons for her client's release from the West Miami-Dade center last month. Officials with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement have yet to release evidence linking de Cárdenas Agostini to specific acts of torture. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/3/05)

March 30: The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, delivered a press release saying that the Coast Guard Cutter Key Biscayne repatriated 40 Cuban migrants to Bahia de Cabanas, Cuba. The migrants were from two groups stopped by the Coast Guard. The first group of 10 were on a raft that was located by the Coast Guard Cutter Decisive about 22 miles south of Key West, Florida. Another 30 migrants were interdicted during a failed smuggling attempt after their go-fast was located by an HU-25 Falcon jet from Coast Guard Air Station Miami about 24 miles south of the Marquesas islands. (*US Fed News*, 30/3/05)

April 6: A press release issued by the US Interest Section in Havana (USINT) said that Fidel Castro lied during a TV appearance on March 30, when he said that "the US Interests Section selects teachers, architects, engineers and other professionals to resettle permanently in the US as part of the US Government's obligation to issue 20,000 travel documents a year". The USINT "wants to set the record straight", the note says. "USINT processes self-selected Cubans for resettlement in the US, without regard to profession or job". "Some Cubans, and their immediate family members, meet the definition of refugee because they have suffered persecution by the Cuban regime, and the US Government recognizes their refugee status. Others are petitioned by family members in the US", the note adds. "The majority of Cubans paroled into the United States -- 60% of the average annual total -- registered for a special Cuban visa lottery. In this random selection process, professional background plays no role. The last time Mr. Castro permitted the United States to hold a lottery registration, in 1998, 541,000 Cubans registered to leave Cuba in just 30 days. The regime has refused to permit us to hold another lottery registration, despite our annual requests to do so and Cuba's obligation under the Migration Accords to allow this". (*Notimex, Reuters*, 7/4/05)

April 9: Unlike 1980, when US officials had to scramble to deal with the Mariel crisis, the government now has a detailed sea, air and land plan to handle mass migrations from Cuba, Haiti or any other nation to the Southeast US coast. "If there is a mass migration threat to Florida, there's lots of plans in place," said Amos Rojas Jr., special agent in charge of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Miami office. "My sense is it's better to be prepared than to have the chaos we had in 1980." The plan, dubbed "Operation Vigilant Sentry," was developed by the Homeland Security Department along with Florida officials and the military. Its central goal is to intercept migrants at sea -- preferably close to their home shores -- and immediately return them in hopes of deterring more people from attempting a dangerous ocean crossing. (*AP*, 9/4/05)

April 19: A Cuban spy suspect who had been on a hunger strike for 38 days demanding freedom from immigration custody was abruptly deported to his homeland -- only the second such removal of a non-Mariel Cuban back to the island since 1982. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention and removal officers returned Juan Emilio Aboy to Havana aboard an American government plane that took off from Miami and flew directly to the Cuban capital, said Barbara Gonzalez, an ICE spokeswoman in Miami. Aboy was admitted and paroled into the country on March 2, 1995. He became a lawful permanent resident on May 7, 1996. Aboy was arrested in May 2002, but has never been charged criminally. Instead, he was put in deportation proceedings. He had been linked by investigators to the so-called Wasp Network of more than a dozen Cuban government operatives working in South Florida in the late 1990s. He has denied the allegations, and investigators have not produced specific evidence other than to indicate the information came from Wasp Network members who were government informants. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/4/05)

April 20: The abrupt deportation of an alleged Cuban spy in Miami -- the first such removal to the communist-ruled island -- came after Havana expressed an unusual willingness to take back the spy suspect, US officials told the press. Washington authorities had sought Juan Emilio Aboy's return to his native Cuba since late last year, but it wasn't until April 18 that Havana unexpectedly issued a diplomatic note saying his return would be accepted. Cuba has generally refused to take back exiles. US officials said no special negotiations or deals were tied to Aboy's return. (*The Miami Herald*, 20/4/05)

May 2: While processing 18 Cubans who reached shore near Bahia Honda State Park, the US Border Patrol was also trying to figure out how they got there. "We're trying to determine if they were smuggled or if they were rafters," said Kerry Heck, a supervisory patrol agent. "But we suspect they were smuggled." The group included eight men, three women, five boys and two girls, ranging in age from two months to 62. Officials believe they're all in good health. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/5/05)

May 15: Cuban migrant smugglers, who for years have brought people from the island to remote spots in the Keys, have adopted a new strategy to get around the heavily patrolled waters off the Keys: Launch their smuggling missions from Collier County in Southwest Florida. The cat-and-mouse shift has everyone, including the Coast Guard and Collier County sheriff's deputies, trying to keep up. "Criminals look to take advantage of vulnerabilities," said Lt. Tony Russell, spokesman for the Coast Guard in Miami. "We are working hard to minimize those. The Florida Straits covers from Cay Sal in the east, to the Marquesas in the west. That's 25,000 square miles of ocean." The increase in smuggling from Collier has been accompanied by another tactic: dropping off the Cuban migrants in the remote Dry Tortugas and Marquesas Islands well off Key West, rather than the Keys mainland. (*The Miami Herald*, 15/5/05)

May 26: Federal authorities are investigating a migrant-smuggling run in which a Cuban man reportedly died just off Cuba. The man is believed to have drowned after smugglers left him in the water and fled to Florida when a Cuban patrol vessel approached their boat before the man could climb aboard. "We did receive a report from Cuban authorities regarding a migrant-smuggling event that they reported did involve a death of a migrant," Lt. Tony Russell, a Coast Guard spokesman, said. "The details of that report are similar to the landing that took place in the Marquesas." Two Miami-area men -- Elio Diaz-Hernandez, the boat's captain, and Edel Domingo-Carvajal, a crewman -- were taken into custody after grounding a speedboat on an island in the Marquesas island chain off Key West. (*The New Herald*, 27/5/05)

May 31: The US Coast Guard was in the process of transferring to shore ten Cuban migrants who landed on an island off the Keys after setting off from Cuba on a rustic boat. The migrants, who arrived on Boca Grande, were among six dozen who have ridden calm seas to the Florida Keys in recent days. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/5/05)

May 31: The US Interest Section in Havana accused the Cuban government of encouraging illegal migration from the island to the US. In a statement to the press, the USIS says that the Cuban government hasn't allowed the Special Program for Cuban Migration, commonly known as "el bombo" or "el sorteo", since 1998. "One of the consequences of the Cuban authorities' failure to meet their obligations under the Migration Accords by permitting a new registration period for the Special Program for Cuban Migration is that Cubans who are now adults in the ages of 18 to 24 are cut off from the benefits of "safe, legal and orderly" migration that the Cuban authorities pledged to support in the 1994-95 Migration Accords", the statement says. "The United States Government renews its call to the Cuban authorities to cooperate in scheduling a new registration period, in conformity to Cuban obligations under the Migration Accords", it adds. (*Press Release, USIS*, 31/5/05)

June 1: The US Coast Guard said it repatriated 40 Cuban migrants to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, and 162 Haitian migrants to Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The 40 Cuban migrants were intercepted by the Coast Guard aboard five different rustic vessels found in the Florida Straits between May 22 and the 24th. (*Sun Sentinel*, 1/6/05)

June 2: A young Cuban journalist who had repeatedly demanded the release of all Cuban prisoners of conscience and denounced Fidel Castro's regime in scathing articles published by US newspapers in 2003, has arrived in Miami. Claudia Márquez Linares, 27, and her son Cristian, 8, were admitted into the United States under political refugee status. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 12/6/05)

June 7: Bernardo Heredia fled communist Cuba a decade ago, and this year loaned his lookalike younger brother his US residency documents to help him do the same. But what started in March as an act of familial love became a full-blown sacrifice when Cuban authorities got wise to the ploy and refused to let the elder Heredia leave the island, effectively switching the lives of two brothers. Now, Heredia is living with his younger sibling's wife and child, plotting an ocean escape similar to the one he went through in 1994. It began when Heredia, 42, found out his younger brother, Fidel, planned to leave Cuba by sea. In Havana on a family visit, Bernardo Heredia persuaded his brother to use his US residency card and Cuban passport to leave on a plane for Mexico. Fidel Heredia then used his own documents to cross the Mexico border into the US as a regular Cuban migrant before working his way to his brother's home in Las Vegas. With his own documents mailed back to him and no record of an arrival in Las Vegas, Bernardo Heredia imagined there'd be no problem flying back to the United States. But Cuban immigration officials stopped him at the Havana airport after realizing his passport had been used a few days prior. Heredia spent 30 days in a detention center. When he was released, he said, he was told he wouldn't be leaving Cuba anytime soon. The US government can't do much because the elder Heredia never obtained American citizenship. (*AP*, 7/6/05)

June 8: A group of 13 Cubans set sail for the United States in a vintage blue taxicab converted into an unwieldy vessel, Miami television station NBC 6 reported. But the makeshift boat, with a prow jutting out of the front and a taxi sign on the roof, was intercepted by the

US Coast Guard about 20 miles off Key West on the southern tip of Florida. The television station showed images of Coast Guard launches circling the vessel and the occupants rolling up the windows, presumably to try to avoid being caught. The Coast Guard declined to comment. "Under US government policy, we cannot discuss migrant interdiction operations until disposition is complete," said Petty Officer Sandra Bartlett. That process often takes days, she said. (*The New York Times, Reuters, 7/6/05*)

June 8: A federal grand jury indicted two men accused of smuggling 31 Cubans to an island off Key West last month. Meanwhile, officials continue to investigate whether the smuggling case may be connected to an incident in which a man drowned off the coast of Cuba. The Florida-based smuggling suspects -- Elio Díaz Hernández and Edel Domínguez Carvajal -- were charged with one count each of conspiracy, 31 counts of smuggling illegal aliens into the United States for profit, and 31 counts of bringing aliens to an "undesignated port of entry." If convicted, the men -- who pleaded not guilty -- would each face a minimum sentence of five years in prison. (*The Miami Herald, 9/6/05*)

June 9: Four of the 14 Cubans intercepted at sea aboard a vintage taxi converted into a boat will be allowed to stay in the United States because they have valid immigration documents, but the others will be sent back to Cuba, US officials said. Rafael Diaz Rey, the mechanic who built the blue, 1948 Mercury taxi-boat, and his wife and their two children appear to have legitimate documents that would permit them to stay in this country, according to the US attorney's office in Miami. An attorney for Democracy Movement, a Cuban exile group in Miami, said Diaz and his family last year won the documents in an annual lottery in Cuba for legal travel to the United States. But the government of Fidel Castro refused to let the family leave, said attorney Wilfredo Allen. "They had to act before the documents expired," Allen said. After interviewing the remaining 10 migrants, Homeland Security Department officials concluded they have no reasonable fear of being persecuted or tortured if they are repatriated to Cuba, according to documents filed in federal court. (*AP, CNN, 9/6/05*)

June 13: Two Cuban brothers were sentenced to six years in prison for assaulting a US Coast Guard crew that tried to prevent them from illegally reaching the Florida Keys by boat. US District Judge K. Michael Moore sentenced Jorge Cartaya-Acosta, 35, and Jose Cartaya-Acosta, 39, at a hearing in which their lawyers argued they were mentally impaired. The crew of the Coast Guard cutter Valiant approached the boat driven by Jose Cartaya-Acosta off the coast of Key West on February 8. When the brothers refused orders to stop and tried to outrun the cutter, the Coast Guard gave chase in a small inflatable boat. The brothers rammed the Coast Guard boat, breaking its stern light. Jorge Cartaya-Acosta brandished a metal tire iron, threatened to beat the officers and tried to puncture the inflatable boat, court documents said. Under US policy, Cuban migrants who reach land are usually allowed to stay and those intercepted at sea are repatriated to Cuba. The brothers were convicted in March of assaulting the Coast Guard officers, and faced up to 20 years in prison. (*Reuters, 14/6/05*)

June 13: A group of ten Cuban immigrants who attempted to reach US soil on a raft made out of an old vehicle once used as a taxi cab has been repatriated. According to the US Coast Guard, four of them were taken to Guantánamo Bay US Naval Base and will be allowed to return to US territory within a few days as they already had their immigrant visas. (*AFP, 13/6/05*)

June 15: According to US Customs and Border Protection spokeswoman Judy Turner, more than 40 Cubans who reached the United States via México and requested asylum are now undergoing medical exams. The immigrants claimed political asylum when they were detained at the Brownville area checkpoint on the border between Texas and México. (*AP*, 20/6/05)

June 20: The attempt by two brothers to go to the United States from Cuba fell short and left one brother trapped in Cuba. But, now both brothers are on American soil. Bernardo Heredia has been stuck in Cuba for the last three months hoping to get back to his home and family in Las Vegas. His brother, Fidel Heredia used Bernardo's documents to leave Cuba. Once Fidel got to the United States, he mailed Bernardo's documents back to him so he too could leave but not before Cuban officials caught on. Cuban authorities forced Bernardo to a stay in the communist country he fled for a better life. Bernardo says the intense pressure from the media is what he believes forced the Cuban government to release him and allow him to return to the United States. (*Las Vegas Sun*, 20/6/05)

