

**Cuba****Cuba hit by second nationwide power outage in a week**

Collapse of electricity grid comes after ship carrying fuel that had been headed for country changes course



A street in Havana on Saturday. Cuba relies on imported oil and fuel © Ernesto Mastrascusa/EPA/Shutterstock

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Cuba is battling to restore power after suffering its second nationwide power cut in under a week as a US oil blockade puts growing pressure on the energy-starved communist regime.

The island's energy ministry confirmed that the national grid had collapsed on Saturday, just days after a ship carrying Russian fuel, which had been set to arrive in Cuba this week in defiance of the US energy embargo, changed course.

By Sunday afternoon, power had begun returning to parts of Havana, the capital, according to the state-run Electric Union and the Ministry of Energy and Mines, though much of the country remained without electricity.

Cuba, which relies on imported oil and fuel, has not received any energy shipments since January 9 and has been in talks with the US in an effort to end the blockade. US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on any countries that supply the regime.

The Hong Kong-flagged ship, the Sea Horse, carrying an estimated 27,000 tonnes of Russian gas, had been on course to arrive in Cuba on Monday — one of two vessels headed to the island. But Samir Madani, co-founder of maritime intelligence company TankerTrackers.com, said the vessel had switched course on March 19 and was now heading to Venezuela.

The other ship, a Russian tanker, the Anatoly Kolodkin, carrying 725,000 to 728,000 barrels depending on the oil grade, was in the Atlantic and still on a trajectory to Cuba, he said, and was expected to arrive on March 30.

Before Saturday's blackout, the island had managed to regain some power following last Monday's power cut, but demand routinely outstrips supply.

Trump said last week that he would have the "honour" of "taking Cuba, in some form".

"Whether I free it, take it, I think I could do anything I want with it, if you want to know the truth. They are a very weakened nation right now," he told reporters.

Cuba's deputy foreign minister, Carlos Fernández de Cossío, told NBC News on Sunday morning that the country's military was readying for "the possibility of military aggression".

"Our military is always prepared, and in fact it is preparing these days for the possibility of military aggression," he said.

Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel had no immediate comment on the latest power outage, instead congratulating athlete Leyanis Pérez Hernández on X on retaining her world indoor triple jump title in Poland.

On Saturday, Díaz-Canel met international leftist figures including former British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Pablo Iglesias, the co-founder of leftist Spanish party Podemos, who arrived in Cuba on a humanitarian aid convoy.

Cubans have long suffered lengthy partial power outages but living conditions have significantly worsened in recent weeks with uncollected rubbish in the streets, food shortages and hospitals lacking medical supplies. Airlines, deprived of fuel, have suspended flights.

The power cuts have exposed the fragility of Cuba's energy infrastructure and come amid mounting speculation that Trump is trying to force out Díaz-Canel.

The Cuban president earlier this month confirmed that Cuba, which lies just 145km off the Florida Keys, was talking to the US administration in an attempt to end the energy blockade. Havana has repeatedly stated that political reforms in the one-party state are off-limits in any negotiations with Washington.

"That is something that no sovereign country negotiates," Fernández de Cossío said on Sunday.

"Things were already very bad before and now they're worse," said Michael Bustamante, associate professor of history and an expert on Cuba at the University of Miami. "At what point does the situation deteriorate so much that they risk blowback on the United States through migration or other kinds of instability that the Trump administration is not going to want?"

Díaz-Canel has blasted the US, saying "they are trying to suffocate to force our defeat".

The government has invited Cuban exiles to invest in and own businesses on the island as part of a larger attempt to boost the fledgling private sector. A wide-ranging US embargo on Cuba, which has long been supported by much of the diaspora, however, would still prevent broader trade and investment.

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