

FOCAL Chronicle on Cuba

February 2002

Domestic Affairs

February 1: Dengue fever has killed two people and stricken hundreds in Havana in recent months, Fidel Castro said, despite an emergency campaign to contain the worst outbreak of the disease in Cuba in two decades. "By November 28th, 1,601 cases were reported in Havana. After that the situation became worse," Castro said during a televised speech explaining what the government was doing to bring the epidemic under control. Castro announced the necessity to extend sanitary and hygienic measures to Guantánamo, close to the U.S. Naval Base, in order to eliminate the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, the carrier of dengue fever. (Reuters, Radio Habana Cuba, 1/2/02)

February 3: The political police forcefully broke up a prayer meeting by about 100 dissidents in Pedro Betancourt, Matanzas province. The event was conceived as a prayer chain by the Independent Movement Alternative Option. When the police came, the participants were praying for the triumph of love over hate, for the reconciliation of all Cubans, and for the liberation of all political prisoners. (UPECI, Cubanews, 5/2/02)

February 7: The Havana International Book Fair opened at the Cabaña Fortress which overlooks the Cuban capital. After the opening ceremony, Fidel Castro gave an interview to the national and foreign press attending the Fair. This year's honorary participant is France. Despite the large number of Cubans who attended the Havana International Book Fair (over 100,000 in three days), dissidents and banned authors were excluded from attending the event, criticized in Paris a declaration by a group of intellectuals who support freedom of expression in Cuba. (Granma, Notimex, 7,8/2/02)

February 9: Cuba hosted the Third International University Convention in Havana. The conference, whose central theme was the University in the New Millennium, was attended by more than 1000 delegates from 30 countries. In the closing session, Fidel Castro told the participants in the conference that universities could and should struggle to save humanity from what he described as an impending catastrophe. (Radio Habana Cuba, 5/2/02)

February 9: The Cuban Human Rights Foundation in Ciego de Ávila held its congress in a farm in the province of Camagüey, with the attendance of 115 members of several dissident organizations. (Instituto Cubano de Periodistas Independientes, 10/2/02)

February 11: For the fifth time, Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, President of Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, has been harassed by the Cuban police for opposing, due to ill health, to allow her house be fumigated. Home fumigations are conducted without prior notice as part of a national campaign against the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito. (Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, 12/2/02)

February 11: Fidel Castro attended the opening session of the Fourth International Meeting of Economists on Globalization and the Problems of Development. Together with more than 400 delegates from around the world, three Nobel prizewinners attended the economic forum - Robert Mundell from Canada, 1999 winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science; Joseph Stiglitz, a U.S. economist and the winner of last year's Nobel Prize; and Adolfo Perez Esquivel, an Argentinean activist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980. For the first time in the four years of the annual event, a representative of the International Monetary Fund has accepted the invitation to take part in the discussions. It was also announced that a representative of the World Bank is attending the economic forum. (Radio Habana Cuba, AP, 11/2/02)

February 11: Thousands of dead fish found in the Havana Almendares River, caused presumably by the dumping of some kind of industrial waste, has prompted local media to warn about the dangers of their consumption. Investigations are under way to determine the causes of this ecological accident. (Juventud Rebelde, 13/2/02)

February 13: Police forces charged into the home of the relatives of renowned Cuban photographer Alberto Korda (1928-2000)-- author of the widely known snapshot of Che Guevara-- with the intention of evicting them by force. However, the operation was called off without any explanation after several failed attempts to enter into Korda's son (Dante Díaz) apartment. In mid 2000 the Cuban government passed decree-law 211, which toughens measures to counter the purchase and sale of real estate and other unlawful acts which could lead to expropriation. In Havana around 12,000 potential confiscations have been filed. (El Nuevo Herald, 14/2/02)

February 15: Three literary works of exiled authors were presented in a Cuban Culture Collection in the XI International Book Fair of Havana. In spite of the fact that the number is negligible and that the books were not sold to the public, the news stood out in a society not used to seeing works by Cuban exiled authors. (Notimex, 15/2/02)

February 15: In its annual report on the State of the World's Children, the United Nations Children's Fund places Cuba among the top ten countries with the lowest infant mortality rate. (Radio Habana Cuba, 15/2/02)

February 16: Fidel Castro denounced the failure of neoliberal globalization during the closing session of the Fourth International Meeting on Globalization and Development Problems. The International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization "do nothing but answer to the dictates of the owners of the world," Castro said. For the first time, the annual conference included an IMF delegation. (AFP, 16/2/02)

February 16: Cubans increasingly are defying the law to catch pirated hit international TV shows and first-run films. Two channels of state television have been the sole free broadcast entertainment options for the past years for the ordinary Cuban. But each day more and more Cubans are seeking alternatives in video clubs -- most of them illegal -- and pirated US and other Spanish-language television signals. It costs about 600 dollars to illegally purchase a parabolic antenna, in a country where the median monthly salary is the equivalent of roughly 8.50 dollars (222 pesos). Many Cubans build their own out of patched-together materials in small wonders of electronic wizardry. State-run video clubs often boast lower prices and more sophisticated --if less popular -- fare. But typical earnings reported by black marketeers -- up to 8,000 pesos a month (308 dollars) -- suggest illegal rental clubs lead the market. (AFP, 16/2/02)

February 18: In a move that is unheard of in Cuba, opposition groups say they have collected enough signatures to try to force a national referendum asking Cubans whether they want democratic reforms. Under the Cuban constitution, citizens who collect 10,000 signatures can compel the government to hold a straw poll asking for legislative changes. That doesn't mean the changes would be adopted; they would have to be considered by the National Assembly. Still, no one until now has tried to collect signatures, said Varela Project coordinator Osvaldo Payá. It's been a daunting task because, he said, more than 300 signature collectors have been beaten, harassed, kidnapped, threatened or jailed over the past year. The Varela Project proposes laws that would guarantee greater basic liberties, free enterprise and electoral reforms. Among the specifics, supporters are asking for expanded freedom of expression; the right to form private enterprises; amnesty for political prisoners; access to the media; and the right to form independent social, political, economic and other groups. (The Dallas Morning News, 18/2/02)

February 19: The 2002 International Informatics Conference opened in Havana, which attracted nearly 600 experts from some 40 countries. At the same time, the 8th International Informatics

and Communications Expo also opened, with more than 100 firms from 15 countries presenting new services and technologies of software and telecommunications. (RadioHabana Cuba, 19/2/02)

February 23: In the central Cuban municipality of La Sierpa, thousands rallied to protest what they described as "dirty maneuvers" on the part of Panama's judicial authorities regarding the case of Cuban-American Luis Posada Carriles. Posada Carriles is well known for his anti-Cuba career, which has included organizing numerous bomb attacks and other aggressive acts, like the blowing up in mid-air of a Cubana airplane in 1976 killing all 73 people onboard, and several bomb attacks against hotels and other tourist facilities in Cuba. (Radio Habana Cuba, 23/2/02)

February 23: Cuban official media dedicated a small section to cover the death of Jonas Savimbi, rebel leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). During Cuban military operations in Angola (1975-1991), 2 289 Cubans died and several thousands of civilian and soldiers were wounded or disabled, according to official figures. (AFP, 24/2/02)