June 27: Cubans continue risking their lives at sea to reach the United States-and they are taking more perilous routes to do so. Many of them set off from Santa Cruz del Sur, where its picturesque bay has become a popular launch point for Cubans trying to avoid the stepped-up US and Cuban patrols in the Florida Straits. Honduras' lenient immigration policy has made it the temporary destination of choice among many Cuban migrants, who then make their way north to the US. Like most Cuban rafters, those fleeing Santa Cruz del Sur are primarily men in their 20s or 30s who leave behind mothers, wives and children relieved at the word of a successful voyage but shattered by grief if no word arrives at all. In the squat homes that line the city's dirt streets, desperate women push frayed photographs of loved ones lost at sea into the hands of strangers in the hope they can bring news of survival. Cuban officials blame the stream of rafters on the 4-decade-old US economic embargo, which they say has crippled the island's economy. They also criticize America's "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy, under which Cubans who make it to US soil can stay but those picked up at sea are sent back. But some Santa Cruz del Sur residents said Cuba's socialist system crushes economic opportunity and leads to a level of desperation that would send some on what can only be described as a suicidal voyage. (*Chicago Tribune*, 26/6/05)

June 20: The man who tried three times to reach the US in vintage vehicles converted into boats finally arrived in Florida with his family. Rafael Diaz Rey, his wife, Nivia Valdez, and sons Pablo Alonso and David looked tired but relieved after their flight from the US base at Guantanamo Bay. They were taken there after being picked up 14 miles south of Key West on June 7 in a bright blue, 1948 Mercury taxi that Diaz converted into a boat. The US normally returns Cubans picked up at sea to Cuba, but Diaz caught a break because he and one of his sons already had won the right to emigrate in a Cuban government lottery. His wife, a doctor, and a second son had been denied Cuban exit visas. (*New York Daily News*, 20/6/05)

July 11: The Coast Guard has increased patrols and aerial surveillance off the South Florida coast, preparing for a rising number of migrants from hurricane-battered Cuba trying to make it to the United States. "The cutters are out in force," said Coast Guard Cmdr. Timothy Ciampaglio in Key West. Two out-of-town Coast Guard patrol boats have been sent to the Keys, federal Customs and Border Protection planes and helicopters are assisting with more aerial surveillance flights and the Florida Highway Patrol is checking boats towed southbound on state roads to see if they might be used by smugglers. (*Sun Sentinel*, 12/7/05)

July 13: Cuban forward Maikel Galindo, a member of the country's CONCACAF championship Gold Cup soccer team, apparently has started the process to defect to the United States, immigration officials confirmed. Galindo was one of two players who did not show up for the team's 2-1 loss to Canada in Foxboro, Massachusetts, a Spanish-language television station reported. The other player, goalie Odelin Molina, has not approached immigration officials, said an immigration spokeswoman. (*The Globe and Mail*, 13/7/05)

July 15: The State Department is making the unusual offer of giving expedited visas to the Cuban sons of Iraq war hero Sgt. Carlos Lazo so they can visit him in the United States, people familiar with the case said. The offer is the latest twist in a case that opponents of the US embargo against Cuba have highlighted as a symbol of the human cost of travel restrictions to the island. Lazo confirmed to the press that his sons, Carlos Manuel, 19, and Carlos Rafael, 16, have been invited to the US Interest Section in Havana for an interview to explore visa options. A National Guard medic who received a bronze star for helping injured troops while under fire in Fallujah, Lazo tried and failed to visit his sons last year, just before new regulations went into place that limited family visits at once every three years. Lazo had been visiting his sons regularly since 1994. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/7/05)

July 26: In what authorities believe is a first, 19 migrants apparently smuggled from Cuba landed in an upscale residential area of Sanibel Island on Florida's Gulf Coast. The group, which included three women and a young child, was taken by the US Border Patrol to its Pembroke Pines station and later released. No boat was recovered at the landing site. It's the first time in recent memory, and perhaps ever, that smugglers have unloaded Cuban migrants as far north as Lee County, adding hours to a run that typically ends off the Florida Keys. (*The Miami Herald*, 28/7/05)

August 4: Amidst the anxiety of his relatives and faced with the possibility of repatriation, a captain in the Cuban State Security service who escaped from the island on a boat along with another 27 people, remained aboard a US Coast Guard vessel. According to his wife's testimony, 39-year-old Guillermo Alfonso Alfonso, an officer with the Cuban Ministry of the Interior (MININT) since 1983, exited the island from the north coast and was intercepted the next day by a US Coast Guard patrol, when the longboat in which he was traveling ran out of fuel. (*El Nuevo Herald*, 5/8/05)

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

August 5: Three children and their father were returned to the US by Cuban authorities. On July 27, Foreign Affairs Canada, akin to the US State Department, was told a Canadian father and his three children had disappeared from the US. Two days later, the Canadian embassy in Havana learned that three Canadian children had arrived in Cuba with their father and without

travel documents. Cloe Rodrigue, a spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs Canada, said her office then worked with Cuban authorities to ensure the children's safety and swift return. Canadian embassy workers, helped by Cuban officials, approached Mel Dressler's catamaran, docked in Puerto de Vita on the Cuban coast, and removed the children from his care. The youngsters were flown to Montreal, where their step father Richard Subbio met them. Then all four returned to Philadelphia. Dressler, meanwhile, sailed to the Bahamas, after being told he would be arrested in Cuba. He faces a bench warrant in Philadelphia, and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's office charged him with child concealment, a third-degree felony that carries a maximum five-year sentence. According to Committee for Missing Children representative David Thelen, Cuba has been more helpful in international child custody cases since the return of Elián González in 2000. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/8/05)

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

August 16: Coast Guard officials said that 234 migrants from Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti have been repatriated after they were stopped at sea on boats headed toward the United States. The total number of Cubans stopped at sea this year is increasing -- 1,856, the largest number intercepted in a single year since 1994, when 37,191 Cubans were stopped during the rafter exodus. According to a Coast Guard statement, its vessels returned 100 Haitians, 121 Dominicans and 13 Cubans. (*The Miami Herald*, 17/8/05)

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

August 22: The US Coast Guard searched for 31 Cubans reported missing at sea after their boat capsized between Florida and Cuba. Three survivors were plucked out of the water by the crew of a merchant ship about 30 miles north of Matanzas, Cuba, and told their rescuers their speedboat had overturned with 31 other people aboard, the US Coast Guard said. The survivors were taken ashore in Cuba and Cuban authorities alerted the US Coast Guard. Search crews found a capsized boat in the area but had not found any more survivors. A Coast

Guard spokesman said he did not know whether any passengers had life vests or if the voyage was a migrant smuggling attempt. (*The New York Times*, 22/8/05)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

September 6: Cuba protested at the United Nations the US government denial for a second consecutive time of a visa for an island delegation to attend the 2nd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in New York, which started on September 5. "The Cuban Mission to the UN likes to express its vigorous protest over the arbitrary decision and total disagreement with this attitude," said a statement delivered to the US mission to the UN. The Inter-Parliamentary meeting was scheduled for September 7-9 to follow-up the first conference of this kind, held in New York in 2000, along with the Millennium Assembly. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/9/05)

September 7: More than 50 Cuban migrants landed in the Florida Keys in recent days -- many of them rafters on homemade boats who likely took advantage of relatively calm seas to cross the Florida Straits, federal immigration officials said. On September 6 alone, three separate groups of Cuban migrants made it to Florida. US Border Patrol officials were also kept busy throughout the Labor Day weekend, according to US Border Patrol spokesman Robert Montemayor. "I would say they saw an opportunity because of the weather and that's why we are seeing these smaller endeavors," Montemayor said of the latest attempts by rafters. Those apprehended were allowed to remain because they had made it to dry land. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/9/05)

September 7: The second world conference of parliamentary speakers kicked off at the United Nations headquarters in New York with the notable absence of the Cuban delegation after Washington denied visas to the Communist island's officials. Havana is not participating in the meeting, which is sponsored by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), after the US government refused to issue a visa to the head of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón, despite his having presented his visa request documentation in time. Alarcón sent a letter to IPU secretary-general Anders Johnsson in which he complained that the United States failed to fulfill its obligations as the host nation for the UN seat. This is not the first time that Washington, which is not a member of the IPU, has hindered the presence of Cuban lawmakers at international meetings on its territory. (*The New York Times*, 7/9/05)

September 8: The number of Cubans leaving the island illegally by sea is at its highest since the 1994 rafters' crisis, the top American diplomat in Havana said. The US Coast Guard has interdicted some 2,400 Cubans at sea so far this fiscal year ending September 30, more than double the number from the previous fiscal year, James C. Cason, the chief of the US Interests Section in Havana, said in a statement. Cason announced that the United States has fulfilled its obligation this fiscal year by issuing travel documents to 20,075 Cubans. He said that access to the government-controlled Cuban press would allow the American mission to better inform Cubans of their legal emigration options, but that "the Castro regime prefers to keep Cubans uninformed about their emigration possibilities." Cason called on the Cuban government to stop denying exit permits to hundreds of Cubans who have received US travel documents. He said Cuba has denied the permits to some 533 people this fiscal year, including 171 doctors and other medical workers. (*AP*, 8/9/05)

September 12: Cuba complained to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the United States had barred its national assembly speaker from attending a meeting of parliamentarians at UN headquarters in New York. Washington denied a visa request from Ricardo Alarcon of Cuba to attend the second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, a meeting sponsored by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. While the United States, as host country for the United Nations, is obliged to give visas to foreign officials for official UN business, a US official said the conference of parliamentarians was not a UN affair even though it used UN facilities. (*Reuters*, 12/9/05)

September 14: Ricardo Alarcon, president of the National Assembly of the People's Power (Parliament) of Cuba, arrived in New York at the head of the Cuban delegation to attend the UN Summit for Financing Development, which opened in New York. The Cuban delegation arrived late because of delays by US authorities in issuing visas to enable their entry into US national territory. (*Prensa Latina*, 14/9/05)

September 14: Within one 24-hour period this week, 109 Cuban migrants landed on several of the tiny islands that form the Dry Tortugas of the Florida Keys -- bringing the number of Cubans landing in South Florida so far this month to more than 150. Meanwhile, the number of Cuban migrants interdicted at sea while en route to South Florida hit more than 2,000 -- the largest number in a calendar year since 37,191 were rescued during the 1994 rafter exodus. Overall Cuban landings are up as well. Since October 1, 2004, more than 1,800 Cubans have reached South Florida's shores. That compares to 955 who made the trip between October 1, 2003, and September 30, 2004, according to recent Border Patrol figures. Homeland Security officials acknowledge the rise in landings and interceptions, but said they don't believe the increase portends a mass exodus. The increase could be attributed to "extremely calm seas out there," suggested Steve McDonald, a Border Patrol spokesman. (*The Miami Herald*, 14/9/05)

September 15: The US Treasury Department has refused a permit to the Rainbow Theatre group to travel to Cuba, where they were to perform during the 12th International Theater Festival in Havana. In a message to the event's organizers, Carlos Barón, the group's artistic director, expressed with deep regret and anger that "the US Treasury Department has denied us a permit to travel to Cuba and thus share with all of you during the upcoming International Theater Festival in Havana." (*Granma International*, 15/9/05)

September 16: The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, issued a press release informing of the repatriation of 34 Cuban migrants to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba. The US Coast Guard Cutter Pea Island said that the migrants were rescued in four separate cases. (*US Fed News*, 16/9/05)

September 23: A group of six US intensive care specialists were impeded to attend the international event "Ventilation 2005" in Cuba. The scientists, from universities in Washington, Texas, Pittsburgh and Loyola, were to attend this forum on mechanic ventilation and blood gases in the central Cuban province of Santa Clara along with more than 300 specialists from ten countries. (*Prensa Latina*, 23/8/05)

September 23: Ten Cubans who navigated the choppy waters of the Florida Straits and endured the bad weather resulting from Hurricane Rita were intercepted just a few miles from the coast. The would-be immigrants were traveling in a makeshift vessel when US Coast Guardsmen spotted them and prevented them from making their way to US soil. Television footage revealed how the Cubans - men between the ages of 20 and 40 - eluded capture for two hours before surrendering to US authorities. Francisco Delarros Carralero, a relative of two of the Cubans, told the Miami outlet of Spanish-language Telemundo television that the would-be immigrants were traveling from Cuba's Puerto Padre to the southern coast of Florida. (*EFE, El Nuevo Herald, Sun Sentinel*, 23,24/9/05)

September 24: Some Cuban American leaders called for a review of the methods used to take 10 Cuban men into custody. The search of the Cuban rafters by the US Coast Guard was followed by Miami TV stations. Boats from the US Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security sprayed a water cannon at the 10 Cubans' homemade boat and repeatedly bumped it, spilling four of the men into the ocean at one point. Cuban American Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart said that if the United States was going to repatriate Cubans, then it should also blockade all oil going to the Caribbean island. "The free world never threw anybody back over the Berlin Wall," he said. "I denounce this policy." US Senator Mel Martinez called wet foot/dry foot a "failure." Martinez added: "The tactics employed today also need review and clarification, but one thing is abundantly clear -- these men were desperate to seek freedom. My heart goes out to them." Diaz-Balart said he is asking the Bush administration to implement a policy where all refugees picked up at sea get an asylum hearing on dry land at the US military base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. US Representative Mario Diaz-Balart said he would also be seeking answers about the way these particular migrants were treated by US authorities -- especially whether the boat from Homeland Security was justified in striking the Cuban men's boat. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/9/05)

