

This file photo taken on Jan 8, 1989 shows a white dove landing on Cuban president Fidel Castro's shoulder as he delivers a speech to Cuban youth at a ceremony to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution in Havana. — AP/AFP photos



This file photo taken on Sept 02, 1998 shows South African President Nelson Mandela greeting Castro as he arrives for the opening of the 12th Non-Aligned Movement summit in Durban.



This file photo taken on Sept 9, 1973 shows then Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad (left) speaking with Castro during a meeting in Damascus.

# FIDEL CASTRO DIES AGED 90

**HAVANA:** Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro has died aged 90, prompting mixed grief and joy yesterday along with international tributes for the man whose iron-fisted rule defied the United States for half a century. One of the world's longest-serving rulers and among modern history's most striking personalities, Castro survived 11 US administrations and hundreds of assassination attempts. Fidel Castro crushed opposition at home from the moment he took power in 1959 to lead the Caribbean island through the Cold War. He stepped aside only in 2006 after intestinal surgery.

For defenders of the revolution, Castro was a hero who protected ordinary people against capitalist domination. To opponents, including thousands of Cuban exiles living in the United States, he was a cruel communist tyrant. Castro eventually lived to see the restoration of diplomatic ties with Washington last year.

#### National Mourning

President Raul Castro, who took power after his elder brother Fidel was hospitalized in 2006, announced the news on national television just after midnight Friday (0500 GMT yesterday). "The commander in chief of the Cuban revolution died at 22:29 hours this evening," Raul Castro said in a solemn voice. He gave no details of the cause of death. He said his brother would be cremated early yesterday. The government decreed nine days of mourning.

From Nov 26 to Dec 4, "public activities and shows will cease, the national flag will fly at half-mast on public buildings and military installations," said a statement from the state executive.

Castro's ashes will be buried in the southeastern city of Santiago on Dec 4 after a four-day procession through the country, it added.

#### Joy in Miami, Grief in Havana

In the streets of Miami, home to the bulk of the Cuban-American community, euphoric crowds waved flags and danced, banging on pots and drums and honking their car horns. "It's sad that one finds joy in the death of a person - but that person should never have been born," said Pablo Arencibia, 67, a teacher who fled Cuba 20 years ago. "Satan is now the one who has to worry," he added, because "Fidel is heading there and is going to try to get his job." Castro was loathed by many for stifling dissent, but loved by others for providing free universal healthcare and education. "Losing Fidel is like losing a father - the guide, the beacon of this revolution," said Michel Rodriguez, a 42-year-old baker in Havana.

#### 'Socialism or Death'

Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 as a black-bearded, cigar-chomping 32-year-old, in a revolution against former dictator Fulgencio Batista. "When this war is over, a much longer greater war will begin: the war that I am going to wage against them," the United States, he had said in 1958. "That will be my true destiny." Living by the slogan "socialism or death," Castro kept the faith to the end, even as the Cold War came and went.

He endured more than 600 assassination attempts, according to his aides, and the disastrous US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion attempt in

1961. "If I am considered a myth, the United States deserves the credit," he said in 1988. Castro was at the center of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, as the world stood on the brink of nuclear war.

#### Revolution

Born Aug 13, 1926 to a prosperous Spanish immigrant landowner and a Cuban mother of humble background, Castro was said to be a quick learner and a keen baseball player. He formed a guerrilla opposition to the US-backed government of Batista, who had seized power in a 1952 coup. After a failed uprising in 1953, Castro was put on trial. In a self-defense speech he said defiantly: "History will absolve me." After two years of prison Castro went into exile in Mexico and organized followers for their ultimately triumphant uprising.

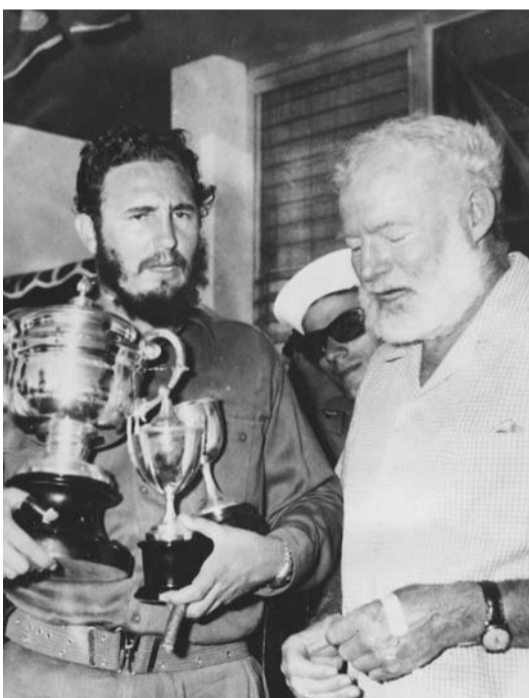
On Dec 2, 1956 the rebels sailed to southeastern Cuba on the yacht Granma. Twenty-five months later, they ousted Batista and Castro was named prime minister. He threw Cuba's lot in with the Soviet Union, which bankrolled his regime until 1989, when the Eastern Bloc's collapse sent Cuba's economy plunging.