February 24: In different places of the island vigils and masses were held and flowers were cast to sea in memory of the four pilots that died in international waters north of Cuba, in 1996. The Cuban State Security put many repressive measures in place since the days leading to February 24. That date, but six years before, Cuban Armed Forces jets downed two Cessna planes killing four pilots of Brothers to the Rescue. (Instituto Cubano de Economistas Independientes, 25/2/02)

February 25: Fidel Castro attended a round table on Cuban TV focused on the nation's campaign to eradicate dengue fever. Castro, who has been closely following its progress, said that the Cuban Government has invested more than 12.5 million US dollars to eradicate the disease. During the round table, Castro referred as fools and naïve to those who hope for political and economic changes on the island. He added: "They are wasting their time when they foolishly hope for changes or backtracking in Cuba- a betrayal to those who have given their lives for this Revolution since 1868" (start of the independence war against Spain). (Granma International, Notimex, 26/2/02)

February 26: The leader of the Corriente Socialista Democrática Cubana, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, has proposed the creation of a group formed by different countries that would conduct a permanent debate on human rights between the government and society. The group could be formed by countries that while maintaining normal diplomatic relations with the island have also shown a willingness to cooperate in the advancement of human rights, explained the opposition leader. This group of friendly countries could also urge Cuban authorities to take on international legislation passed at the United Nations on the respect to individual liberties. (Notimex, 26/2/02)

February 27: Eggs, a mainstay of the Cuban diet and sometimes primary source of protein, have been getting increasingly scarce in Cuba, to the point where lately they have only been available to accredited foreign diplomats. The eggs monthly ration was of 6 eggs per person, at least in the city of Havana, but they were usually available in the black market at 2 Cuban pesos each, or in the dollar stores at 10 cents each. Now, when found, black market eggs cost 3 pesos each and in the dollar stores they are only sold to diplomats. (Cubanet, 27/2/02)

February 27: A busload of Cuban citizens crashed through a gate at the Mexican embassy with the apparent intention of seeking asylum. About dozen Cubans made it into the compound and were seen on the roof of the embassy, crying out anti-government slogans and threatening to jump if police entered the embassy grounds. The crash through the perimeter gate culminated a day of tension outside the embassy in the upmarket Miramar district after rumors swept the capital that Mexico was offering to take in Cubans wanting to leave the communist-run island. According to a news agency cameraman and producer at the scene, they were attacked by police with batons to prevent them from videotaping the events. Hundreds of police with dogs and plain-

clothes government agents flooded the area, blocking off access to journalists and passersby. Hundreds of people, including whole families, had started to gather around the embassy, apparently seeking asylum, too. International news organizations have been forbidden from broadcasting images of what happened. Cuban authorities said the transmission from the government television station has been suspended for "obvious reasons". Fidel Castro visited the scene to try to restore calm. (CNN, AP, 28/2/02)

February 28: After a group of anti-Castro Cuban asylum-seekers smashed a stolen bus into the Mexican Embassy in Havana, Elizardo Sánchez, coordinator of the dissident Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said dozens of arrests were made and he denounced "many acts of police brutality." "If they are handed over to Cuban authorities, they could face severe sentences," Sánchez said, urging Mexico to protect the asylum-seekers, and the Cuban government to initiate a negotiated solution to the crisis. (Reuters, AFP, 28/2/02)

Economy

February 1: The World Trade Organization (WTO) has ruled in favour of the European Union in its dispute with the United States over the Havana Club trademark. The U.S. company Bacardi had been illegally using the trademark, arguing that it was confiscated after the 1959 victory of the Cuban Revolution. Havana Club -- jointly owned by Havana Rum and Liquors and the French company Pernod Ricard -- contends that the United States is violating the basic principles of the World Trade Organization. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/2/02)

February 3: Cuba reported that Mexico has lost its place as Cuba's main Latin American economic partner to Venezuela, and Brazil is threatening to take over second place, partly due to a decline in Cuba-Mexico trade and investment since 1995. Bilateral trade with Mexico was more than \$400 million in 1995, and has gradually fallen since then. (Reuters, 3/2/02)

February 4: Thailand's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prancha Guna-Kasem, during official talks held in Havana, emphasized to his Cuban counterpart, Jose Armando Guerra Menchero, his country's willingness to widen the increasing bilateral relations between both nations. Both parties agreed to consolidate their bilateral ties through an economic and technical cooperation agreement signed by the Foreign Affairs' Deputy Ministers of the two countries. The agreement will be the basis of the Cuba-Thailand Joint Commission to broaden bilateral cooperation between these two countries. (Radio Habana Cuba, 5/2/02)

February 7: Cuban Minister of Finance and Prices, Manuel Millares, informed that the state collected almost \$577 million, by means of tax returns in 2001, which is 4.4 per cent higher than what authorities had forecasted. However, returns from private workers declined 8.1 per cent due to their increasingly reduced number as a consequence of high taxes, fines and state controls. (Notimex, 7/2/02)

February 7: Cuba has made foreign investment in oil prospecting more appealing in its economic zone of the Gulf of Mexico by putting the state as a guarantor of the activity. A Cuban specialist from the Ministry of Basic Industry said that this new type of joint production foresees a shorter-term return of investment (six or seven years). It also leaves the door open for the withdrawal of investors during the exploration phase, and the taxation system is "simple and clear" since there is only a tax for central administration, he added. (AFP, 7/2/02)

February 8: Cuba and Mexico are considering setting up a line of credit to bolster bilateral trade, said the Director of the National Bank of Foreign Trade (Bancomext) of Mexico, José Luis Romero Hicks. After a 24-hour visit to Havana, the Mexican official said that the line of credit would be intended to grant financing to Mexican entrepreneurs for the export to Cuba of footwear, food, coffee and hydrocarbons. (Notimex, 8/2/02)

February 11: The planned Cuban export of 3.3 million tons of sugar for 2002 would be worth roughly \$580 million, but both prices and production may drop. After a short improvement in late December to early January, sugar prices plummeted in the second half of the month to set a 22-month spot record low of 6.41 ¢/lb. (Cubanews, Feb/02)

February 13: China's Ambassador to Havana, Wang Zhiguan, said the island continues to be one of Beijing's most important Latin American trading partners. Following an exchange with area businesspeople in Cienfuegos province, Ambassador Zhiguan said that Cuba is the Caribbean country that receives the most credit from China. He pointed out that several joint projects were implemented last year with Havana in the field of communications. The Chinese official also mentioned Beijing's investments in Cuba's agricultural sector, particularly in the cultivation of rice, as well as in the area of tourism. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/2/02)

February 14: A German business delegation with interests in the Cuban biotechnological industry met with Fidel Castro. The German delegation was headed by Dieter Posch, minister of Economy of the Hessen state. In the meeting, Castro and Posch discussed economic cooperation in this field between the two countries. During his visit, Posch has held meetings with Cuban officials and participated in the opening ceremony of a seminar on biotechnology. (World Data Service, Xinhua, 12, 14/2/02)