September 25: The US Coast Guard has repatriated 107 Cubans it intercepted at sea in nine incidents over a 10-day period. One incident involved 34 people the Coast Guard found on a go-fast boat 27 miles south of Key West. Two of the people on board, suspected of being smugglers, are in the custody of Customs and Border Protection and the Coast Guard returned the rest to Cuba. (*Sun Sentinel*, 27/9/05)

September 29: At a time when interceptions of Cuban migrants have doubled, the United States has accused Cuba's government of refusing to comply with 1995 migration accords designed to prevent another exodus to Florida. Cuba doesn't try to stop migrants on vessels while they are still in Cuban territorial waters, and it refuses to issue exit permits to many citizens who receive US travel documents allowed by the accords, according to a recent US

State Department report. More than 500 potential migrants awarded one of the 20,000 entry visas the US grants each year haven't been allowed out. Among them: 171 doctors. Cuban officials, for their part, have accused Washington of dragging its feet on visas, trying to deliberately spark an exodus in an effort to topple the Castro government. (*The Miami Herald*, 29/9/05)

September 30: Six of 10 Cubans whose search by the US Coast Guard was broadcast on television in Miami have been sent back to Cuba, officials said. Federal officials said the other four Cubans were taken to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for possible entry into a third country. The 10 were stopped by the US Coast Guard off Haulover Beach. (*NBC6Net*, 1/10/05)

October 4: The US Department of Homeland Security's US Coast Guard, 7th District, issued a press release informing of the repatriation of 54 Cuban migrants to Bahia de Cabanas, Cuba. The migrants were intercepted at sea, caught attempting to enter the United States. (*US Fed News*, 4/10/05)

October 6: Miguel Sigler Amaya and Josefa López Peña, along with their children, arrived in the United States. In September, both oppositionists had been detained in Havana by Cuban authorities when they were boarding the plane that would take them to the US. The grounds for the detention were unknown. (*Bitácora Cubana*, 6/10/05)

October 6: A Cuban baseball team that was to participate in a qualifying tournament at Puerto Rico for the Central American and Caribbean Games has not received visas from the US government, Cuba's Institute of Sports (INDER) said. "The Cuban baseball team will not visit Puerto Rico because it has not received authorization from the US State Department," said an INDER internet site, calling the Cubans "victims of US political discrimination." (*AFP*, 6/10/05)

October 9: The number of Cubans caught this year trying to make the risky voyage across the Florida Straits to the United States -- whether by pattering homemade boats or speedy smuggler's boats -- reached a 10-year high. There was a significant increase this year in Cubans who made it to US shores as well. While no mass migration appears on the horizon, Cuba experts and US officials say Cubans increasingly take to the ocean to flee the island run by Fidel Castro because of chronic economic hardship, repression of political dissent and a hard-line bureaucracy that makes it difficult for even some legal migrants to leave. "Something has to be happening that people would prefer to risk death rather than continue living there," said Ramon Sanchez, founder of the Cuban exile group Democracy Movement. "People just get so fed up with the system, they leave and risk their lives on the high seas." (*CNN*, 9/10/05)

October 13: A 6-year-old Cuban boy drowned after a smuggler's boat carrying him and 30 other people capsized as a US Coast Guard vessel attempted to intercept it south of Florida, the Coast Guard said. The boat was spotted on radar about 45 miles south of Key West, according to Lt. Cmdr. Chris O'Neill. The cutter Dauntless gave chase and drew within sight of the 33-foot "go fast" boat, but the boat sped up and pulled away, the Coast Guard said. The Coast Guard cutter lost track of the boat, he said. About 20 minutes later, the crew found the boat capsized with about 30 people clinging to the boat or in the water. After they were rescued they told authorities the 6-year-old boy was missing. While a Coast Guard helicopter searched the water, the crew of the Dauntless tried to right the boat. When they did so, "the youngster was found inside," O'Neill said. The migrants are being held at sea aboard the Coast

Guard cutter while US officials decide their immigration status, the Coast Guard said. (*CNN*, 14/10/05)

October 14: A Cuban-American who won a Bronze Star in Iraq but was not allowed to return to his homeland to care for a sick son said that his children are being allowed to visit the United States. Under an agreement with the State Department and the Cuban government, Sgt. Carlos Lazo's two sons, Carlos Rafael Lazo, 17, and Carlos Manuel Lazo, 19, will visit for three months. In an exceptional move, the Cuban government allowed the two boys to travel to the US although both are under military age. Lazo, a sergeant in the Washington state National Guard, plans to fly to Miami on Friday to meet them. The family's plight prompted US legislators from both parties to complain about the strict travel limits to Cuba imposed by the Bush administration. The rules allow family visits once every three years. "First of all, I'm very grateful for the outcome of this," Lazo said in an interview. (*Sun Sentinel, El Nuevo Herald*, 17/10/05)

October 17: Two Cuban parents won their bid for freedom, but at a life-shattering price -- the death of their 6-year-old son during an apparent smuggling attempt. Julian Villasuso Jr. died when the boat he was on overturned as it tried to elude the Coast Guard on its way to Florida's coast. Villasuso was buried at Woodlawn Park Cemetery in Miami. Dozens of friends and family members attended a memorial service for the boy in Coral Gables. The parents, among more than two dozen survivors of the failed smuggling trip, were allowed to enter the United States in a departure from normal procedure under the wet-foot/dry-foot immigration policy. (*NBC6Net, The Miami Herald*, 17/10/05)

October 18: Cuba's Parliamentary speaker blamed the US government for the drowning of a 6-year-old Cuban boy during an illegal migration attempt to South Florida. The US diplomatic mission in Havana in turn blamed smugglers and "the Cuban regime." The death of this child is the responsibility of the United States, as are all the others," Parliamentary speaker Ricardo Alarcón told reporters. If you arrive [in the United States] they admit you," said Alarcón, "But you have to make it, escape from the [US] Coast Guard, you have to violate American laws, you have to risk your life." The US Interests Section in the Cuban capital later issued a statement saying, "The culpable parties in this tragic accident were the smugglers in question and the Cuban regime. The regime continues to drive its citizens to risk their lives at sea by abusing their human rights and denying them economic opportunities." The statement added that the United States "is committed to safe, legal, and orderly migration from Cuba to the US" The child, Julián Villasuso, died when the boat smuggling him and 30 others -- including his parents -- capsized in the Straits of Florida. (*CNN*, 18/10/05)

October 19: Washington and Havana rip apart Cuban families with travel policies that violate civil rights, Human Rights Watch said in a 69-page report that marks the first time the group investigates two countries in the same study. Based on interviews with dozens of Cubans and Cuban-Americans, the report documents the terrible human cost of these restrictions, which have torn young children away from their parents, and prevented adults from caring for ailing relatives—including in some cases dying parents. "The US and Cuban travel restrictions reflect an utter disregard for the welfare of families," said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch. "Both countries are sacrificing people's freedom of movement to promote dead-end policies." The report notes that Fidel Castro had long used travel restrictions to control defections, silence critics and punish people. But it also faulted the Bush administration for tightening rules on travel to Cuba last year, on the ground that trips home

by Cuban expatriates were providing the government with much needed hard currency. The report calls on Cuban and US authorities to ease all travel restrictions. (*The Miami Herald*, *BBC*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, 19/10/05)

October 27: Lina de Feria, one of the most prominent writers of Cuban contemporary poetry, requested political asylum in the United States. De Feria arrived in Miami after spending a few hours in the Brownsville, Texas, immigration camp where she was taken after crossing the US-Mexico border. The writer was a candidate this year for Cuba's National Prize for Literature. (*Encuentro en la Red*, 27/10/05)

October 29: The US government refused a visa to a Cuban scientist arguing that his presence would be prejudicial to that country's interests. The San José, California Technical Museum awarded one of its annual prizes in the health category to the team of specialists who worked on obtaining the Cuban vaccine against Haemophilus influenzae Type B, the bacteria that causes meningitis, pneumonia and other infections in under-fives. Dr. Vicente Vérez Bencomo was supposed to travel to the award ceremony scheduled for November 9 at the museum itself, but the US government refused him a visa. (*Granma International*, 29/10/05)

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 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 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. (*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 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: 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 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 Bahía de Cabanas on board cutter *Metompkin*, 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 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 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: 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 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)

December 4: Nine of the 10 Cubans rescued in the Florida Straits on November 27 by the Celebrity Cruises ocean liner Zenith were returned to Cuba, the US Coast Guard reported. Coast Guard spokeswoman Petty Officer Gretchen Eddy would not disclose why the 10th migrant was not returned with the others, or when a decision would be made about the individual's fate. Also, 18 Cubans who apparently reached the US Virgin Island of St. Croix by boat were turned over to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents by local police, and will be flown to Miami to be reunited with relatives, according to the press. (AP, 4/12/05)

December 28: The US Coast Guard returned 159 illegal Haitian and Cuban migrants to their homelands, officials said. The 51 Cuban migrants were returned to Bahía de Cabañas, Cuba, said Coast Guard Lt. Petty Officer James Judge in Miami. Coast Guard crews intercepted three

separate Cuban vessels between December 15 and 26. The number of captured migrants spiked to 2,834 in 2005 from 1,499 the previous year. It is the highest number since a mass exodus from Cuba in 1994 when 37,191 migrants were intercepted, said Judge. (*AP*, 28/12/05)

December 30: Eighty-seven Cuban migrants reached Florida's coast, including a group of 28 who waded ashore in a Miami Beach waterfront park. Federal officials said most of the migrants appeared to have been brought to the United States by smugglers who carry Cubans in fast boats across the 100 miles of open water that separates the communist-ruled island from Florida. Fifty-six Cubans landed in the Florida Keys and three came ashore in Key Biscayne, a wealthy island town near Miami. The 12 men, seven women and nine children who landed at Miami Beach told police they left Cuba on December 28 in a makeshift boat, which began to sink somewhere between Cuba and Florida. They said they were picked up by a yacht and dropped off in waist-deep water just off South Pointe Park in Miami Beach. But Steve McDonald, an assistant chief with the US Border Patrol, said the Miami Beach incident and some of the other landings bore the hallmarks of smuggling operations. The U.S. Coast Guard has picked up 2,866 Cubans at sea in 2005, nearly twice as many as last year and the highest number since 1994, when more than 37,000 were intercepted in a major exodus from the island. Only Dominicans have taken to sea in greater numbers in the Caribbean region. Fewer Haitians have attempted the journey this year. (*Reuters*, 30/12/05)

NON-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

January 9: The Rev. James "Jim" Reeves of Christ Boulevard United Methodist Church traveled to Cuba on a mission trip. Reeves worked for the week with a network of Christians that help churches in Cuba. Called the "Cuba Connection," the network includes groups, individuals and churches from various denominations and ministries from various states. The missionaries spread the Gospels and provide food, clothing and other needs for people. Reeves traveled to Cuba through Canada because the United States does not recognize Cuba or allow travel between the countries. He obtained special licenses through the church for travel to Cuba -- for religious purposes only -- and was limited to what he could take and spend there. (*Charlotte Observer*, 9/1/05)

February 3: A videoconference celebrated as a first has linked Cubans in Miami and Havana for a discussion on a new book on the island's post-Castro economy. The University of Miami's Institute of Cuban and Cuban American Studies arranged the teleconference with Kelly Keiderling, a public affairs officer at the US diplomatic mission in Havana. "It's a pleasure to be part of this collaboration, that for the first time is possible," said Martha Beatriz Roque, a leading Cuban dissident. Keiderling invited about 50 Cubans to her home in Havana to take part in the videoconference with a Miami panel on the new book by Jorge Sanguinetti, a Miami economist who headed Cuba's National Investment Planning Department from 1963 to 1966. He has also advised former Soviet-bloc nations on economic reforms. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/2/05)

February 22: Members of the Cuban Cultural Center, an arts group that usually sponsors Cuban exhibitions and concerts, adopted an independent library in Cuba. They chose one in Las Tunas, Cuba, the Felix Varela Independent Library, which is named for a Cuban priest famous for his work for immigrants and the Roman Catholic Church in Lower Manhattan in the 1800's. The library itself, like some 100 others that have been founded since 1998, offers

Cubans an alternative to the official media or state-run libraries. They carry newspapers and magazines from around the world or books considered taboo by the regime. (*The New York Times*, 22/2/05)

March 20: In April, the 6th Havana Film Festival in New York will pay homage to two cinema luminaries, Cuban Pastor Vega, and Brazilian Walter Salles. "This year, the festival presents award-winners from Havana's Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, as well as new independent films from and about Latin America," said festival spokeswoman Diana Vargas. During the festival, moviegoers will be able to see cutting-edge narrative, documentary, short films and classics not only from Cuba but also from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and the US. (*New York Daily News*, 20/3/05)

