

Venezuela's Chavez meets with Castro

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HAVANA --

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez met for more than four hours Saturday with ailing leader Fidel Castro, Cuban state television reported.

Chavez arrived in Havana late Friday for a visit that will include the airing Sunday of the Venezuelan leader's weekly radio and television program from the provincial capital of Santa Clara, where the Cuban government on Monday marked the 40th anniversary of the death of revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

No new official photographs or video clips of the convalescing leader accompanied the brief report on the evening news. The last official image of Castro was a photograph released late last month, showing him looking more robust than in some past pictures as he stood and greeted Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos during an official visit to Havana.

"The two revolutionary leaders discussed the history of our nations, the solid and growing bilateral relations, the situation in Latin America and the most grave problems faced by humanity," state television said of Chavez's meeting with Castro.

Chavez, a close friend and political ally of the 81-year-old Castro, last met with the Cuban leader during a surprise visit to the capital in June.

The Venezuelan president has traveled to Cuba several times to visit Castro since he underwent emergency intestinal surgery in late July 2006 and ceded authority to his younger brother Raul, who continues to head the collective leadership governing the communist-run country.

Castro has not appeared in public in the 14 months since he fell ill and was not expected to make an appearance on the show. Castro called in live in February to one of Chavez's programs broadcast from Venezuela and the pair chatted for more than a half hour.