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Russian Energy Minister Confirms Oil Shipments to Cuba

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Sergei Tsivilev. **Mikhail Sinitsyn / TASS**

Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilev confirmed Wednesday that Russia is sending "humanitarian" shipments of oil to Cuba after ship-tracking data appeared to show that at least one tanker was on its way to deliver crude to the crisis-stricken island.

Cuba, which imports around 60% of its energy supply, previously relied on oil sold by Venezuela. Those shipments ended after then-President Nicolás Maduro was captured in a U.S. military raid.

An energy embargo imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump to bring pressure for a change in the island's political system has compounded years of deep economic crisis and led to more frequent blackouts across the Caribbean nation.

"We are sending humanitarian aid. We are providing humanitarian support," Tsivilev told reporters.

“Cuba has found itself in a difficult situation as a result of sanctions pressure. That is why we are currently sending humanitarian supplies to Cuba,” he added.

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The Financial Times reported last week that a Russian tanker had been dispatched to Cuba and was expected to arrive later in March. In response to that reported shipment, the U.S. Treasury Department amended a sanctions waiver for Russian oil tankers, barring transactions that include Cuba.

Several aid vessels carrying solar panels, bicycles, food and medicine have also been dispatched to Cuba in recent days. Those humanitarian deliveries have been organized by groups of politicians, activists and other public figures from dozens of countries.

Trump has said that he is prepared to “take” Cuba. Authorities from both countries acknowledged that they are holding talks, although they have not disclosed details.

Amid the U.S. pressure campaign, the Kremlin has reaffirmed its support for Cuba and has expressed concern over the growing humanitarian crisis on the island.

Correction: An earlier version of this article misstated that the Russian oil tanker had already arrived in Cuba.

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