April 24: The leader of a Baptist group in Cuba will be preaching at a Birmingham church as part of a program that promotes cultural exchange between US and Cuban Baptists. Manuel Delgado, executive secretary of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba, will speak at Baptist Church of the Covenant. Delgado's group has ties to the Alliance of Baptists, a coalition of moderate Baptists of which Church of the Covenant is a member. The Alliance promotes exchanges between churches in Cuba and the United States. (*Birmingham News*, 24/4/05)

May 6: The US group Audioslave broke decades-long barriers with a thundering concert before thousands of Cuban fans -- who knocked over barriers to get closer to the first US rock band to play an outdoor concert in Cuba. Chris Cornell's scream -- "I won't do what you tell me!" -- boomed off the high-rise apartment buildings on south side of the stage as feedback shrieks from Tom Morello's guitar drifted into the night breeze over the Caribbean to the north. It was a distinct difference from the orderly, clean-cut crowds who march in massive anti-US protests along the Malecon waterfront at the same venue: the Jose Marti Anti-Imperialist Tribunal before the US Interests Section, or diplomatic mission. (*The New York Times*, 8/5/05)

May 26: Tropical fruit trees and manicured gardens greet visitors driving through Ernest Hemingway's sprawling estate on the outskirts of Havana, but the wooden home where the famed American novelist lived more than 20 years is falling apart. Scaffolding covers the molding house, where much of the furniture has been removed due to moisture damage and to make room for restoration work. Americans in Havana for an international forum on the late writer were surprised at the sight. "It's not like what you see in the photographs," University of Pennsylvania professor Paul Hendrickson said as he peered through the windows of Hemingway's study. "This is really in a more fragile state than I had guessed." Erosion, tropical humidity and botched repairs are threatening the house where Hemingway spent some of his happiest years and wrote the prize-winning classic "The Old Man and the Sea." (*AP*, 26/5/05)

June 2: Novelist Ernest Hemingway's hideaway near Havana, where he wrote "The Old Man and the Sea" and spent more than 20 years of his life, is so tied to American culture - and so damaged by time and the elements - that a US preservation group has listed the house among its endangered historic places. The house, called Finca Vigía, or Lookout Farm, is the first historic site outside the United States to be part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual call for help. "This is a very important part of America's cultural heritage

even though it is outside our boundaries," said Richard Moe, president of the group. "It is part of our shared heritage with the Cubans." (*Sun Sentinel*, 2/6/05)

June 6: The President of the National Council of Cultural Heritage (CNPC), Marta Arjona, highlighted that the Ministry of Culture is financing the restoration of the House-Museum Ernest Hemingway in San Miguel del Padrón, Havana. In statements to press, the also member of the International Council of Museums and Sites stressed the advisory work done by a group of architects who, without doing any structural modifications, currently work on the roof and other parts of the building. Arjona added that from last February the residence of Finca Vigía estate (about 8 miles southeast of downtown Havana) is being restored with a budget of 270 thousand dollars. (*Prensa Latina*, 6/6/05)

June 7: Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said she was "very upset" with a group of architects seeking authorization to travel to Cuba to restore "Outlook Farm," Ernest Hemingway's home in Havana. In a press release, Lehtinen, a Florida Representative, pointed that the architects "are concerned about the condition of the Hemingway property, while Castro's brutal government keeps hundreds of political prisoners in jail and the whole island under a totalitarian and despotic regime." (*EFE*, 7/6/05)

June 7: Some lively dialogue about US policy on Cuba is expected as farm exports from the Southeast take the spotlight at a conference in Alabama's port city, chosen because of its cultural and shipping links to Havana. The fourth National Summit on Cuba which will be held in Mobile is sponsored by the World Policy Institute based at the New School University in New York. "We are creating a forum for an intelligent and balanced discussion of US-Cuba relations," says summit spokeswoman Lissa Weinmann, a researcher at the institute. She said the agenda for the meeting is "wide-ranging, but the focus is on trade." Some Cuban officials, who cannot attend, are expected to participate by phone or possible video hookup and answer questions from the audience. (*AP*, 7/6/05)

July 4: The Naples Rugby Football Club will compete against the Cuba National Rugby Football team in Havana. "There's no political agenda". "We wanted to go to Cuba because of the mystique of it," Sean Reddick, part-time rugby player, full-time trial lawyer, said. The Naples team has invited Fidel Castro to attend. Reddick insisted there's no political agenda. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/7/05)

July 4: Cuban musicians, writers and artists celebrated in Havana the 229th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence. In the activity, held at Havana's Amadeo Roldán Theater, Cuban musicians performed pieces from universal composers like Erich Kleiber, Igor Stravinski and Leopoldo Stokowski, among others. The program included all music genres, as well as merged US and Cuban rhythms. (*Prensa Latina*, 5/7/05)

July 7: The game between the Naples Rugby Football Club and the Cuban National Club on the Fourth of July in Havana was canceled, according to Kenneth Dunne, match secretary of the Naples club. Dunne, who was not part of the 45-person contingent that made the trip to Cuba, said he did not know the reason for the cancellation. Doyle Junker, the father of player Dax Junker, who traveled with the team, said his son told him it was the Cuban side that canceled the match. (*The Miami Herald*, 7/7/05)

July 11: One of the four opening rounds of next spring's World Baseball Classic will take place in Florida, but it remains uncertain whether the powerful Cuban national team will participate in the 16-team, 18-day event, officials for the fledgling tournament said. All-Star pitcher Danys Baez of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, who defected from the Cuban team during the 1999 Pan American Games, said Cuba has dominated international competition the past three decades because it has faced inferior competition. But in the World Baseball Classic, Cuba would play Panama and Puerto Rico in the first round, and if it advanced to the second round it likely would face the Dominican Republic or Venezuela. Another obstacle could be the tournament schedule, which has Cuba playing all its games on US soil, increasing the threat of defections. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/7/05)

July 26: Pastors for Peace religious foundation leader Lucius Walter conveyed a special greeting to Fidel Castro, on the occasion of the 52nd anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barrack. Speaking from McAllen border crossing in Texas to the press, Walker said the 16th Friendship Caravan to Cuba members joyfully welcomed July 26th. Lucius Walker noted he remained at the McAllen border crossing to demand the US administration return a portion of the humanitarian aid to Cuba that North American authorities seized there. Customs agents and the Department of Commerce are holding a bus transporting 12 computers, printers, wires, scanners and other electronic means, he denounced. (*Prensa Latina*, 27/7/05)

July 29: "The Secret War. Crime Chronology 1959-2002", a revealing testimony of CIA assassination attempts against Fidel Castro, was launched at the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists headquarters. The book by retired Major General Fabian Escalante Font includes considerable information about terrorist acts by US governments and the CIA from 1959 to 2002. Cuba's Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon stressed at the ceremony that the publication is very timely and contains important thoughts on political crime just when notorious terrorist Luis Posada Carriles has been arrested in the US for migration charges. (*Prensa Latina*, 29/7/05)

July 29: A religious group that gathers humanitarian aid for Cuba urged US authorities to release 12 Canadian computers seized at the US Mexican border under American sanctions against Cuba's communist government. The 43 boxes of computer equipment donated by Canadians were en route to Cuba in an annual caravan organized by the Pastors for Peace group when they were seized by US border officials at McAllen, Texas. "These were Canadian computers that were confiscated by US customs," said Genevieve Mutschler, a volunteer from the Canadian province of British Columbia. "They were sent from Canada in support of Cuba in its struggle against the US embargo." (*The New York Times*, 29/7/05)

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

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

September 22: Two 30-passenger aircraft will leave Miami International Airport in Florida with over 50 enthusiastic volunteers to travel to the island of Cuba to participate in a project whose goal is to build four playgrounds in one week for the children of Havana. These American volunteers will join local Cuban families to assemble and erect new swing sets, climbing structures, crawling tubes, triple twists, turbo towers, infant playhouses and many more pieces of the latest playground equipment. The project was the idea of an entrepreneur and real estate investor, Bill Hauf, who six years ago formed the nonprofit foundation "It's Just The Kids, Inc." to fulfill the unrealized dreams of children. (*Business Wire*, 22/9/05)

September 26: Three groups of Canadian and American volunteers are preparing to fly to Havana to teach English to the Cubans. The 22-day programs are open to working or retired educators willing to pay their own costs, while donating their English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching skills. (*PR.Com*, 26/9/05)

September 26: Restoration has begun on the Cuban hilltop villa where Ernest Hemingway hung his hat and hunting trophies for 21 years, from 1939 to 1960. But as repairs progress, US conservationists say the project lacks funding and materials they are eager to supply -- assistance banned under the terms of the 40-year-old US embargo on travel and trade with the communist island. Boston-based Hemingway Preservation Foundation, which was denied a US license last year to help fund restoration efforts, sent a team of experts to Cuba to study needed repairs under a special travel license issued by the US Treasury Department. Even when they finish their feasibility study later this year, though, it's unclear how they will put their findings to work. The group will reapply to the Treasury Department for a restoration license in November, but has no guarantee of receiving one, Jenny Phillips, co-founder of the Foundation said. (*Sun Sentinel*, 26/9/05)

September 29: Baseball officials said they expect Cuba to participate in the first World Baseball Classic in March. "They're not formally in yet," said Gene Orza, the chief operating officer of the players association. "There's a process that you have to go through to play with the Cubans, through the United States government. The license has been applied for. We're hopeful for a favorable response. I personally don't believe that the participation of Cuba poses any problems," he said. (*AP*, 29/9/05)

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 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)

December 2: Cuba seems to be preparing to participate in next year's inaugural World Baseball Classic -- the first international tournament to include Major League players -- Fidel Castro said on several occasions in Havana. "We will participate and demonstrate that we know what to do in baseball," Castro told Panamanian reporters visiting Havana. In the spare comments, published in *La Prensa*, a Panamanian newspaper, Castro added that the tournament should be "very interesting." But Major League Baseball officials, aware of those comments, said that paperwork involving MLB, Cuba, the International Baseball Federation (IBAF) and the US State Department is incomplete and the committee overseeing the 16-team tournament is not yet prepared to make an official announcement. (*MLB.Com*, 2/12/05)

December 5: With blaring horns and pounding African drums, Grammy-winning pianist Chucho Valdés and other Cuban performers wrapped up an international music festival with an Afro-Cuban tribute to Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans, birthplace of American jazz. The tribute concert ended Cuba's annual international jazz festival, *Jazz Plaza 2005*, and featured a new Valdés composition called "Canto a Dios," which Valdés dedicated to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. (*CNN*, 5/12/05)

December 11: The president of Cuba's Olympic Committee, José Ramón Fernández, confirmed the island's participation in an international tournament sponsored by the Major League Baseball. The Cuban official denied making any other comments to the press. (*AFP*, 11/12/05)

December 12: Baseball is in Congress's crosshairs again due to Communist Cuba's participation in an upcoming international tournament sponsored by Major League Baseball that is under fire from Capitol Hill. Cuban-American leaders in Congress are urging the league's commissioner, Allan "Bud" Selig, to rescind an invitation to the Castro government to field a team for the league's inaugural World Baseball Classic. The members of Congress want instead to allow free Cubans to represent the island nation. The Bush administration, too, is being pressed to deny the league's application for a license that would permit Cuba - a State Department-identified state sponsor of terrorism, subject to a Treasury embargo - to participate in the tournament. The first World Baseball Classic is an 18-day, four-round international tournament established and sponsored by Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association. According to the league, the tournament, to be held in March, will feature 16 teams from North America, Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa, and Latin America, and will be played in Tokyo, San Juan, Florida, Arizona, and California. (*The New York Sun*, 12/12/05)

December 18: At least 100 members of Congress have weighed in on the controversial US decision to deny Cuba a license to play in the upcoming World Baseball Classic. Most of them want Cuba to play ball. Eighty members of Congress signed letters to Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Treasury Secretary John

Snow urging them "not to take international politics to the ball field." Major League Baseball and the Players Association organized an international baseball tournament to be played by 16 teams this March. But Treasury denied Cuba a necessary license because making money in a baseball tournament would violate the US embargo against Cuba. "Let's just enjoy the game and put sportsmanship over politics," wrote the members in favor of a Cuba team. (*The Miami Herald*, 18/12/05)

December 20: The chairman of the US Olympic Committee, Peter Ueberroth, requested from US president George Bush to revert the decision of banning the Cuban baseball team from participating in the Baseball World Classic in 2006. Ueberroth, who was the president of the organizing committee of Los Angeles Olympic Games, said that the Treasury Department decision will damage US aspirations to host the Olympic Games in the future. (*AP*, 20/12/05)

December 21: A group of Cuban major leaguers will meet with Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart to discuss forming a team to play in the inaugural World Baseball Classic in March. Diaz-Balart, Florida Republican and a native of Cuba, declined to identify the players but said they have enough for every position, plus a manager. "Cuban players have rights, too," Diaz-Balart said. "They are organizing and want to play together as a team." The issue of Cuban players in the tournament -- a World Cup-style competition that is being heavily promoted by Major League Baseball and the players union as a historic event -- has become a point of contention. A group of congressmen from South Florida, including Diaz-Balart, successfully lobbied the Bush administration to deny Cuba a permit that would have allowed its national team to play in the United States during the tournament, which will be held March 3-20 in the United States, Puerto Rico and Japan. (*The Washington Times*, 21/12/05)

December 22: Cuba said it would donate its revenues from a world baseball tournament to Hurricane Katrina victims if the Bush administration reverses a controversial decision to bar Cuba's participation. "The Cuban baseball federation, in an effort to find options, would be ready for the money corresponding to its participation in the classic to go to the victims of Hurricane Katrina left homeless in New Orleans," the federation said in a letter to US Major League Baseball. Cuba labeled the Bush administration's position as "shameful" and "absurd" and "having nothing to do with sports." (*The New York Times*, 23/12/05)

December 28: Venezuela offered to host part of next year's World Baseball Classic in place of Puerto Rico and suggested moving the final to Canada, proposals aimed at keeping Cuba in the 16-team tournament. Such an arrangement would open the way for communist-led Cuba to participate in the first World Cup-style baseball tournament. Cuba is banned from playing on US soil, and Puerto Rico is a US commonwealth. "We hope that the United States' government changes its position," Edwin Zerpa, president of the government-run Venezuelan Baseball Federation, said. "But if not, we are proposing that group C play in Caracas. We don't approve of Cuba's exclusion." Only teams in group C -- Olympic champion Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Netherlands and Panama -- would be invited to play in Venezuela, with the final in Canada, Zerpa told the press. (*AP*, 28/12/05)

SALES AND BUSINESS

January 5: A trio of US senators is protesting a US Treasury Department proposal they contend could seriously hamper the growing trade in agricultural products between the United States and Cuba. One of the trio, Senator Max Baucus (Democrat-Montana), has threatened to

put a hold on any new Treasury Department nominees that come before the Senate if the department's Office of Foreign Assets Control goes ahead with plans to require payment in advance of shipment on sales to Cuba. "Moving to obstruct lawful trade after three years of it functioning without incident takes this administration's dangerous obsession with Cuba to a whole new level," said Baucus. "I will not sit idly by if the Treasury Department attempts to rewrite legislation Congress intended to facilitate trade with Cuba. I am prepared to hold up the next significant Treasury Department nominee until this gets resolved." In a November 23rd letter to Treasury Secretary John Snow, Baucus joined Senators Larry Craig (Republican-Idaho), and Byron Dorgan (Democrat-North Dakota), in noting that "OFAC's mission is to enforce sanctions in place against Cuba, not to regulate or interfere in lawful commerce between the United States and Cuba. (*Southeast Farm Press*, 5/1/05)

January 30: Texas Cooperative Extension, a partner in the Texas-Cuba Trade Alliance, will present an educational program to help agricultural producers, businesses and others improve their chances for success in trading with Cuba. A half-day seminar, "Doing Business with Cuba," will be held at the University of Houston. Owners of businesses that market foods, other agricultural products and medical supplies will benefit from seminar subjects that include how to trade with Cuba, how to get paid, information on port facilities, and trade opportunities, said Extension agriculture economist Dr. Parr Rosson. (*North Texas E-News*, 30/1/05)

February 1: Despite a much-publicized agreement signed last year for the government of Cuba to buy \$10 million in goods from South Carolina companies, little has been done since then to implement the deal. Three state officials, including Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer and then-Agriculture Commissioner Charles Sharpe, and two shipping executives returned from a controversial trip to Havana with a deal that included the officials agreeing to urge the state's congressional delegation to push for more open trade with the communist nation. "There were some people who were unhappy, but we weren't endorsing Castro," said Representative Chip Limehouse (Republican-Charleston), who went on the trade trip. Increased political tensions between Cuba and the United States could be to blame for the deal falling through. "For trade to flourish, we have to get the political situation better," Limehouse said. "It seems like every foot we go forward, we take a step or two backward." (*AP*, 2/2/05)

February 3: US farm product sales to Cuba, which began only in 2002, have now topped \$1 billion, the head of Cuba's food import agency said. That trade appears to be growing despite a marked deterioration in always tense bilateral relations. "We have paid \$1,043 billion to date," Alimport Chairman Pedro Alvarez said after signing a \$22 million contract for 10,000 tonnes of milk with Dairy America of Arizona. Alimport includes shipping and other costs in its figures. Alvarez said most of the 163,000 tonnes (tons) of agricultural products purchased from the United States under a 2000 US measure that allowed cash-only sales were shipped by US companies. Alimport reported Cuba had become the 22nd largest US agricultural market, with sales of \$474 million last year. (*Reuters*, 3/2/05)

February 3: New US government moves to reinterpret the payment system under a 2000 law allowing sales of American farm goods to communist Cuba threatens to slow the limited but growing trade relationship of recent years, the island's top food import official said. If the American government ultimately decides no US food products can leave port until paid for in advance by the Cuban government, deals "could be dramatically reduced" this year, said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. "This harms American producers as much or more than Cuba itself," said Alvarez, speaking at a news conference

called to announce a US\$22 million contract for the island to buy milk from Dairy America of California. (*The Miami Herald*, 4/2/05)

February 4: Governor Kathleen Blanco will lead a state delegation to Cuba from March 8 to 11 in an effort to win business for Louisiana ports and companies seeking to expand trade with the communist island nation. A spokeswoman for the governor said no meetings were planned with Fidel Castro during her visit, which was announced previously with no firm date. The relaxation of a trade embargo three years ago allows the sale of US food, agricultural, medical and some wood products to Cuba. (*The Times Picayune*, 4/2/05)

February 9: A group of US senators presented a bill to Congress seeking to clarify a law that permits the sale of agricultural produce and food to Cuba, thus ending a controversy that has jeopardized authorized trade with the communist island. The bill, presented by some 20 Republican and Democratic senators, clarifies details of 2001 legislation that allowed US firms to sell medicines and agricultural produce to Cuba as long as the government of Fidel Castro pays cash in advance. A dispute in interpreting the law had pitted US exporters since November with the US Treasury Department, which had asked banks to block sale of foodstuffs and medicine to Cuba. "The Agricultural Export Facilitation Act (2005) will ensure that (agricultural producers ... all over the country) can keep the market and continue to sell their products to Cuba as they have done without incident for several years," said Senator Max Baucus, ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee. "Today, I will not allow bureaucrats to reinterpret Congress' original intent and obstruct already established legal trade," said Senator Larry Craig, as the bill was unveiled. The bill defines cash payment in advance as receipt of payment before transfer of title and release of physical control of goods to the purchaser. (*Sun Sentinel*, 9/2/05)

February 9: The American Farm Bureau Federation said that it supports a bill introduced in the Senate to facilitate and increase US agricultural exports to Cuba. "We applaud these changes, which would clarify Congress' intent when it enacted trade sanctions reforms in 2000 and streamline the procedure that allows US farmers and ranchers to export their products to Cuba," said AFBF President Bob Stallman. "Congress clearly meant to open the Cuban market for farm exports, and this bill is a positive next step." (*Southwest Nebraska News*, 9/2/05)

February 10: Cuba has purchased 125,000 tonnes of US wheat "over the past several days," according to the US Wheat Associates, an industry group that promotes sales of American wheat abroad. US Wheat Associates officials, accompanying wheat growers from Oklahoma and Texas, have been in Cuba this week meeting with food-buying officials. Details on delivery dates for the wheat were not available, according to a US Wheat Associates official. According to the group, "More purchases (of wheat) are being negotiated" by Cuba. (*Reuters*, 10/2/05)

February 14: Cuba became the United States' 25th-largest agricultural export market in 2004 with food purchases jumping 55 per cent, despite a decline recently as always tense relations deteriorated further, a report showed. "With the completion of the 2004 data, Cuba's purchases of \$391.9 million ranks the country as the 25th largest agricultural market for U.S. companies, compared with 35th in 2003, 50th in 2002, and 144 in 2001," said John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. The New York-based organization monitors trade between the two countries and issues an annual summary based on US government data and other sources. (*Reuters*, 15/2/05)

February 17: The US government's strict enforcement of a four-year-old law allowing farm sales in Cuba is threatening to slow the limited but expanding trade between the countries, a top Cuban official said. Late last year, American agricultural companies found that payments made by Cuba were not credited to US bank accounts while US officials studied whether shipping the products before full payment is received constitutes a line of credit. If the American government decides no US food products can leave port until paid for in advance by the Cuban government, deals "could be dramatically reduced," said Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. "This harms American producers as much or more than Cuba itself," said Alvarez, speaking at a news conference to announce a \$22 million contract for the island to buy milk from Dairy America of Fresno, California. (*AP*, 18/2/05)

February 17: Daniel McNeel, executive director of Gulfport, Mississippi, and Pedro Alvarez, head of ALIMPORT, Cuba's food import company, have renewed an agreement to increase shipments from that harbor to Cuba. The accord with Gulfport, the third most important southern US seaport, was first signed in 2003. McNeel said he would be pleased if the renewal would help boost bilateral trade exchange. (*Prensa Latina*, 18/2/05)

February 18: The American Farm Bureau Federation supports a bill introduced in the Senate to facilitate and increase US agricultural exports to Cuba. The Agricultural Export Facilitation Act of 2005 would authorize Cuba to make payments directly to US banks; clarify that Cuba's payments do not have to be received before exports leave US shores; make it easier for US citizens to travel to Cuba to market agricultural products; and expedite temporary visas for Cuban nationals to visit the United States to inspect goods before they are shipped. "We applaud these changes, which would clarify Congress' intent when it enacted trade sanctions reforms in 2000 and streamline the procedure that allows U.S. farmers and ranchers to export their products to Cuba," said AFBF President Bob Stallman. (*Texas Agriculture*, 18/2/05)

February 22: In a blow to growing US agricultural sales to Cuba, the Treasury Department ruled that American exports to the island cannot leave US ports until Havana pays cash. The "clarification" comes after a lengthy review of provisions in the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000, which permits limited cash sales of food and agricultural products to Cuba. Most other exports are barred by the 42-year-old US trade embargo. The review stemmed from concerns about possible violations of TSRA, which had led some banks to delay crediting Cuban payments to the accounts of US exporters, said Treasury officials. TSRA requires that Cuba pay cash but seemed unclear on whether payments had to be made before the US goods left American ports or -- a more common international trade procedure -- after the goods arrived at Cuban ports. The clarification "doesn't affect the ability of US exporters to send shipments to Cuba, but rather ensures that they receive payments before the goods are shipped to the island," said Treasury spokeswoman Molly Millerwise. (*The Miami Herald*, *Sun Sentinel*, *Reuters*, 23/2/05)

February 22: The Treasury Department made clear that Cuba must make cash payments before the shipment of US agriculture and medical products to the island. The ruling drew quick criticism from farm-state senators, with one threatening to block nominees to Treasury posts. "I'm outraged at this attempt by Treasury Department bureaucrats to choke off US agriculture sales to Cuba," Senator Max Baucus of Montana, top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said. Baucus has also joined senior Republicans, including Intelligence Committee Chairman Pat Roberts of Kansas and Larry Craig of Idaho, in promoting legislation to remove what they say are the bureaucratic obstacles being put up by the administration to

farm trade. Senate Finance Committee chairman Charles Grassley, an Iowa Republican, also said he was considering a response to the new rule. (*CNN, Reuters, 22/2/05*)

February 23: Cuba is considering halting purchases of American farm products worth \$400 million a year because of new Bush administration rules demanding payment before shipment to the island, Cuban officials said. One official said the payment rules announced by the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control made Cuban shipments vulnerable to confiscation by Cuban exiles with legal claims against Fidel Castro's government. "If they manage to obstruct trade, Cuba will find alternative suppliers," the president of Cuba's National Assembly or legislature, Ricardo Alarcon, told the press. He said the measure would hurt US agricultural producers, who have sold \$790 million in food to Cuba since December 2001. "They are shooting themselves in the foot," Alarcon said. Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import agency Alimport, said Cuba would honor its commitments with American suppliers, though trade will inevitably decline. "Of course, we are not going to continue buying. The shipments could be seized once Cuba has paid for them," said one Cuban official who asked not to be named. (*Reuters, 23/2/05*)

February 26: A member of the San Diego Port Commission bucked policy by going to Cuba and striking a tentative deal with a food importer. Kouros Hangafarin, appointed to the panel less than a month ago by Mayor Dick Murphy, signed a deal between the San Diego Unified Port District and Havana-based Alimport, *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reported. The deal would require commission approval at a public hearing. The news stunned Bill Hall, head of the commission, who said he told the *Union-Tribune* he was upset when Hangafarin faxed him the contract between the port and Alimport. "I am concerned by it; I don't like it," Hall told the newspaper. "Basically, he didn't act in accordance with policy, but he's new to the board, so I'm going to look at what the repercussions may be." (*North County Times, 26/2/05*)