February 14: The corporation Habanos S.A. is sponsoring the IV International Habano Festival, the company announced. Habanos S.A. co-president Jaime Garcia Andrade, from Spain, at a press conference said that the company's cigars account for 70 percent of the international market, with the exception of the United States, and that sales increased 30 percent last year. In 1999, Habanos S.A. sold 50 percent of its shares to the French-Spanish tobacco consortium Altadis, which was created by the merger of Spain's Tabacalera and France's Seita. The firm's earnings in 2001 were \$260 million. Cuban cigars are not sold in the United States because of the embargo imposed by Washington on Havana for the past 40 years. According to Andrade, Europe accounts for 70 percent of the total Habanos exports and is the primary market for Cuban cigars, which are renowned for their superior quality. (EFE, 14/2/02)

February 15: The Cuban pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry unexpectedly announced that it plans to produce 90 per cent of the country's drug consumption in order to address the shortage of medicines that has affected the internal market for years. Although the Cuban pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry has launched unique products to the international market such as vaccines against different types meningitis, Cuban drug stores have not even been able to offer drugs for the relief of minor pains. (World Data Service, 15/2/02)

February 18: In a meeting between Cuban ambassador to Iran José Amiro Rodríguez and Minister of Agriculture Jihad Mahmoud Hojjati avenues of economic and agricultural cooperation were explored. Hojjati stressed identifying economic and agricultural potentials between Tehran and Havana, adding that the implementation of joint agreement signed should be expedited. (IRNA, 18/2/02)

February 19: The Cuban economy will enter a new phase marked by increased business autonomy, more economic actors and decentralization of decision-making, says a report issued by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Chile. The document states that this new phase will be possible thanks to the "significant improvement in the area of structural reforms" conducted by Cuba in the last two years. (Notimex, 19/2/02)

February 20: The Cuban Fisheries Ministry reported that total catch dropped by about 10% to 31 000 tons. The declines have affected key species, such as lobster, shrimp and tuna. A number of factors are to blame, including delays in introducing modern technology, poor use of the equipment that has been purchased, serious problems in aquaculture and quality control

problems. But by far, the most important reason for most of the problems has been large-scale mismanagement and extensive corruption. The result has been a lack of financial control, uncontrolled expenditures, rising debt levels and considerable petty theft. (AFP, Cubanews, 20/2/02)

February 21: Cuban Minister of Basic Industry, Marcos Portal, urged executives and engineers of the nickel & cobalt industry to not interrupt production of mines and plants as a result of plummeting prices in international markets. (Notimex, 22/2/02)

February 25: Canada is the main source of tourists to Cuba, particularly to the resorts in Cayo Coco and Cayo Guillermo, located to the north of the island. "Seventy per cent of all thirteen weekly flights to these locations come from Canada", said an executive of the Cuban Ministry of Tourism. The number of Canadian tourists will further increase with a new 151-passenger flight direct to Cayo Coco airport. (World Data Service, 25/2/02)

February 25: World renowned Cuban tobacco grower Alejandro Robaina opened the Fourth Habano Cigar Festival in the city of Havana. This year's international cigar festival celebrates the fifth anniversary of the cigar brand created in his honor, the Vegas Robaina. About 600 cigar enthusiasts from 47 different countries will try out new brands, visit tobacco plantations, and go to elegant receptions and a \$400-a-head dinner traditionally attended by Fidel Castro during the five-day event. (AP, 26/2/02)

February 25: The Eighth International Agricultural Fair opened in Havana at the Rancho Boyeros exhibition grounds where representatives from 19 different countries were in attendance. Major European corporations such as Bayer, Mercedes-Benz, Big Bitchman and Pulsfog were also present. The Fair is essentially for professionals. (Radio Habana Cuba, 26/2/02)

February 26: Senior Sugar Ministry officials are signaling privately and hinting publicly that the 2001-02 sugar crop will be less than the 4 million tonnes planned. Recent comments by Sugar Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro, broadcast by the official media, appeared aimed at lowering the nation's expectations. "This is the most difficult harvest in recent years, not only because there is not a lot of cane -- a harvest less than we had hoped for, but because we are carrying it out under very difficult conditions in terms of fuel, lubricants, power and spare parts," Rosales said. (Reuters, 26/2/02)

Exile Community

February 4: Cuban exiles in the United States welcomed Mexican President Vicente Fox's meeting with a group of dissidents in Havana. "We cannot but applaud his courage and commitment with democracy", said the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba. (Notimex, 4/2/02)

February 11: The Cuban American National Foundation criticized USA Today founder Al Neuharth for traveling to Havana to present an award to shipwreck survivor Elián González. (CNSNews, 11/2/02)

February 11: Frank Calzón, executive director of the Center For A Free Cuba was skeptical about a possible Carter visit to the island. "I certainly welcome the visit of President Jimmy Carter to Cuba and I hope that either before his arrival or during his arrival, all Cuban political prisoners will be released and allowed to stay in Cuba or travel abroad if they wish to do so," Calzón said in an interview. Calzón added, "Unless the prisoners are released, I think the visit of former President Carter, who is the epitome of human rights, will be a charade." (CNSNews, 11/2/02)

February 15: Cuban soccer players Alberto Delgado and Rey Angel Martínez told the press they realized that they had the possibility of reaching "the dream of every young Cuban, which is to be free." Delgado and Martínez, forwards on the team Cuba sent to the CONCACAF Gold Cup in Los Angeles managed to defect last month. Delgado, who left behind his wife, mother and other relatives in Cuba, said Cuban athletes have almost everything they need in Cuba - but only while with the team. "The athletes have diets in which we received enough food, but what happens when you go home?" said Delgado. "We had to invent ways to get food, even a piece of meat for my family," Delgado said. "If we can't play soccer, we're ready to work or to study, knowing that living in this country will give us a better future than in Cuba," Martínez added. (AP, 15/2/02)

February 19: A group of Mexican parliamentarians of the National Action Party (PAN) met with representatives of the Miami-based Cuban-American National Foundation and the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba. Representatives of these organizations, which oppose the Fidel Castro regime, handed over a document on the human rights situation on the island. (El Universal, 19/2/02)

February 25: A plan to recover fallen comrades' remains at the Bay of Pigs has caused a bitter rift among fellow veterans and relatives who want nothing to do with Castro. Despite securing the unlikely cooperation of Fidel Castro, the group's effort is being blocked by fellow veterans and relatives of those who died. "Our mission is to reunite these relatives with the remains of their loved ones and to give them closure," said Mario Cabello, one of the founders of the Bay of Pigs Missing in Action Recovery Committee. Cabello's proposal has raised a storm of protest from hard-line anti-Castro leaders of the Bay of Pigs Veterans Association, which represents surviving members of the 2506 Brigade, Washington's secret army of Cuban exiles. "These men are traitors to the Cuban cause," said association president Juan Perez Franco. "They have been expelled from our organization." (St. Petersburg Times, 25/2/02)

