

Castro says he is battling to recover

In a written message to the Cuban people to mark the 48th anniversary of the revolution, Fidel Castro said his recovery is continuing and he assured Cubans that he remains involved in vital matters.

The Miami Herald
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HAVANA - Ailing leader Fidel Castro saluted Cubans on the eve of the revolution's 48th anniversary, thanking them for their support during his illness and telling them he had not lost his battle to recover.

"I am grateful to you for your affection and support," said the message read by a newscaster on state television and radio Saturday. "Regarding my recovery, I have always warned that it could be a prolonged process, but it is far from being a lost battle. I collaborate as a disciplined patient, attended by the consecrated team of our doctors.

Castro, 80, traditionally sends a similar message to Cuban citizens every New Year's Eve to mark the anniversary of the Jan. 1, 1959, triumph of the revolution that brought him to power.

"I have not stopped being in the loop on main events and information," he added. "I have had exchanges with our closest comrades always when cooperation has been necessary on vitally important issues."

Earlier Saturday, Cuba's Communist Party daily reported that Castro telephoned the Chinese ambassador in Havana to wish his president, Hu Jintao, a happy new year.

REASSURING PUBLIC

Castro's message to the Cuban people and the short story about his call to the Chinese ambassador seemed aimed at ensuring the world that the leader's recovery continues five months after he underwent emergency intestinal surgery.

Speculation about Castro's medical condition has been rife amid a lack of information from the communist government.

The last news in the state media about Castro was a story published Dec. 16 saying he had made separate telephone calls to Cuban lawmakers and his friend and ally Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

Castro has not been seen in public since several days before he announced on July 31 that he was temporarily stepping aside after an operation for an intestinal infection. He has provisionally ceded his powers to his brother Raúl, the 75-year-old defense minister.

Saturday's story said Castro called Chinese Ambassador Zhao Rongxian on Thursday evening, and that they discussed relations between their countries. The ambassador also transmitted his president's wishes for Castro's speedy recovery.

The island's official media has not commented on a Spanish surgeon's declarations earlier this week that Castro did not have cancer and was slowly recovering from a serious operation.

VISIT TO HAVANA

José Luis García Sabrido, chief surgeon at Madrid's Gregorio Marañón Hospital, said he flew to Havana on Dec. 21 to see Castro and consult with the Cuban leader's medical team on how his treatment was progressing.

Castro's medical condition is a state secret, but Cuban authorities have denied he suffers from terminal cancer, as U.S. intelligence officials have claimed.

Cuban officials have nonetheless stopped insisting Castro will return to power.

García Sabrido said Castro could resume the presidency if his recovery is "absolute."

Some doctors believe Castro may suffer from diverticular disease, which can cause bleeding in the lower intestine, especially in people over 60. In severe cases, emergency surgery may be required.