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Tanker 'Likely' Delivered Russian Diesel to Fuel-Starved Cuba

By AFP

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The Hong Kong-flagged Sea Horse tanker. **Vessel Finder**

A tanker has likely delivered diesel to crisis-hit Cuba after using deceptive maneuvers to reach the island, which is under a U.S. fuel blockade, according to a maritime tracker.

The Hong Kong-flagged Sea Horse "likely discharged its cargo of approximately 190,000 barrels of gasoil in Cuba in early March," maritime intelligence firm Windward reported on Wednesday.

If confirmed, this would be the first arrival of a refined petroleum product to Cuba since January, according to Windward, which did not say in which port it might have docked.

A second ship, the sanctioned Russian tanker Anatoly Kolodkin, is also on its way to Cuba carrying 730,000 barrels of crude oil, maritime analytics firm Kpler said Wednesday.

Cuba has been mired in an economic crisis and blackouts exacerbated by the sudden

suspension of oil supplies from Venezuela in January after the United States ousted President Nicolás Maduro, a Cuba ally.

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The island nation of 9.6 million was already battling the effects of the U.S. fuel blockade against the island. The country was plunged in a nationwide blackout earlier this week.

The Sea Horse, which is not under sanctions, was loaded with diesel from another ship off Cyprus in early February, according to Windward.

It signaled its next destination as Havana before switching it to "'Gibraltar for orders' due to increased scrutiny of inbound cargoes to Cuba," the firm said.

After sailing across the Atlantic in mid-to-late February, the Sea Horse stopped around 1,300 nautical miles from Cuban waters and began drifting at less than 1 knot, signaling it was "not under command."

Windward said the ship also engaged in other "deceptive shipping practices," including switching off its automatic identification systems (AIS) — a GPS-type signal that commercial ships use to avoid collisions.

It has no Western insurance, "another indicator it is involved in sanctions circumvention," according to Windward.

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