March 1: San Diego port officials have hired a leading government ethicist to look into the newest commissioner's recent trip to Cuba, where he signed a trade agreement without the port's authorization. Port Commission Chairman Bill Hall said Bob Stern will evaluate whether Kouros Hangafarin's actions in Cuba posed any ethical problems, including whether he stood to gain financially. The agreement Hangafarin signed is not binding without approval of the San Diego Unified Port Commission at a public meeting, but port officials moved quickly to resolve the matter. Hall said the federal departments of Treasury, State and Commerce had been contacted to see if they have concerns. (*Union Tribune, 1/3/05*)

March 8: Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco arrived in Havana for a three-day trade mission aimed at boosting food sales to Cuba at a time when the Bush administration is tightening sanctions and seeking to limit trade with the island. Louisiana's ports rank first in shipping commodities such as wheat, soy and corn that make up the bulk of exports to Cuba. But most of that food is not grown in Louisiana. State officials and local agribusiness executives are hoping a visit from their chief executive will help cash in on lucrative sales that have made Cuba the United States' 25th largest export market. (*Sun Sentinel, 8/3/05*)

March 9: Easing a tension that had built up in the days leading to her Cuba visit, Governor Kathleen Blanco met with State Department officials who had requested she spend time with them to get "the other side of the story." Blanco and a small group accepted an invitation to join Chief of Mission James Cason for a private meeting in his sumptuous residence in Havana. Blanco's nod to Cason did not extend to accepting the Interest Section's invitation to meet

with Oswaldo Paya, a soft-spoken dissident whose vision of a new Cuba has inspired supporters to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. "I think any elected official coming here should have some basic knowledge of how the situation in Cuba really is," Paya said after dropping in on Cason earlier in the day. "It's important they hear an alternative voice to the government." (*Times Picayune*, 9/3/05)

March 9: Kourosh Hangafarin ended a short but stormy tenure on the Port Commission by submitting his resignation to San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy, who accepted the offer. Hangafarin, 45, was sworn in February 1 and became embroiled in controversy February 25 when he went to Cuba and struck an unauthorized trade agreement with a Cuban import-export company on behalf of the port. At a Port Commission meeting, Hangafarin said he was confident that the investigation would show he was only trying to find a new revenue source for the port and did nothing wrong. (*Union Tribune*, 10/3/05)

March 10: Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco met with Fidel Castro for two hours just before her trade mission's departure from the island nation. "Out of respect for the president, the governor accepted the invitation," Blanco spokeswoman Denise Bottcher said. Blanco, speaking upon her return to New Orleans, said she weighed the perception of her meeting with Castro after being criticized by anti-Castro activists for making the trip but thought going to the meeting was in the state's best interest. "We had just signed agreements with Cuba by \$15 million of our goods, food and fiber products," she said. "We didn't want to jeopardize that by perhaps insulting the president of the country," she said. (*Times Picayune*, 10/3/05)

March 10: New restrictions on trade with Cuba imposed by the US government will mostly punish small and medium-sized US businesses exporting food to the island, the chairman of Cuba's food import agency said. A recent move to reinterpret how Cuba pays for American farm goods allowed under an exception to the embargo says the Caribbean nation must make full payment before the cargo leaves US ports. "These new measures go directly against American business people, and especially punish small and medium-sized businesses," Pedro Alvarez, chairman of the food import company Alimport, said while accompanying Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco on her final day of a visit to boost trade with the island. Alvarez said before the goods leave U.S. ports, Cuba will now have to extend letters of credit guaranteeing payment and send the cash once the goods are on their way. "We have no other alternative left to us," he said. (*AP*, 10/3/05)

March 16: Thirty-three US agriculture export firms and groups representing farmers exporting to Cuba petitioned the Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control to allow existing contracts with the Cuban government for agriculture and food deliveries to proceed under the terms that were written before OFAC issued a rule February 22 to tighten up financial regulations on trade with Cuba. US firms have been selling agriculture and food products to Cuba since 2001 under a 2000 law that allows cash-only sales. (*DTN*, 16/3/05)

March 16: A top expert on US-Cuba trade announced that he had resigned, saying he was "tired" of dealing with the Cuban and US governments, careless journalists and "two-bit hustlers." "I don't care what conclusions people draw; I would just like them to use accurate information," said John Kavulich, head of the New York-based US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council (USCTEC). "Integrity, accuracy, ethics seem to be increasingly less important." Kavulich and USCTEC have been regarded as the leading experts on US trade with Cuba and

the Cuban economy since it was established in 1994. Its members are largely major U.S. companies exploring business opportunities in Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 16/3/05)

March 18: The Bush administration is refusing to back down from its decision to start imposing payment restrictions on US exports to Cuba. In testimony before the House Agriculture Committee, OFAC Director Robert Werner reiterated the Bush administration's position that Cuba must start paying in advance of the goods leaving the United States, a move the Cuban government strongly opposes. Werner said that Cuba may use letters of credit through a foreign bank, which exporters say will increase the time and costs of transactions. (*The Advocate*, 18/3/05)

March 24: Cuba will continue buying US food despite stricter new Bush administration requirements for cash-in-advance payments, a senior Cuban official said. "The United States is a nearby market and prices are good. We will keep buying despite increased regulation, if prices, shipping and other costs remain competitive," said Miguel Alvarez, top aide to the president of the National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón. Congress authorized cash sales of food to Cuba in 2000, a rare exception to the US trade embargo dating from 1963, which is aimed at pressuring Cuba's communist government. (*Reuters*, 24/3/05)

March 24: There's little hope Arkansas farmers will have access to an expanded market in Cuba in the near future, or for the Social Security system in the long term if something isn't done to fix it, US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said. Gutierrez, 51, who was sworn in last month, has pledged to help American exporters by negotiating more agreements for trade with other countries while striking out against unfair trade practices. During confirmation hearings, the Cuba native said foreign trading partners have to uphold their ends of agreements. Gutierrez said after a speech to about 70 people at the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce that he supports Bush's policy of severe restrictions on business with Cuba. "We require certain changes to happen in Cuba before opening broader trade relations," Gutierrez said. (*AP*, 25/3/05)

March 29: US Treasury Secretary John Snow downplayed the likelihood that a brewing political scuffle over agriculture exports to Cuba would hamper his ability to fill a swath of vacant high-level positions in the Treasury Department. "I'm sure we'll be able to work out whatever these issues are," Snow told reporters during a stop in Montana, the home state of Senator Max Baucus, who has threatened to block Treasury nominees in a spat over new rules about food sales to Cuba. "I want to sit down with the senator and talk through what his concerns are," he said. Treasury's new rules, which came into effect this month, require that Cuba pay cash for US food items before they are shipped, a change critics say could choke off sales to a key emerging market for American agricultural goods. (*Reuters*, 30/3/05)

March 31: In testimony before the House Agriculture Committee, the Director of the Office for Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), Robert Werner, reiterated the Bush administration's position that Cuba must start paying in advance of the goods leaving the United States, a move the Cuban government strongly opposes. Werner said that Cuba may use letters of credit through a foreign bank, which exporters say will increase the time and costs of transactions. "It's moronic. The Cubans are panicking like crazy," said Gary Frankston, a Metairie shipper who joined the Louisiana trade delegation in Havana. "OFAC is not making this easy for Louisiana businesses." The delegation to Cuba -- as well as anyone currently doing business with the

communist nation -- is ensnared in a political tango between the US federal government and the communist country. (*The Miami Herald*, 31/3/05)

April 7: The Reverend Jesse Jackson plans to travel to Cuba to promote US trade with the Communist-run island, a friend said. Jackson visited Cuba in 1984 when he secured the release from jail of 22 Americans and 26 Cuban political prisoners, and again in 1991. This time he will be going to endorse free trade with Havana. "He thinks we should bring the walls down and do business with Cuba," said Alabama businessman Gregory Calhoun, owner of the distribution company Calhoun Foods, who spoke to Jackson from Havana. "He said he would come to Cuba and told me to work on the dates for him," Calhoun said before signing with Cuban authorities food sales worth \$14.3 million. (*Reuters*, 7/4/05)

April 15: A US senator who wants more food sales to Cuba blocked action on a popular nominee for the No 2 job at the Agriculture Department to draw attention to the issue. Senator Larry Craig, an Idaho Republican, acted a few days ahead of a potential Senate vote on a measure that would make it easier to sell US farm goods to Cuba. The Bush administration toughened the rules on February 22 over the protests of farm groups and their lawmaker allies. "We want to be assured we can trade with Cuba," said a Craig aide. He confirmed Craig put a hold on the nomination of White House agriculture advisor Chuck Conner to become deputy agriculture secretary. As a matter of courtesy, senators traditionally defer action on a nomination if a senator puts a hold on it. (*The News*, 17/4/05)

April 20: Recent US Treasury Department rulings threaten a growing US market for rice and other commodities, a representative of the US Rice Producers Association and USA Rice Federation told members of Congress. "Cuba has grown to be among our top five largest single-country export markets for US rice," says Dennis DeLaughter, a rice producer from Edna, Texas, who testified at a hearing held by the House Agriculture Committee. "Since December 2001, \$1 billion of agricultural goods have already been delivered and paid for by Cuba, he said. "These purchases included shipments of nearly 320,000 tons of US rice worth a reported \$81 million. In 2004, the Cubans bought \$64 million worth of US rice — more than their purchases of any other commodity." (*Southwest Farm Press*, 20/4/05)

April 26: More than thirty companies, state agencies, and organizations from 19 states announced the official formation of the US-Cuba Trade Association (USCTA). Charter members of the newly formed association include ADM, Caterpillar, Cargill, National Foreign Trade Council, USAEngage, USA Rice Federation, North Dakota Farm Bureau, Port of Galveston, Louisiana Department of Economic Development, AgBioTech, Buffalo Int'l., Arthur Savage & Sons, Port Manatee Commercial Center, Virginia Department of Agriculture, US Wheat Associates, and other companies. The mission of the U.S.-Cuba Trade Association is to protect current trade with Cuba, expand and increase the potential for future business, and promote the full normalization of commercial relations between the US and Cuba. (*PRNewswire*, 26/4/05)

April 27: North Dakota firms expect to sell 25,000 metric tons of dry peas to Cuba in the next 18 months, an agreement that officials say will bolster the state's trade relationship with the communist nation. The first shipment of 5,000 tons of peas should be sent to Cuba in the next three months, said Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson, who returned this week from a three-day trade mission to the country. Cuban officials also are interested in buying several

other North Dakota commodities, including sunflowers, soybeans and potatoes, along with cattle, Johnson said. (AP, 27/4/05)

April 27: Business leaders and current and former elected officials from throughout the South will gather at the Mobile Convention Center to attend the 2005 National Summit on Cuba in Mobile, Alabama. Special presentations will be made on US Cuba policy's economic impact on the American South. Speakers include Alabama Secretary of Agriculture Ron Sparks; Louisiana Secretary of Economic Development Mike Olivier who just traveled to Cuba with Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco; US Representatives Jo Bonner (Republican-Alabama) and Jeff Flake (Republican-Arizona) among other local and US elected officials, corporate representatives and others. (PR Newswire, 27/4/05)

April 27: The United States has lost out on \$300 million in agricultural sales to Cuba since February when the Bush administration imposed stricter financial regulations on firms doing business with the country, a Cuban government official told a new pro-Cuba trade group. Pedro Alvarez Borrego, chairman of the Cuban food import agency Alimport, told the US-Cuba Trade Association in a telephone conference that the "uncertainty of supply and financial losses" had forced Alimport "to detour" to other foreign markets for \$300 million in purchases, according to a copy of his speech. Alimport has imported \$179.4 million in U.S. food products this year, which USCTA said is on par with imports of recent years. Traders, however, say the Cuba business is not growing this year. Alvarez said Cuba will honor the contracts it has signed and hopes to continue to expand US purchases. (Congress Daily, 28/4/05)

May 3: Cuba's food importer company Alimport and the US state of Vermont have agreed to promote the sale of agricultural products, mainly cattle, milk powder and mayonnaise on the island. Vermont's independent Senator James Jeffords and Alimport's President Pedro Alvarez signed a memorandum of understanding, an evidence of growing ties with the agro-business community of the United States. Jeffords described his trip to Cuba as very informative and productive and he committed himself to do all he could "to lift the trade embargo and promote closer relations between our two peoples and our two governments", said the Vermont lawmaker. (Prensa Latina, 3/5/05)

May 25: An unusual alliance of farm-state Republicans, liberal Democrats and free-trade advocates is fighting a Bush administration policy aimed at stifling the growth of farm exports to Cuba. Ready to square off against the group is a vocal bloc of lawmakers who vehemently oppose Fidel Castro and any moves to open trade with his regime. The issue has reignited the acrimonious debate between supporters of the four-decade-old US trade embargo, who believe it will weaken Castro's government, and opponents who see it as a failed policy and an obstacle to democratic change. (Newhouse News Service, 25/5/05)

June 13: A three-person delegation from Cuba arrived in Vermont looking to buy Holstein and Jersey heifers -- young dairy cows about to start their milking careers. The three -- a cattle expert, a veterinarian and an official with Cuba's import agency -- toured farms in southeastern Vermont's Windham County, a hot and muggy day that appeared to make them feel at home. Tatiana Taboada Gonzalez of Cuba's Alimport agency said the country currently has about 1.5 million dairy cows, not enough to provide milk and dairy products for the country of 11.3 million people. "The first goal is to be self-sufficient," she said. The group hopes to buy 100 heifers in Vermont, a similar number in Maine, and others in Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Florida. (AP, 14/6/05)