#### Ceded Power

Fidel ceded power to his younger brother Raul, now 85, in July 2006. The revolutionary icon underwent intestinal surgery and largely disappeared from public view. Castro married three times and is known to have fathered eight children. He was last seen in public on his 90th birthday on Aug 13. — AFP



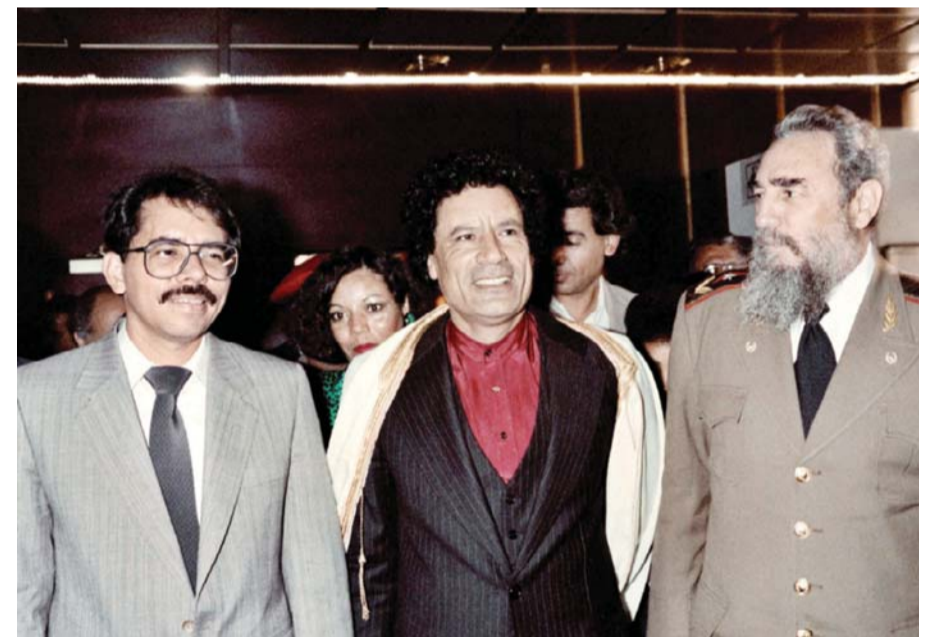
This file photo taken on Nov 16, 1999 shows Castro trying on a pair of sunglasses as he talks to the media in Havana during the IX Iberoamerican Summit.



In this May 15, 1960 file photo, American novelist Ernest Hemingway (right) stands with Castro who holds a trophy after winning the individual championship in the annual Hemingway Fishing Tournament in Havana.



This file photo taken on April 02, 1989 shows then General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev (standing left) and Castro (standing right) greeting onlookers en route from the airport upon Gorbachev's arrival in Havana.



This file photo taken on Sept 04, 1986 shows Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (center) and Castro walking along with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (left) during the non-aligned countries summit, in Harare, Zimbabwe.



This file photo taken on July 11, 1972 shows Castro (center) wearing a miner's dress of Kotowice during his official visit to Poland.



This Oct 13, 2016 photo shows Castro (right) shaking hands with Algeria's Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal, in one of the last pictures taken of Castro before he died, in Havana.



This file photo taken on Dec 14, 1974 shows Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Yasser Arafat (right) walking with Castro during his visit to Cuba.



In this April 14, 1966 file photo Castro stands in a sugarcane plantation in Cuba.



This Jan 01, 1956 file photo shows Castro standing behind bars at the Miguel Schultz prison in the Mexican colony of San Rafael in 1956, after being arrested by the Mexican police with the cooperation of then president of Cuba Fulgencio Batista.



This file photo taken in the 1960s shows Castro (left) lighting a cigar while listening to Argentinian revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara.