

Backers of Bosch call strike

Exile firms urged to close Thursday

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Orlando Bosch supporters, angered over the U.S. Justice Department's denial of political asylum for the 62-year-old anti-Castro militant, called Sunday for a strike this week by Cuban exile businesses.

Members of the Alliance for Orlando Bosch's Freedom, a coalition that claims the support of more than 30 exile groups, are exhorting Cuban-run businesses in South Florida and across the U.S. to close between noon and 3 p.m. Thursday.

"We're symbolically trying to say, 'We can do this, and if Orlando Bosch is deported, we can do far more,'" said alliance member Ramon Saul Sanchez.

The strike is one of a number of activities being planned this week by Bosch's supporters, including a

demonstration today in downtown Miami. The alliance is also calling on local Cuban-American elected officials to ask President Bush to intervene in Bosch's favor.

The Justice Department ruled Friday that Bosch should be deported from the United States, saying "he has been resolute and unwavering in his advocacy of terrorist violence." Bosch has been imprisoned at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in South Dade since February 1988, when he entered the U.S. illegally from Venezuela.

Bosch fled Miami in 1974, while on parole for a 1968 conviction for attacking a Polish freighter. Though acquitted three times by Venezuelan courts, Bosch spent 11 years in Venezuelan jails on charges that he masterminded the 1973 bombing of a Cuban airliner in which 73 people died.

On Sunday, small groups of Bosch supporters gathered in a private meeting hall in Northwest Miami to plot strategies for the coming week. One group discussed ways to spread word of the strike among local businesses; another geared up to contact Cuban exile groups in Tampa, Chicago, California, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

Thursday's strike will be "a thermometer of the emotions in the Cuban community," Sanchez said. "We're going to concentrate on that right now. If he's deported, then we'll have to see."