February 26: Cuban writer Zoe Valdés said that she was confident a suit filed in a Brussels court last October against Cuban President Fidel Castro for crimes against humanity would finally be heard. The suit, filed with Judge Patrick Collignon, was brought by survivors of the 1996 attack by Cuban military aircraft against small planes flown by the exile group Brothers to the Rescue. The author said she was confident "that the people who have this case in their hands want to get to the truth and are thinking of the victims, not just the victims in the four planes, but the victims of 43 years of Castro's rule." (EFE, 26/2/02)

February 26: Dennis Hays, executive director of the Cuban-American National Foundation, said it appears Castro's mood towards the United States is changing again. "The charm offensive is sputtering to an end, that it's simply that Castro can't help himself. He has to blame somebody for the poverty and misery of his people and the somebody is always the United States," said Hays in an interview with the press. (CNSNews, 26/2/02)

February 28: The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) blames Fidel Castro for the incident in the Mexican Embassy in Havana. Joe García, executive director of the CANF, said he believed that while aspects of the incident occurred spontaneously, it was fueled by Castro's government. García said Castro had absolute power. "He has the capacity to provoke an incident and then fix it." Garcia said that although Havana was now blaming Radio Marti, it wanted to worry Castañeda. "What you've got going on here is classic Castro trying to set up a scenario where he can negotiate (...) It's meant to send chills down Castañeda's back." Cuba has been irritated with Castañeda in the past over the Mexican official's calls for reform in Cuba. (Reuters, 28/2/02)

February 28: Radio Marti officials denied charges by the Cuban government that the station deliberately broadcasted remarks by Mexican Foreign Secretary, Jorge Castañeda, to incite the occupation of the Mexican Embassy in Cuba. Wilfredo Granados, chief of reporters and correspondents at the station, said its report on Tuesday's visit to Miami by Mexican Foreign

Secretary Jorge Castaneda did not include any remarks on the Mexican Embassy in Cuba. [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and US-Cuba Relations.] (The Sun Sentinel, 28/2/02)

Foreign Affairs

February 1: Benin's Foreign Minister, Antoine Kolawwole, expressed satisfaction with his visit to the island after meeting with Cuban Government Minister, Ricardo Cabrisas. In comments to the press, Kolawwole praised the island's decision to increase bilateral links between both nations in the areas of trade and economic exchange at regional and international level. (Radio Habana Cuba, 2/1/02)

February 1: The United Kingdom and Cuba have signed an agreement to work together on four new development projects in the framework of the British Cooperation Fund-Small Grants Scheme, which was established in Cuba in 1995. Among the projects is a physical therapy center to be constructed in a senior center located in the Belen Convent, in the capital's Old Havana colonial section. (Radio Habana Cuba, 1/2/02)

February 3: President Vicente Fox of Mexico met with Fidel Castro to try to restore a century-old diplomatic relationship that was damaged in recent years as Mexico began its transition to a multiparty democracy. During a tour of Old Havana, Fox told news correspondents that Cuba and Mexico reached further agreements in the areas of tourism, trade and investment. Among other places of interest, the Mexican president visited the Cuban-Canadian energy plant Energas, with state-of-the-art technology, and Cuba's International Neurological Restoration Center. The Mexican delegation expressed confidence in an increase in the current 350 million dollars in annual trade between the two nations, down from 400 million in 1995. Some 500 Mexican firms trade with and invest in the island, 50 of which have offices or representations in Havana. Within the political context of the visit, Fox said that Mexico has no intention of sponsoring or co-sponsoring any resolution on Cuba in the United Nations Human Rights Commission, slated to gather next April in Geneva. President Fox delivered a list of Cuban political prisoners to Fidel Castro, hoping, he said, that their cases would be reviewed prior to the sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. In an interview with the national press, Fox ruled out that Mexico would play an intermediary role between Cuba and the United States. (NYT, Notimex, Radio Habana Cuba, 3, 4, 5/2/02)

February 4: Prior to his return to Mexico, President Vicente Fox met with a group of Cuban dissidents in the Mexican embassy in Havana. Dissidents Elizardo Sánchez Santacruz, Oswaldo Payá, Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, Raúl Rivero, Héctor Palacios Ruiz, Osvaldo Alfonso and Manuel Costa, as well as Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda were present at the meeting. (Notimex, 3/2/02)

February 4: Argentine President Eduardo Duhalde denied allegations that the United States pressured his government to vote against Cuba in the UN Human Rights Commission in exchange for financial aid to help his country surmount the present crisis. (Clarín, 5/2/02)

February 5: France's participation in the Havana XI International Book Fair has the intention to "contribute" to the social debate on freedom of expression in Cuba, said diplomatic sources of that nation. The spokesman of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Francois Rivasseau, said "more than promoting French literary publications, the presence of French authors and intellectuals should contribute to the debate of ideas in the very heart of Cuban society, particularly to the debate on freedom of expression and freedom of creation". [For more on this, see section Domestic Affairs.] (Notimex, 5/2/02)

February 5: A majority of the Dutch lower house proposed the Minister of Agriculture, Laurens-Jan Brinkhorst, to cancel a trade mission scheduled to visit Cuba. The proposal is a reaction to Cuban authorities refusal to grant a visa to the Chair of the Dutch Christian Trade Union Federation (CNV), Doekle Terpstra, who would travel to the island as part of a mission headed by the Minister of Agriculture. Cuba's decision is driven by existing contacts between the Dutch leader and a banned union in Cuba. (Radio Nederland, 5/2/02)

February 5: Fidel Castro has congratulated North Korea's supremo Kim Jong-Il on his 60th birthday and called for stronger ties between the communist nations. In the birthday message, Castro wished Kim "great success and good health and happiness." (AFP, 7/2/02)

February 6: The international organization Reporters without Borders (RSF) asked the special envoy of the French government to the Havana International Book Fair to request Cuban authorities the immediate and unconditional release of journalist Bernardo Arévalo Padrón. "It is inconceivable that France, which proclaims to be the homeland of human rights, accepts to be the guest of honour in such a cultural event, disregarding the situation of the freedom of expression and of the press in Cuba", said Robert Ménard, secretary general of RSF. (AFP, 7/2/02)

February 6: Chile asked Cuba and Switzerland for information on the former Chilean rebels Mauricio Hernández Norambuena, detained for kidnapping in Brazil; and Patricio Ortiz, a refugee in Switzerland. The Director of Foreign Policy of the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mario Artaza, requested the Cuban ambassador in Santiago, Alfonso Fraga, information on the alleged visits of Hernández Norambuena to the island in the last few years. Hernández Norambuena was detained in Brazil accused of leading a group that kidnapped the Brazilian publicist Washington Olivetto. (Notimex, 6/2/02)

February 6: As another 70 Venezuelans flew into Cuba to be treated for various ailments, as part of the two nations' cooperation accords signed in November of 2000, the assistant director of the program in Caracas announced that the agreement was running "full steam ahead." (Radio Habana Cuba, 7/2/02)

February 7: During comments to reporters following the inauguration of Havana's Book Fair, Fidel Castro affirmed that he had no problem with the brief meeting that Mexican President Vicente Fox held with Cuban dissidents this week and said he was satisfied with Fox's first visit to Cuba as head of state. (AP, 7/2/02)