June 15: With the first sale completed in a contract signed in March committing Cuba to spend \$15 million for Louisiana products, an official with the state Office of Economic Development said that the office is planning another trade mission to the island nation in hopes of finding more opportunities for Louisiana businesses. Speaking to a lunch meeting of the World Trade Club of Greater New Orleans, Felipe Martinez, project manager for the state Department of Economic Development, said Cuba is a "natural trading partner" for the state and a number of opportunities remain for Louisiana businesses there. (*Times Picayune*, 16/6/05)

June 21: A congressional panel voted to undo a new Bush administration regulation that critics say threatens to squelch US food sales to Cuba. The House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, by voice vote, approved an amendment that would roll back a Treasury Department rule issued in February that requires communist Cuba to pay for food imports from the United States before they leave port. (*Reuters*, 21/6/05)

June 22: A group of Americans from a US trade association pushing for normalized commercial relations with communist Cuba arrived in Havana to discuss future business possibilities and the current state of trade with their Cuban counterparts. The visit by delegates from the Washington-based US-Cuba Trade Association comes as members of Congress consider amending a new Treasury Department rule that forces Cuba to make full payment for American farm goods before the cargo leaves US ports. "The purpose of the trip really is for the members to get an update on what's happening from the Cuban point of view," primarily with the island's economy and the effects of the latest US measures, Kirby Jones, the association president, told the press. Hopefully companies will sign some contracts as well, he said. (*AP*, 22/6/05)

June 23: Cuba will spend less than two-thirds of the money it had planned to invest in American farm goods this year because of increased US restrictions, Cuba's top import official said. The communist-run island had planned to purchase up to \$800 million in goods this year from the United States, according to Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Cuba's food import company Alimport. But a rule that forces Cuba to make full payment for goods before the cargo leaves US ports has complicated commerce and forced the island to turn to other markets, Alvarez said. As a result, Cuba is now aiming just to match the amount it spent last year on US products -- about \$475 million. "Not only have the recent measures made American exports more expensive, they've also introduced a lot of uncertainty," Alvarez told a news conference during a visit to the island by members of a US trade association pushing for normalized trade with Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 24/6/05)

June 23: US food producers who sell to Cuba complained that a payment rule introduced by the Bush administration has cut their exports to the Communist-run island by 25 percent. "What is disturbing for producers is that we are losing solid exports to Cuba every week," US Rice Producers Association President Dwight Roberts said on a visit to Cuba. US food businesses sold almost \$400 million to Cuba last year, mainly in bulk shipments of corn, wheat and soy, under an exception to a trade embargo enforced for four decades against Fidel Castro's government. But sales fell to \$131 million in the first four months of this year compared to \$173 million in the same period of 2004, according to US Department of Agriculture figures. (*Reuters*, 23/6/05)

June 23: The head of Cuba's state-run food importing company said the country would import 750,000 to 800,000 tonnes of rice this year, 300,000 tonnes more than in 2004. "We are providing more subsidized rice to our people and the rice crop was severely impacted by drought," Pedro Alvarez, president of Alimport, told a news conference, explaining why imports were up by around 75 percent. Cuba usually produces 150,000 to 200,000 tonnes of rice and imports 400,000 to 500,000 tonnes, mainly from Vietnam and China. Alvarez said Cuba bought 100,000 tonnes of rice from the United States last year, but would purchase less in 2005 due to new regulations regarding food for cash trade exempted from the trade embargo. (*Reuters*, 23/6/05)

June 23: Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff announced that a second shipment of cattle has been sold to Cuba as a result of his trade mission trip last year, and as part of Cuba's commitment to invest \$10 million in agricultural commodities within Pennsylvania. "Building relationships with domestic and international markets is consistent with Governor Edward G. Rendell's commitment to economic development, and is a win-win situation for Pennsylvania agriculture and for Cuba's dairy industry," said Wolff. "The sale not only is a significant economic boost to Pennsylvania's farm economy, but also helps to grow the Cuban dairy industry with high quality genetics." Some 300 Holstein and Jersey animals from Pennsylvania will be shipped in two groups in early and mid-July; 100 in the first and 200 in the second. (*US Fed News*, 23/6/05)

July 5: Conservative American farmers, businessmen and some Republican lawmakers are likely to oppose the US policy limiting trade with the island. As Congress voted down amendments to the policy, those pushing for more interaction with Cuba questioned how the embargo can endure. "Will someone please explain this policy to me?" Dwight A. Roberts, the Texan president of the US Rice Producers Association, asked a news conference in Havana after describing financial losses to thousands of rice growers when US restrictions were tightened. This year, he said, the association will sell less than a third of the rice it exported to Cuba in 2004. "The policy just doesn't make sense," said Roberts, who visited Cuba in late June. (*AP*, 5/7/05)

July 19: Louisiana State economic development officials are planning a third trip to Cuba in the hope of stirring up more business between the island nation and Louisiana businesses. This time, neither Governor Kathleen Blanco nor Mike Olivier, secretary of the Department of Economic Development, will be making the trip. Among the nine participants traveling to the communist nation on July 28th and 29th will be officials with the Port of South Louisiana, a medical equipment supplier in New Orleans, a dairy products producer and a rice shipment company. (*AP*, 19/7/05)

July 19: US farm and trade groups are urging Senate lawmakers this week to overturn a Treasury Department ruling they say has slashed agricultural exports to Cuba by altering how the country pays for US food orders. Congress authorized food sales to Cuba in 2000 if paid for in cash, a rare exception to the overall US trade embargo dating from 1963 against the Communist-ruled island. However, the Treasury Department issued a rule in February 2005 requiring Cuba to pay for American goods before they leave a US port. Senate panels are scheduled to meet to consider a bill funding the Treasury Department and other federal agencies beginning October 1. Farm groups are lobbying for lawmakers to include an amendment, which would roll back the Cuba trade rule. (*Reuters*, 19/7/05)

July 20: The US Treasury Department and a key senator remained deadlocked over a Cuba trade dispute that is holding up Senate approval of officials to fill vacant senior jobs at the Treasury. Montana Democratic Senator Max Baucus, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, told four Treasury nominees at a hearing that he continues to be upset at an export rule change that makes it harder for agricultural producers to ship goods to Cuba. Baucus has threatened to block Treasury nominees until the rule is reversed. (*Reuters*, 20/7/05)

July 25: Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman announced that he will lead a 10-member trade delegation to Cuba from August 13 to 17. The visit will provide the chance to explore export opportunities for the state's agricultural products, as well as medical supplies. This will be the Governor's first trade mission since taking office in January. (*Southwest Nebraska News*, 25/7/05)

July 29: A top senator ended a seven-month standoff on Treasury Department nominees after the Bush administration clarified new rules that the lawmaker said made it harder for US companies to sell food to Cuba. "I pushed the Treasury Department hard so that agricultural exporters could continue to sell their products to Cuba," Senator Max Baucus, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, said in a statement. "I'm optimistic that this clarification will provide US agricultural exporters in Montana and elsewhere with another option to restart sales to Cuba." Agricultural sales to Cuba fell by about 25 percent in the first five months of the year compared with the same period in 2004 after the Treasury Department ruled in February that Cuba had to pay US companies before the shipment left a U.S. port, instead of after docking in Havana. Baucus said the new requirement -- an interpretation of "cash in advance" regulations governing sales to Cuba -- was especially difficult for small exporters. Under the deal, the payment will still have to be made before the boat leaves a US port, but Treasury clarified that it can be held in a foreign bank that acts as a seller's agent until the shipment reaches Cuba. (*The Miami Herald*, 30/7/05)

July 29: Exporters may face fewer complications in selling US farm goods to Cuba under a Treasury Department clarification, one trade group said, but another doubted it would make any difference. The clarification said vessels could leave US ports as soon as a foreign bank confirmed receipt of payment. That could be slightly faster than rules in effect since February, experts said, and would spare sellers the expense of using letters of credit. "It should speed the process up and, therefore, facilitate additional trade," said Kirby Jones of the US-Cuba Trade Association. "The unknown is how the buyer (Cuba) reacts." Sales of US food exports to Cuba have fallen 25 percent since new rules took effect, requiring Cuba to pay for US foods before they were shipped. John Kavulich of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which monitors trade between the nations, said the option highlighted by Treasury was "nothing new." (*Reuters*, 29/7/05)

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

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

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

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

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

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

States markets are totally insecure about our country," said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import firm Alimport. (*Dow Jones Newswires*, 25/8/05)

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

September 9: John Kavulich summarized his decade as a top US expert on the Cuban economy by saying that he went "from being the anointed one to the disappointed one," Kavulich, former president of a group whose members included huge US companies interested in trade with Cuba, resigned as head of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, bitterly complaining about US and Cuban officials who put politics before profits, sleazy business practices and naive media reporting. In 2002 Kavulich made his final trip to Cuba, for the US Food & Agribusiness Exhibition, an unprecedented event that attracted 293 exhibitors from 32 American states. But as Cuban imports of US goods increased, Kavulich began going public with controversial issues. The trade council's newsletter was first to report that Havana was buying goods from specific US states in order to push their congressional representatives to vote for easing US sanctions on Cuba. It also first reported in 2003 that Havana was requiring US firms and some US politicians to sign "advocacy agreements" -- promising they would lobby Congress to ease the sanctions -- before Cuba would buy their goods. "I am witnessing an increasing lack of ethics (...) both in the United States and in Cuba." (*The Miami Herald*, 9/5/05)

October 4: After securing deals in August for Cuba to buy \$30 million in agricultural products in the next year and a half, Nebraska governor Dave Heineman announced that he is returning later in October for a second trade mission. The trade mission is scheduled to run from October 30 to November 2 and will include a visit to the International Trade Fair in Havana. (*AP*, 4/10/05)

October 11: For the first time in over 40 years, representatives of the US energy sector will meet personally with their Cuban counterparts at the US-Cuba Energy Summit to discuss the potential for business in oil and gas ventures between the US and Cuba. This Summit will take place at the Westin Resort and Spa in Cancun, Mexico, from December 1-3, 2005. This historic gathering is being organized by Alamar Associates which has organized five previous Cancun Business Summits which have brought more than 500 US executives together with their Cuban counterparts. The Energy Summit is being sponsored by the US-Cuba Trade Association along with Caterpillar, Port of Corpus Christi, Louisiana Department of Economic Development, Valero Energy Corporation, Lafayette Economic Development Authority, National Foreign Trade Council, and USA Engage. "With Spain, China, Canada, Norway, and India exploring in Cuban waters less than 100 miles from our shores in the Gulf, it is time for US firms to understand what is going on and what the future business potential might be," said Kirby Jones, President of the US-Cuba Trade Association, "and this event offers US executives the opportunity to do just that face-to-face with their Cuban counterparts." (*PRNewswire*, 11/10/05)

October 13: A majority of executives interviewed in South Florida would be interested in doing business with a post-Castro, democratic Cuba, a survey shows. Hispanics surveyed are most interested in expanding business into neighboring Cuba after Fidel Castro leaves power. But a majority of Anglo and black executives also voiced interest, according to the poll commissioned by Miami-based South Florida CEO magazine. A majority interviewed also think a democratic Cuba would have a positive impact on South Florida and their particular industry, said the survey conducted by Coral Gables-based polling firm Bendixen & Associates. The results are based on phone interviews with 417 business leaders and high net worth individuals in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish during the first two weeks of September. (*Sun Sentinel*, 13/10/05)

October 21: US business executives, Cuban-American ones and "Anglos" alike, are anxious to pour billions of dollars into Cuba in the tourism, agriculture, real estate, manufacturing, communications and other sectors once Communism there goes the way of other disappeared Marxist regimes. The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce estimates that post-Castro investment from the United States will amount to more than \$2 billion a year. The results of a new survey of Miami-area executives by veteran pollster Sergio Bendixen revealed that many business leaders plan to take advantage of this opportunity. Of the 417 respondents to the survey, 64 percent said they would be interested in setting up business operations in Cuba. The poll also showed that some 72 percent of Cuban-American executives said they planned to do business with Cuba once restrictions on trade with the island are lifted, compared with 63 percent of "Anglos" and 50 percent of African-Americans. (*EFE*, 21/10/05)

October 25: North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson said 11 people will accompany him on a trade trip to Cuba. The delegation will attend the Havana International Trade Fair October 31 through November 5. "The Cubans have said up front that they want to buy at least 20,000 metric tons of dry peas from North Dakota, and that they are also very interested in other commodities, including wheat, pulses, potatoes and onions," Johnson said. The president of Cuba's state food-buying agency invited North Dakota to take part in the trade fair, Johnson said. (*WestCan Cuba*, 25/10/05)

