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by lionel martin

havana, july 25, reuter -- cuban president, fidel castro, is scheduled to make his annual speech tomorrow in commemoration of the twenty-ninth anniversary of what cuban historians call +the beginning of the cuban revolution.+

on july 26, 1953, twenty-seven year old fidel castro led a group of 146 followers, including two women, in an assault on cuba's second biggest military base, the moncada barracks in santiago de cuba, in an attempt to spark an insurrection that would bring about the downfall of cuban dictator, fulgencio batista.

the attack on the moncada barracks and a smaller army post in nearby bayamo was a military failure. but it succeeded in making castro a cuban hero and in encouraging a movement among the island's youth to battle the batista regime.

castro's speech in bayamo tomorrow is expected by observers here to touch on major aspects of cuba's domestic and foreign policy, including its relations with the united states.

according to a cuban official, dr. castro is likely to speak about the dramatic fall in world crude sugar prices and its disastrous effects on the cuban economy. he will probably make a calls, the official said, for better management of the nation's economy and will report on the increased labour productivity since material incentives were introduced several years ago.

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there is consensus among western diplomats here that castro will make a strong attack on the foreign policy of the reagan administration but that the cuban leader will leave the door open for dialogue and normalisation of relations with the united states.

since the victory of the cuban revolution in 1959, the july 26 festivities have become a major national holiday, in some ways supplanting the traditional christmas holidays. while christmas is celebrated by individuals in cuba, july 26 is commemorated with a work holiday accompanied by carnavals, street dancing and block parties. special selections of children's toys are distributed under an equitative rationing system in july instead of during the christmas season.

the reason cuban officials give for transferring +christmas to july+ is that the traditional christmas season takes place during a vital part of the sugar harvest. sugar cane and crude sugar production are cuba's main source of foreign currency. the officials say that the christams holiday was usually preceded and followed by a high rate of absenteeism on sugar plantations and in sugar mills.

the sugar harvest, this year,ended in june. in the period around july 26, nightly festivites draw hundreds of thousands of cubans into the streets. during the holiday, liquor prices are reduced considerably.

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the july 26, 1953 attack on the moncada barracks followed fulgencio batista's march 10, 1952 military coup which took place during the presidential and congressional election campaign. fidel castro, who had earned his doctor of laws degree at the university of havana, was a candidate for the house of representatives on the orthodox party ticket. the military coup dashed his hopes for a political career within the multi-party system.

castro set himself the task of overthrowing the dictator. he organised a clandestine group of anti-batista followers, mostly youth, who received marksmanship training in and around havana.

only sixteen of castro's followers were killed during the exchange of gunfire that took place at the moncada barracks in the early morning of july 26. however, the toll of his dead followers reached sixty one due to the fact that many prisoners were murdered following their capture.

fidel castro was captured on august 1 in the mountainous zone near santiago de cuba by a squad led by a black lieutenant of the rural guard, pedro sarria, who insisted on bringing the young rebel into santiago alive.

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castro was sentenced to thirty years in jail. one of the highlights of his trial was his defense speech which was later reconstructed an published under the name, +history will absolve me+.

many student of the cuban revolution contend that fidel castro was not a socialist when he led the attack on the moncada barracks. however, the cuban leader told an american writer: +i knew what the final goal was. my programme was like the antechamber to a socialist revolution. to get to the third floor, one must start from the first.+

in a letter from his prison cell on the isle of pines dated april 4, 1954, castro mentioned reading the works of karl marx and commented: +he, like lenin, possessed a terrible, polemical spirit, and i, here, get joy reading them and i laugh#, they were implacable and fearless with the enemy. two true prototypes of revolutionaries.+

in another letter from prison, castro wrote to a friend: +with what joy i would revolutionise this country from top to bottom.+
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