February 7: Fidel Castro came out in defense of his Venezuelan counterpart, calling Hugo Chavez "one of the greatest defenders of democracy in Latin America." During comments to reporters following the inauguration of Havana's Book Fair, Castro referred to comments made by a Venezuelan army colonel who claimed that Chavez was destroying 44 years of democracy. (Radio Habana Cuba, 7/2/02)

February 8: A visiting delegation from the French Senate's France-Caribbean Friendship Group met with Cuban Parliament's President Ricardo Alarcón. The French legislators were in Cuba as invited guests to the Havana International Book Fair. (Radio Habana Cuba, 9/2/02)

February 13: Chairman of the Russian Supreme Court Vyacheslav Lebedev, who is paying a working visit to Cuba, said that the trip of the Russian Supreme Court's delegation has not only given the sides a chance to exchange views on professional problems, but has contributed to the consolidation of their bilateral relations in general. "We have agreed with our Cuban colleagues to exchange experience on different cases, to exchange information on law enforcement problems," he noted. An agreement on cooperation between the Supreme Courts of the two countries was signed in the course of the visit. (Itar Tass, 13/2/02)

February 13: A general agreement signed recently by University of New Brunswick Fredericton Campus (UNBF) and Universidad de Cienfuegos in Cuba will create exchange opportunities for students and professors alike. In addition to offering university credits towards a degree, an international exchange could provide an economical opportunity for students to live and learn in a foreign country. (University Wire, 13/2/02)

February 14: Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Pavel Vosalik and Presidential Office's Petr Burianek are to go to Latin America to win support from countries of the region for a draft UN resolution against violations of human rights in Cuba. The annual resolution against Cuba has been drafted, or co-drafted, by the Czech Republic for the last few years. (CTK, 14/2/02)

February 15: The Cuban embassy in Mexico denied press allegations about a meeting between Fidel Castro and the Mexican President Vicente Fox. The embassy stated there had been exchanges between both countries to set the date for the next Binational Meeting, which is presided over by the ministers of foreign affairs. (Notimex, 15/2/02)

February 16: Nicaraguan President Enrique Bolaños promised to yield its seat on the Geneva Human Rights Commission to Cuban nationals residing in Miami as Nicaragua has done for the past five years. "Cubans within and without (Cuba) should have a voice," said Bolaños. (AFP, 16/2/02)

February 16: The Cuban government refuted its alleged links with Chilean rebel Mauricio Hernández Norambuena who was arrested in Brazil for kidnapping publicist Washington Olivetto, said the Chilean Minister of Interior, José Miguel Insulza. In a letter to the President of Chile, Fidel Castro denied that the convict who escaped a high security prison had been in Cuba. (AFP, Terra, 16,19/2/02)

February 18: President Ricardo Lagos complained that Cuba has not been forthcoming with information on four wanted Chilean terrorism suspects believed to have escaped to the island. Chile, however, will not retaliate by voting for a resolution to condemn Cuba's human rights record when the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations meets in April, Lagos said. (AP, 18/2/02)

February 21: The Dominican Republic and Cuba signed an agreement stipulating that Dominican and Cuban prisoners sentenced in either country can complete their prison terms in their homelands. (EFE, 22/2/02)

February 21: Cuba attended a meeting of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), which got underway in the Uruguayan capital. Cuba became a full member of the Latin American Integration Association in August 1999 -- joining Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and Uruguay. (Radio Habana Cuba, 21/2/02)

February 22: Chilean Senators Gabriel Valdés and Ricardo Nuñez returned home from a visit to Cuba to examine allegations that Havana had helped four guerrillas who fled a Santiago prison. Valdés and Nuñez met with Fidel Castro for more than six hours while in Havana. Upon returning from the trip, Nuñez declared Cuba "can play a very important role in eradicating violence and terrorism in Latin America." Valdés concluded that Cuban officials had nothing to do with the four leftist guerrillas from the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front. (AFP, 22/2/02)

February 22: Cuba has promised to increase its technical assistance to Uganda especially in the fields of health and education. The visiting Cuban foreign minister, Felipe Perez Roque, made the pledge in a meeting with the Speaker of Parliament, Edward Ssekandi. Perez Roque is visiting several countries prior to the UN Human Rights Commission meeting, to be held in Geneva in April. (The New Vision, 22/2/02)

February 22: Cuba's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Felipe Pérez Roque, arrived in Kinshasa, Congo, as part of an international tour to offset an unfavourable vote against Cuba during the meeting of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, to be held in April. (AFP, 22/2/02)

February 24: Iranian Minister of Science, Research and Technology Motafa Mo'in in a meeting with his Cuban counterpart Rosa Elena Simeon, signed a memorandum of understanding on expansion of scientific and research cooperation between the two countries. (BBCNews, 24/2/02)

February 25: French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine called on Cuba to make more efforts to improve respect for human rights on the island during a meeting with his Cuban counterpart, Felipe Perez Roque, officials said. Human rights, in the framework of the upcoming United Nations Commission on Human Rights meeting in Geneva, was the first issue the ministers discussed during the one-hour meeting. Perez Roque outlined the steps Cuba has taken to improve the rights situation on the island, while Vedrine urged him to do "much more," officials noted. (EFE, 26/2/02)

February 28: In a declaration to the press Mexican Foreign Secretary, Jorge Castañeda, referred to the group of Cubans who occupied the Mexican Embassy in Havana. He said it was a "small provocation" by radical Cuban groups based in Miami. "There are around 15 or 20 persons inside the embassy who are not exiles, nor have sought for asylum, nor have showed any political motivation for entering the embassy". And added: "In Miami there are certain radical elements (Cubans) who didn't like the visit that President Fox made to Cuba; they didn't agree with an improvement in our relations, what I called "normalization" of our relations, and those individuals distorted my declarations to launch a small provocation", he explained. Mexican President Vicente Fox thanked Fidel Castro for his personal participation in solving the incident at the Mexican Embassy in Havana. [For more on this, see also the sections Domestic Affairs and US-Cuba Relations.] (Reuters, AFP, EFE, BBC, 28/2/02)

Security

February 12: Equipment is being dismantled at the former Russian radar centre in Lourdes, Cuba, and there are almost no Russian servicemen left there, Russian Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov announced at a news conference. He denied information that the decision to close the Lourdes base was made by the Russian General Staff. (BBC News, 12/2/02)

February 14: A 20-minute anti-terrorism joint US Marine, Army, Navy and Coast Guard exercise took place in Guantanamo bay off the seaside detention center that holds prisoners captured in Afghanistan. It was the first exercise of its kind since prisoners first started arriving in southeastern Cuba on Jan. 11, 2002. (AP, 14/2/02)

Terrorism

February 6: In a statement to the Intelligence Committee of the US Senate, Carl Ford, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the US State Department, said that "Cuba harbours 20 members of the Basque terrorist organization ETA, who from the island assist the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Ford also said that an Irish citizen residing in Havana, arrested in Colombia last year for training the FARC, is now the representative of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on the island. (Europa Press, 7/2/02)

February 8: The Cuban authorities rejected the USA's arguments for including the island on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism and recalled that if it has ETA members on its territory, it is at the request of the Spanish government, according to the spokesman for the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, Luis Fernández. At least a dozen ETA members have been living in Cuba

since they were deported in the mid-1980s. However, the Spanish Interior Ministry believes more have subsequently moved to Cuba clandestinely. "The ETA members in Cuba are under conditions of strict respect for Cuban law and they are not allowed to carry out any activities against Spain", Fernández said. Regarding the presence of members of the FARC Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the ELN National Liberation Army, he said that "Cuba is taking part in the Colombian peace talks at the request of the president of Colombia, Andrés Pastrana." (ABC, 9/2/02)

February 13: U.S. officials said they envision the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as a site for the tribunals and as a terrorist penal colony for many years to come. The base hosts 288 captured al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban fighters. (The Washington Post, 13/2/02)

February 19: Saying there was insufficient evidence to support a case, Panama's prosecutor's office announced that Luis Posada Carriles and three Miami Cubans arrested in November 2000 would not face charges of attempted homicide. But the four defendants still may be tried for falsification of documents, illegal association to commit a crime and possession of explosives. According to sources, prosecutor Dimas Guevara told the presiding court that "no grounds exist for the [charge] of attempted felonious homicide" in the case of the four defendants. Posada, 73, Gaspar Jiménez, 65, Guillermo Novo, 61, and Pedro Remón, 56, were arrested Nov. 17, 2000, during the 10th Ibero-American Summit at Panama City. When Castro arrived, he notified the Panamanian authorities of an alleged assassination plot. (The Miami Herald, 20/2/02)

February 19: A disgruntled former Venezuelan consul alleged that a Venezuelan-based international terrorist network with ties to Cuba, Colombia and the Middle East is working against the United States. Nelson Castellano Hernandez, a former consul to Paris, made the claims at a news conference in Miami that had been organized by a Cuban exile group. (EFE, 19/2/02)

February 25: Colombia's government peace commissioner, Camilo Gomez, met with representatives of the Rebel National Liberation Army (ELN), in Cuba in preparation for the peace talks between the government and the rebel group, the Colombian government said. Gomez' trip to Havana was aimed at taking substantial steps to encourage the peace negotiations between the government of President Andres Pastrana and the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia. (Xinhua, 26/2/02)

February 26: The Board of Directors of the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsman (FIO) asked the government of Cuba to show consideration for the lives of Salvadorans Otto Rodríguez Llerena and Raúl Ernesto Cruz León, sentenced to death in 1999 for terrorism. Other Salvadoran organizations have made the same plea to Fidel Castro's government. (EFE, 26/2/02)

US-Cuba Relations

February 1: Eighth District U.S. Representative Jo Ann Emerson said the Cubans have made some additional purchases of agricultural products in addition to rice purchased in recent months. During the January break in Congress, Emerson made her second trip in less than a year to Cuba in an effort to encourage the island nation to buy more U.S. agricultural commodities. (Daily Statesman, 2/2/02)

February 1: Cuba said it will not import any more U.S. agricultural products until Washington's embargo against the island is eased further, but modest "gestures" like easing credit restrictions might stimulate more trade. Trade Minister Raul de la Nuez said December's purchase of more than \$30 million of U.S. meat and grains demonstrated that commerce between the two nations benefits U.S. agricultural producers as much as Cuba. Cuban Minister De la Nuez met with U.S. producers at a trade conference in Cancún, Mexico, aimed at building closer ties between US and the island. (Reuters, 1/2/02)

February 1: The U.S. Coast Guard returned 27 Cuban migrants to the island. The Coast Guard intercepted the migrants after learning that a 29-foot (8.7-meter) boat was disabled 16 miles (25 kilometers) southwest of Key West. Following interviews, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service determined the undocumented migrants should be repatriated. Cubans who reach American soil generally are allowed to stay while those intercepted at sea are repatriated. The Coast Guard picked up more than 1,900 Cuban migrants last year. (The Miami Herald, 1/2/02)

February 2: The push by some Americans to overturn the 40-year-old U.S. trade embargo against Cuba is an "unstoppable snowball" that will ultimately end the sanctions, Cuba's foreign minister said. Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque characterized the trade sanctions as a "dinosaur" policy. (AP, 2/2/02)

February 2: Less than 24 hours after the U.S. Coast Guard called off an extensive search for a boatload of Cubans reported missing by their families, the group of six adults and one 2-year-old child came ashore in the Florida Keys. The group told US officials they came ashore around 2:30 a.m. at mile marker 88 in Islamorada, arriving on an 18-foot wooden boat, according to U.S. Border Patrol spokesman Joe Mellia. No vessel was found, and the migrants -- who told officials they paid smugglers \$4,700 to take them to the Keys -- appeared to be in good health. (The Miami Herald, 2/2/02)

February 6: United States President George W. Bush will hold in place Washington's policy toward the island for the last forty years, indicated Secretary of State, Colin Powell, at the Committee on Foreign Relations of the House of Representatives of the US Congress. Powell also said that Bush told him about the impossibility of modifying US policy on Cuba as long as Cuban President Fidel Castro is in power. (Notimex, 6/2/02)

February 6: Three Miami residents pleaded not guilty to charges laid against them in a US federal court. Miguel Armas Plasencia, Pedro Arrieta and William González are accused for smuggling people from Cuba for money. (Europa Press, 7/2/02)

February 7: Characterizing Cuba's current friendliness toward Americans as a "charm offensive" aimed at changing U.S. policy, the top American diplomat in Havana said that the communist island must also embrace democracy and human rights if it expects an end to restrictions on trade and travel. "What happens if you give a lot of money to the Cuban government and it doesn't change?" asked Vicki Huddleston, chief of the U.S. Interests Section. "Then you find out you are just supporting Fidelismo," she said, using a term that signifies support for Fidel Castro. (The Washington Times, 9/2/02)

February 7: In an interview with the press, Fidel Castro referred to statements by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, and offers from American pharmaceutical companies to sell Cuba medicine and medical supplies to restock the nation's reserves after Hurricane Michelle. (The Washington Post, World Data Service, 8, 9/2/02)

February 7: Adolfo A. Franco, who was born in Cárdenas, Cuba, was sworn on January 31, 2002 as the Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean for the U.S. Agency for International Development, a USAID report said. As the head of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mr. Franco serves as principal advisor to the USAID Administrator on all matters related to the Latin American and Caribbean region. Mr. Franco is also responsible for the direction and supervision of the bureau and its overseas operation, including 16 missions in the Western Hemisphere. (USAID, 22/2/02)

February 8: U.S. medical officers met with Cuban doctors to reassure the government that suspected terrorist prisoners in Guantanamo base are not introducing malaria into the island, which has been free of the mosquito-borne disease for 50 years. At the same time, Cuban

medical personnel used the session just across the Northeast Gate, on Cuban territory, to brief U.S. authorities on their efforts to control dengue fever, a mosquito-transmitted viral disease that has been detected in nearby Santiago Province. "I think both sides needed reassurances that we're going by public health standards of the World Health Organization, that we're doing the right thing," said Navy Capt. Al Shimkus, commander of the Naval Hospital at the base. The discussion between "technical experts" lasted about 45 minutes, Shimkus said. The meeting was requested by Cuban commanders. There were three U.S. representatives at the session: a translator, a U.S. public health officer and a preventive medicine physician. Cuba sent three equivalent envoys. (The Miami Herald, 22/2/02)

February 8: The U.S. group Freedom Forum presented shipwreck survivor Elian Gonzalez with its Free Spirit Award in a ceremony attended by the boy's family and a few Cuban officials. "In the minds of people all around the world, Elian is a hero for one reason or another," said Al Neuharth, founder of USA Today. (AP, 8/2/02)

February 11: A US Senate panel examined Washington's restriction on travel to Cuba. Americans For Humanitarian Trade With Cuba (AHTC), the national coalition leading the push for food and medical sales to Cuba, said the Senate hearing on Cuba travel licensing problems -- the first in 40 years of embargo -- shows why unrestricted travel to Cuba is necessary if Americans are to exercise their legal right to sell food and medicine there. Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on treasury and general government, made clear he believed that longtime laws that restrict most tourist travel to the communist nation have done little to bring about democratic reforms in Cuba. "I don't think travel restrictions do anything to impede Fidel Castro," Dorgan said. "It only impedes U.S. citizens." Richard Newcomb, the head of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), which enforces the travel ban, acknowledged that up to 200,000 Americans visited Cuba last year, most under special exception licenses for Cuban Americans and others, but as many as 60,000 in violation of the law. Most illegal U.S. visitors to Cuba are tourists who reach there from third countries. The ban, which technically is not a prohibition against travel but prohibits Americans from conducting any financial transactions -- spending money - in Cuba, was first imposed by President John F. Kennedy in 1963. As a criminal matter, U.S. attorneys rarely brought cases, but in its 1992 overall toughening of Cuba sanctions, Congress imposed civil penalties of up to \$50,000 for violations. (PRNewswire, The Miami Herald, The Washington Post, 11, 12/2/02)

February 11: After meeting with Fidel Castro, several U.S. congressional representatives visiting Cuba held a news conference, calling for an end to Washington's embargo against the island. Representatives Mike Thompson, of St. Helena, and Bob Filner, of San Diego, both Democrats, filled out the congressional delegation. The group also included representatives of California's rice and wine industries, and singer Carole King. The delegation met with Cuban dissidents at an Old Havana hotel. "We are accustomed to meeting with dissidents because we have them in our own districts," said Sam Farr, Democratic U.S. representative from Carmel. "I think that listening to the voice of dissent can be helpful." Thompson said he supported greater freedoms for Cubans, including free elections. "I'm a strong supporter of democracy but I don't think the embargo gets us there," he said. (AP, 11/2/02)

February 11: US authorities arrested four Cubans who entered the US base in Guantánamo, and went into the quarters where the journalists covering the Afghan prisoners of war are staying. Authorities abstained from commenting on the arrests, or how the Cubans managed to enter the base at a time when security measures have been tighter. (CNN, 11/2/02)

February 13: Pedro Alvarez, president of Cuba's import company Alimport told a news conference Cuba will buy more American food if the U.S. government continues to expedite licenses for the sales. "We would like all American producers to have the chance to compete," Alvarez said. (AP, 13/2/02)

February 13: Fidel Castro held a six-hour meeting with US poultry industry representatives and said Havana intends to import more food products from the United States, US delegation sources said. US delegation leader Jim Sumner, who is president of the USA Poultry and Egg Export Council, said Castro told the group that Cuba intends soon to make an additional purchase of food and agricultural products from the United States. (AFP, 13/2/02)

February 13: The 9th Scientific Seminar on Education is underway at the Caimao Hotel in Matanzas province with the participation of 50 professors from Cuba and a similar number of educators from the United States. (Radio Habana Cuba, 13/2/02)

February 15: Arkansas' congressional delegation said that the United States should lift its trade embargo with Cuba to help Arkansas farmers. U.S. Reps. Vic Snyder and Mike Ross, both Democrats, and John Boozman, a Republican, attended a press conference by the Cuba Policy Foundation at the state Capitol. U.S. Rep. Marion Berry sent a letter in support, and representatives for U.S. Senators Tim Hutchinson and Blanche Lincoln also were present. The Cuba Policy Foundation said Arkansas has more to gain than any other state from open trade with Cuba. "It's time that our government stop using our farm families as a weapon," Ross said. "Enough is enough. This is about economic opportunities for our people." (AP, 15/2/02)

February 15: Two men, charged with running an illegal migrant voyage in which six Cubans died, pleaded guilty to conspiring to smuggle aliens for profit and could face life in prison, federal prosecutors in Miami said. The defendants, Osvaldo Fernandez Marrero, and Roberto Montero Dominguez, are Cuban nationals who had been living in the Miami area. Sentencing was set for May 7. Six passengers died in August when their dangerously overloaded 27-foot (8-metre) speedboat capsized at night in a tropical storm off the Florida Keys. "It was a tragedy that didn't have to occur," said U.S. Attorney Guy Lewis. "The message really needed to be loud and clear. We are going to take a zero-tolerance policy related to these kinds of cases." (Reuters, AP, 15/2/02)

February 17: The U.S. Treasury office that enforces the trade embargo on Cuba is investigating whether Americans have bought hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of dolphins from the Cuban government, a main supplier of the animals for proliferating tourist attractions in the Caribbean. The probe, launched by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, has inserted U.S. agents into a battle involving, among others, Che Guevara's 38-year-old daughter, Celia, the chief marine mammal veterinarian at Cuba's National Aquarium. Cuba's Ministry of Science and Technology and its National Aquarium in Havana have captured a lucrative market for the animals, not only in the Caribbean but also in Europe. The Science Ministry licenses dolphin exports and voluntarily submits data to a U.N. agency responsible for compiling information on world trade in animals. The official figures reported by Havana show steady dolphin sales -- 82 in the last five years -- making Cuba the world's leading exporter. (The Miami Herald, 17/2/02)

February 17: United States President George Bush ordered a review of the policy toward Cuba in order to "achieve a fast and peaceful transition to democracy on the island", said Mercy Viana, White House spokeswoman. "Now that President Bush's team for foreign relations is fully operational, we are beginning to revise every aspect of US policy towards Cuba", she said. She also added that, apart from the foreign relations team, President Bush appointed several Cuban-Americans to key positions some of which are central to US policy making on Cuba. (Notimex, 17/2/02)

February 18: The U.S.-Cuba Sister City Association (USCSCA) is holding a week-long meeting in the Cuban capital. The conference, "Building Bilateral Relations: A Continuous Conversation," got underway at Havana's International Convention Center. Sister city relations already exist between Santa Clara and Bloomington, Indiana; Camagüey and Madison, Wisconsin; Havana and Mobile, Alabama; Santiago de Cuba and Oakland, California; Matanzas and Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania; and Cienfuegos and Tacoma, Washington. Cuba-US relations have reached a crucial point, with both great possibilities for improvement as well as risks, Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba National Assembly, told visiting Americans. "I would say we were in a defining moment, with risks and challenges on one side (...) and at the same time showing great possibilities, possibilities for important steps," Alarcon told about 100 Americans who arrived in the island for the conference on Cuba-U.S. sister cities. Fidel Castro met also with the American visitors, together with movie director Oliver Stone, who arrived in Havana days before. (Radio Habana Cuba, AP, 18/2/02)

