

Cubans remain subdued about Castro's health

Cubans know that Fidel Castro may die soon, but they are keeping their reactions private.

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MIRAFLORES PRESS FILE

IN THE HOSPITAL: Fidel Castro gets a visit from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez after surgery in Havana, Cuba in August of 2006.

Many Cubans are aware of a Spanish newspaper's report of Fidel Castro's prognosis as "very grave" but are keeping their reactions to themselves, a dissident in Havana said Wednesday.

The Cuban media has made no mention of the El País newspaper reports that Castro has undergone three surgeries and is wasting away, but word has filtered in nevertheless.

"In Cuba, lots of people have seen or heard about the news reports, but comments are kept at a whisper," Laura Pollán, the wife of a jailed dissident, said in a telephone interview from Havana. "People realize that [Castro] is in bad shape and wonder what will happen when he dies."

"There is a lot of uncertainty and anxiety but, as of yet, reaction does not go beyond that," Pollán said

The El País report this week, if true, was the most detailed to date on the ailments that have kept Castro out of power for 5 ½ months. In a follow-up story late Tuesday, it reported that "Castro and his people" opted for a risky procedure that failed and led to life-threatening complications.

José Luis García Sabrido, the Spanish doctor who examined Castro last month, told various news outlets Wednesday that the El País reports were "absolute falsehoods" and that Castro has shown "some progressive improvement."

"The only truthful parts of the newspaper's reports are the name of the patient, that he has been operated on, and that he has had complications," García Sabrido told CNN. "The rest is rumors."

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said Tuesday that he had spoken to Castro recently and that the Cuban leader was "doing well."

The 80-year-old ruler ceded power to his brother Raúl on July 31, saying only that he had undergone surgery for intestinal bleeding. Havana has since released only a handful of photos and videos of Castro.

"The most relevant thing is not the [El País] report itself, but the fact that the government hasn't released a single word," said Elizardo Sánchez, a human-rights activist in Havana. "They don't feel obligated to inform the public."

The closest thing to a commentary on Castro's continuing absence and rumors of his impending death was an article Wednesday in the Cuban newspaper Trabajadores.

The commentary, titled "In Cuba, there is enough Fidel and revolution for a while," says that Washington should not expect any major changes after Castro's death and warns against a military intervention.

Since the transfer of power, the commentary said, the Cuban population has remained calm and the country continues to function with its "habitual rhythm."
