

# Evo Morales meets with Raúl Castro

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HAVANA --

(AP) -- Bolivian President Evo Morales met Thursday with Cuba's interim leader Raul Castro and other top officials in an unannounced visit. It was unclear if Morales would meet with Fidel Castro, still sidelined by serious illness.

Photographs distributed by Morales' office showed the leader meeting with Fidel Castro's brother Raul, the 76-year-old defense minister, after his morning arrival. The images also showed Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque and Vice President and Secretary General Carlos Lage, who Cuban state media said greeted Morales at the airport.

International reporters were not given access to Morales' arrival or meetings.

A brief story in the Communist Party daily Granma announcing the visit did not say whether Morales would meet with the 80-year-old Fidel Castro, his friend and ally. Castro has not appeared in public for more than 10 months while recovering from intestinal surgeries.

Since his illness, Castro has been seen only in still photographs and videotapes released by the government.

Granma said the visit ``constitutes a new demonstration of the solid ties of friendship and solidarity that unite our people and governments."'

Castro announced on July 31 he was temporarily stepping aside following surgery and handing power to his brother Raul.

Senior officials have repeatedly said Castro is on the mend, although he recently acknowledged that his recovery has been delayed because one of his first operations did not go well.

The bearded revolutionary has been more active of late, writing more than a dozen essays on international issues and appearing in a 50-minute taped interview on state TV on Tuesday.