February 21: Former US Drug Czar, Barry McCaffrey, said he would lead a group of academics that will travel to Cuba to discuss issues like terrorism and drugs with local officials. In a press conference, the former Chief of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) of the White House pointed out that the visit would be sponsored by the Center for Defense Information (CDI). McCaffrey is currently a professor of national security studies at the Military Academy of West Point. (Notimex, 22/2/02)

February 21: More than 20 Cuban educators and researchers will not be able to attend an education conference in Miami because the Cuban government failed to process their visas, Lisandro Perez, director of Florida International University's Cuban Research Institute (CRI), told the press. The academicians had been invited to attend the 4th CRI Conference on Cuban and Cuban-American Studies from March 6-9. "Cuba tries to centralize the issue of invitations by channeling them through institutions and does not send them directly to individuals," Perez said. (EFE, 22/2/02)

February 21: U.S. filmmaker Oliver Stone returned to the United States from Cuba, where he met repeatedly with Cuban leader Fidel Castro to discuss a documentary he intends to make on Cuba. "Looking for Fidel" includes extensive interviews with Castro, including his views on Cuba, the world and his own life, and will get a theatrical release this fall in Spain. Stone met with Castro at least four times. (Reuters, EFE, 19,21/2/02)

February 21: The head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, career diplomat Vicky Huddleston, warned the government of Cuban President Fidel Castro that it must improve the human rights situation on the island. "It is all very well for Cuba to say it wants a warmer and better relationship. What there needs to be is fundamental change in Cuba," she said, adding that this would have to include respect for human rights and democratic elections. Huddleston's remarks came at a ceremony to mark the delivery of a U.S. government grant to the University of Miami (UM) to fund a project focusing on issues related to an eventual democratic transition in Cuba. (EFE, 21/2/02)

February 21: Cuba experts from the University of Miami participating in the newly established Cuba Transition Project will study the different aspects of a transition to democracy once Fidel Castro is no longer in power, then offer recommendations to post-Castro business, government and community leaders. "This is truly a pioneer academic endeavor," said U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who helped push for the grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development. "It will remove the veil of silence and oppression that envelops the Cuban people today." USAID representatives at the courtyard news conference at UM's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies handed a large symbolic check made out in the amount of \$1,045,000 to university officials. (The Sun Sentinel, 21/2/02)

February 22: Fidel Castro attended the protocol signing of a sister city agreement between the province of Matanzas and the U.S. State of Pennsylvania. The official ceremony took place in the provincial capital of Matanzas, and was attended also by State Rep. Michael Diven (D., Allegheny). (Philadelphia Inquirer, 23/2/02)

February 22: The US government will oppose any attempt to lessen the four decades long embargo against Cuba, stated James Carragher, Director of Cuban Affairs at the State Department. "The administration of President George W. Bush is interested in improving relations between the two countries, but that will only be possible when Cuba moves to a more democratic system and a market economy", said Carragher in a presentation on US-Cuba relations at the Hunter College. (Notimex, 22/2/02)

February 25: Fidel Castro accused the United States of carrying out biological attacks against Cuba. Castro's latest accusation came during a nationwide address, in which he also talked about the battle against dengue fever in his country. Castro did not directly blame the U.S. for the dengue problem, which has killed two and stricken hundreds but is now receding. But he did say U.S. officials are responsible for past attacks against Cuban tobacco, sugar and pigs. Castro admitted he has read a report about how USAID, the U.S. government's relief agency, helped in fighting Cuba's dengue outbreak. But he downplayed USAID's role. "This is the famous agency, well-known in our country, very charitable, very humanitarian but we know 10 times more than them about combating dengue," said Castro. "The most they (USAID) know about, really, is how to transport and develop viruses and how to attack a country with viruses. They did it for years," said Castro, who went on to accuse USAID of leading subversion in Cuba and backing insurgents in Latin America. (CNSNews, 26/2/02)

February 25: The Castro government may purchase approximately ten million eggs sometime next year from a United States-based company, marking the first time Cuba has ever imported eggs, the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council said. In its weekly newsletter, the Council said the eggs would likely be transported in refrigerated containers from the United States to Cuba. Such a purchase would cost the Castro government around \$600,000 in US dollars. (CNSNews, 26/2/02)

February 25: During a US State Department briefing with the press its spokesman Richard Boucher denied that the person who runs the Cuban Affairs Desks and his deputy are promoting or lobbying or trying to get the administration to practice reconciliation with Cuba: "It's important to make clear that the Bush administration, the political appointees, such as the secretary and Assistant Secretary Reich, have full confidence in the professionalism of career diplomats who are carrying out US policy towards Cuba." "The State Department's team of Foreign and Civil Service officers in Washington, and at our Interest Section in Havana, has worked vigorously to support President Bush's efforts to bring about rapid, and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in Cuba, using the full array of policy tools available. Assistant Secretary Reich has worked loosely with these people since his appointment in January", Boucher added. Answering if there was "any movement on the Cuba front" of which he could talk about, he added that he should make clear "the issue is movement in Cuba on human rights and democracy. And unfortunately, very regrettably, we have not seen that kind of movement. And in fact, I think you'll see in the human rights report that the human rights situation in Cuba remains very bad". (State Department Press Service, 25/2/02)

February 26: Six weeks after giving a recess appointment to Assistant Secretary of State Otto Reich, President Bush has resubmitted his nomination to the Senate for confirmation. Reich heads the State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. (AP, 26/2/02)

February 26: US President George W. Bush reiterated The Emergency Authority Relating to the Regulation of the Anchorage and Movement of Vessels, signed by Bill Clinton in 1996, after the destruction by the Government of Cuba of two unarmed U.S. registered civilian aircraft in international airspace north of Cuba, in February 1996. "Since these events, the Government of Cuba has not demonstrated that it will refrain from the future use of reckless and excessive force against U.S. vessels or aircraft that may engage in memorial activities or peaceful protest north of Cuba" (...) "I am continuing the national emergency with respect to Cuba". (The White House Press Service, 27/2/02)

February 28: In an official note released a few hours after a bus loaded with a group of Cubans crashed into the Mexican embassy in Havana, the Cuban government blamed Radio Marti for repeatedly broadcasting statements by Mexican Foreign Secretary Jorge Castañeda, which it said were "cynically manipulated" into "an open invitation to occupy the embassy". [For more on this, see sections Domestic Affairs and Foreign Relations.] (BBC News, 28/2/02)

February 28: The United States said it expected Mexico to find a humanitarian way to remove 21 Cubans who crashed a bus into the Mexican Embassy in Havana but said such problems would not arise if Cuba had a "free society." "Cubans would not seek entry to foreign embassies if they had an opportunity to choose their own government, receive independent and accurate information, participate in a more open market, and thereby benefit from the economic advantages that a free society would provide," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told a regular news briefing. (Reuters, 28/2/02)

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