October 31: There are a variety of US products on display at Havana's annual trade fair. More than 300 representatives of 171 American firms confirmed they would attend the International Fair of Havana, said Pedro Alvarez, head of the Cuban food import company Alimport. "We have a larger American participation this year despite the (US) restrictions," Alvarez said as he toured the Expo Cuba fairgrounds on Havana's outskirts. "But the (Bush) administration has created serious obstacles for small and medium-sized companies." Marvin Leherer, of the USA Rice Federation, said the trade group he represents indicates that American rice sales to Cuba this year have been down, "mostly because of the problems with the terms of payment" created by US rules. "It's definitely made things harder," Leherer said as he set up the Rice Federation's booth at the fair. But rice farmers are determined to keep selling as much to Cuba because it is a key future market, Leherer added. "This is a huge market for rice. We have to be here," he said. "Cuba imports as much or more than Mexico with just one-tenth of the people." (*AP*, 31/10/05)

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 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 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 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 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: 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 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)

December 11: Maine Governor John Baldacci, the third US governor to travel to Cuba this year in search of trade, won a deal to sell \$20 million in farm goods to the country's state-run food import agency. "We appreciate our trade with Cuba. It is good for our farmers and good for our state," Baldacci said, after signing a series of documents with Cuba's Alimport. The governor of Nebraska visited Cuba in November and the governor of Louisiana in March, each walking away with similar agreements and meeting with Fidel Castro. Baldacci, a Democrat, is in Cuba with a delegation of businessmen, farmers and state officials. (*Reuters*, 11/12/05)

December 13: A trade mission resulting in a commitment from Cuba to purchase \$20 million of products from Maine companies underscores the growing importance of foreign trade for the state's economy, Governor John Baldacci said. Baldacci signed a trade agreement with Cuban officials calling for the purchase of items such as potatoes, dairy cows and apples. The trip led to more sales commitments than three previous trade missions to France, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and Germany and Italy combined. (*AP*, 13/12/05)

December 19: In a letter to US energy company executives, Fidel Rivero Prieto, President of Cuba Petroleo, told his counterparts from the US energy sector that Cuba "would be very pleased to do business together", and invited them to meet with him and his Cuban colleagues at the US-Cuba Energy Summit scheduled for February 2-4, 2006, in Mexico City. Citing the need for "investments by additional foreign companies," Rivero wrote that the meeting in Mexico "will permit us to provide the information that is most useful to your company (...) and we will have the opportunity to learn about your products and services. In this way," Rivero wrote, "both of us will be prepared to discuss real business opportunities as soon as that is possible." This historic US-Cuba Energy Summit is being organized by Alamar Associates, which has organized five previous Cancun Business Summits that have brought more than 500 US executives together with their Cuban counterparts. (*PRNewswire*, 19/12/05)

THE WASP NET/ THE CUBAN FIVE

January 31: A documentary on the five Cuban political prisoners incarcerated in the United States, is being shown in various cities across the United States through February 27. Co-directed by Radio Havana Cuba journalist Bernie Dwyer, and Cuban television producer Roberto Ruíz, the documentary "Mission Against Terror" will be shown in 30 US cities according to the Cuban Antiterrorist web site. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 31/1/05)

February 6: The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, named Sunday as a day of solidarity with the Five Cuban prisoners in the United States. The top Cuban official made the comment during the launching of five new titles linked to the Five in the framework of the 14th International Book Fair, underway in Havana. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/2/05)

February 8: Foreign Affairs Professor at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Piero Gleijeses, said that the five Cuban political prisoners incarcerated in the United States "are the victims of Washington's hatred against the Cuban Revolution." The US scholar's views and considerations regarding the case of the Cuban Five are included in a 20-chapter book written by different international public figures under the coordination of Salim Lamrani. That book will be

launched during the 14th Havana International Book Fair taking place in the Cuban capital. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 8/2/05)

February 10: Washington's Festival Center hosted packed audiences over the weekend to the premier of the documentary "Mission against Terror." AIN News Agency notes that the film, produced and directed by Bernie Dwyer of Radio Habana Cuba and Cuban TV producer Roberto Ruiz, profiles the incarceration of the so-called "Cuban Five" in prisons in the United States. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/2/05)

March 7: The main US cities will stage demonstrations on March 19 demanding the release of the five Cubans incarcerated in US prisons. Participants at the Global Day of Action will carry Cuban flags and banners in support of the groups defending Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando and René, whom the FBI arrested in 1998. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 7/3/05)

March 10: The defense team of the five Cuban prisoners incarcerated in the US presented their appeal for a retrial outside Miami to three judges of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, Atlanta one year ago. The Appeals process usually takes three months but the judges explained last March 10th that due to the complexity of the case against the Five, this appeals process would take longer to give a response. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 10/3/05)

March 22: Cuban television's nightly round table discussed the case of the Cuban Five beginning with comments from the head of the British campaign to free them from US prisons. Father Geoffrey Bottoms visited two of the five men recently - Gerardo Hernández and René González - and described them as very firmly believing that their case, which is under appeal, will be won. Father Bottoms said that although the appeal had been a year in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, the men were in good mental and physical health. (*Radio Habana Cuba*, 22/3/05)

July 11: The United States' detention of five Cubans convicted of being foreign spies is arbitrary and in violation of international law, according to a UN panel ruling. The UN Commission on Human Rights Arbitrary Detentions Working Group has adopted a resolution of its investigation into the case of the five Cubans imprisoned in the US. Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez, Fernando González Llort, Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar and René González Sehwerert have been imprisoned in the US for almost 7 years. The UN Working Group, in Opinion No. 19/2005, noted three aspects of the detention and arrest of the five Cuban agents that made their detention arbitrary. Firstly, they were held in solitary confinement for 17 months, weakening their ability to mount an adequate defense, secondly most of the evidence against them was with-held, undermining an equal balance between the prosecution and the defense, and thirdly, the trial was held in Miami where it was impossible to select an impartial jury in a case linked with Cuba. (*Prensa Latina, Canadian Press*, 12/7/05)

August 2: Cuba praised the value of the verdict from the UN Group for Arbitrary Detentions on the arrest and sentences against five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. Attorneys Roberto Gonzalez and Roberto Davalos said the prestigious UN panel conclusion, issued on May 27, renders the arrest and sentences against the "Cuban Five" illegal because of the evident political interests involved and violation of US and international laws. Among the violations lie solitary confinement, the manipulation of the Act for the Protection of Classified

Information, and holding the trial in an adverse environment like Miami that led the prosecutors to declare them a threat for national security in 2001. (*Prensa Latina*, 3/8/05)

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

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

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

peers," he said. "If they are retried, they will again be found guilty." (*Sun Sentinel, Chicago Tribune, The Miami Herald, 10/8/05*)

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

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

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

August 12: Miami's top federal prosecutor says he will retry the five accused Cuban spies whose 2001 convictions were just overturned by a federal appeals court -- most probably next year in another city. But US Attorney R. Alexander Acosta is weighing another potential legal move: challenging the stunning decision by the 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta. Legal experts said the three-judge panel cited so much overwhelming evidence -- including a court-approved, pre-trial survey showing widespread community prejudice toward the five Cuban defendants -- that there is nothing factually for prosecutors to challenge. (*The Miami Herald, 12/8/05*)

August 14: Fidel Castro marked his 79th birthday with relatives of five Cuban agents whose convictions on spying charges were overturned, and he spoke to two of the men in US prisons, official media said. "The best they could do would be to set you free," the Cuban president told one of the five agents, Gerardo Hernandez, at the Lompoc prison in California, according to the official daily Juventud Rebelde. Hernandez was speaking to his wife by phone when the Havana gathering fell silent so Castro could address him, the newspaper said. Castro later spoke to another of the agents, Antonio Guerrero, in the same manner, the paper reported. Guerrero is imprisoned in Florence, Colorado. Castro said the ruling was "a victory for the

truth in the best tradition of the North American people," and had made his 79th birthday the most memorable, according to the report in *Juventud Rebelde*. "Stay firm. You are heroes among heroes," the paper quoted Castro telling Hernandez. He also promised to continue to mobilize Cubans and the international community in their defense. Cuba has organized defense committees for the five around the world and made their freedom a cause celebre at home. (*Reuters*, 14/8/05)

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

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

September 9: More than two hundred intellectuals from Spain have signed an open letter addressed to the US General Attorney demanding the immediate release of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States. Thousands of public figures including several Nobel laureates from around the world have already signed the document, reported *Prensa Latina* news agency. (*A/N*, 9/9/05)

September 12: Marisol Gari, an Orlando woman convicted of spying for the Cuban government, has been detained for possible deportation back to the island, her Miami attorney said. Louis Casuso told the press his client was detained two weeks ago and is now being held at a detention facility outside Miami-Dade County in the custody of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which carries out deportation orders. If deported, Gari, 46, would be the third person linked to the infamous Wasp Network expelled since the FBI busted the group in 1998. The Wasp Network, or "La Red Avispa", was an alleged Cuban spy group uncovered by US agents. Five Wasp ringleaders were tried and convicted in Miami, though their case was recently reversed on appeal. Casuso said the deportation of Gari would be a betrayal of US government promises of protection in exchange for cooperation. Federal officials familiar with the case said US officials were sufficiently pleased to try to persuade immigration officials not to deport her. (*The Miami Herald*, 12/9/05)

September 12: An Orlando woman convicted of spying for the Cuban government and recently detained for possible deportation to Cuba, was suddenly released by immigration

officials and allowed to return home, her Miami attorney said. Marisol Gari, 46, had been linked to the infamous Wasp Network uncovered in Miami-Dade by the FBI in 1998. The Herald published an article about Gari's detention. "I think that's why she was released, I can't think of any other reason," said her attorney, Louis Casuso. His client, he said, was driven back to her house in Orlando. "Her status now is that she's deportable, but she's home," Casuso said. A spokeswoman for US Immigration and Customs enforcement declined to comment on the case. (*The Miami Herald*, 13/9/05)

September 28: Federal prosecutors asked the full 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals to reconsider the case of five suspected Cuban spies whose convictions and sentences were tossed out last month by a three-judge panel of the court. US Attorney R. Alexander Acosta said in a statement that the three-judge panel's decision runs counter to previous U.S. Supreme Court decisions in similar cases, although he did not elaborate. "Consideration by the full court is necessary to secure and maintain uniformity of decisions in the 11th Circuit" with the nation's highest court, Acosta said. The petition asks for rehearing by all 12 active members of the Atlanta-based 11th Circuit, which considers federal appeals in cases from Florida, Alabama and Georgia. The case could possibly reach the Supreme Court. (*Sun Sentinel*, 28/9/05)

October 31: 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. The 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals threw out a ruling in August by a three-judge appellate panel that had overturned those convictions. 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. This time, a majority of the 12-member appellate court has agreed to rehear the so-called Cuban Five's appeal, which leaves the case in limbo for several more months. (*The Miami Herald*, 2/11/05)

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 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. (*AP*, 4/11/05)

US AND CUBAN STATEMENTS ON US MILITARY AGGRESSION TOWARD CUBA

February 1: Fidel Castro said the only way the United States could overthrow his communist government was by the nuclear destruction of Cuba. Castro, whose one-party state was recently labeled an "outpost of tyranny" by US President George W. Bush's administration, said Cuba would resist an American invasion like Vietnam. "I hope I'm wrong (...) but if they make the mistake of attacking and invading this country, I recommend Mr. Bush had better launch 50 nuclear weapons and exterminate us all," Castro said in a speech. "I assure you this country could be exterminated," he said. "Extermination by weapons of mass destruction is the only way," he said. "We are not afraid." "Nobody was frightened here when hundreds of nuclear arms were pointing at this country in 1962," he added, in reference to the missile crisis in which Washington and Moscow came to the brink of nuclear war over Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba. (*Reuters*, 1/2/05)

February 3: US Southern Command chief, General Bantz Craddock, said his country has no intention to invade Cuba. When asked in Tegucigalpa whether his country was planning to invade Havana, the general replied with a sparse "No." Fidel Castro recently said that the US would consider military operations against the island. (*AP*, 4/2/05)

February 18: US President George W. Bush announced that he is extending for another year restrictions on naval and air operations in the vicinity of Cuba. These measures were implemented following an incident on February 24, 1996 when two Cuban Air Force fighter jets shot down two small Cessna aircraft manned by anti-Castro exiles on international waters north of the island. (*EFE*, 18/2/05)

April 19: Cuban's resistance will be invincible if the United States ever decided to launch a military aggression against the island, stressed Fidel Castro when recalling memories of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Addressing a ceremony on the victory 44th anniversary, Castro warned that the US administration of President George W. Bush is portraying Cuba as a terrorist country to psychologically prepare the ground for a military attack. (*Prensa Latina*, 19/4/05)

December 23: Fidel Castro said that any US invasion to his country would fail and called US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "mad" after Washington announced plans for a "democratic transition" in the Caribbean island. Castro said before the National Assembly: "I am going to tell you what I think about this famous commission, for the democratic transition in Cuba: they are a group of shit-eaters who do not deserve the world's respect". "In this context, it does not matter if it was the mad woman who talks of transition - it is a circus, they are completely depraved, they should be pitied," added the 79-year-old Cuban leader. While US imperialism was in its decline, Castro said, his revolution is "uncontainable and unstoppable". "We are in transition: to socialism, to communism," Castro insisted. (*EFE*, *Pravda*, 23/12/05)