



By: TA | AP Brief

Cuban president confirms US talks



Cuba has held talks with the U.S. government, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said Friday, marking the first time the Caribbean country has confirmed widespread speculation about discussions with the Trump administration as it grapples with a severe energy crisis.

Díaz-Canel said the talks “were aimed at finding solutions through dialogue to the bilateral differences between our two nations. International factors facilitated these exchanges.”

He did not elaborate on those factors, or provide any specifics about the talks, which U.S. President Donald Trump has alluded to in the past.

Cuba's relations with the U.S. have been fraught for decades and punctuated by animosity, with the exception of a brief rapprochement during former President Barack Obama's second term.

Asked for comment on Friday, the White House pointed to Trump's public comments about discussions with Cuba that he said were being led by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and intended to press major changes in Cuban **policies and governance**.

Trump has suggested that top Cuban leaders would be smart to avoid the fate of former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, who was ousted and arrested in a U.S. military operation in January.

Shortly after Díaz-Canel spoke, two U.S. officials said that Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants and a longtime Cuba hawk, and top aides met at the end of February in the Caribbean with the grandson of retired Cuban leader Raúl Castro, who is believed to play an influential role in the government despite not holding an official post.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions, said that Rubio had met secretly with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro on the sidelines of a Caribbean Community leaders

meeting in St. Kitts and Nevis on Feb. 25.

At the time, Rubio refused to say who, if anyone, he was speaking with in or close to the Cuban government.

Díaz-Canel said that the purpose of the talks with the U.S. was to identify “bilateral problems that require solutions based on their severity and impact” and find solutions to them.

He said that the aim was “to determine the willingness of both parties to take concrete actions for the benefit of the people of both countries.

And in addition, to identify areas of cooperation to confront threats and guarantee the security and peace of both nations, as well as in the region.”

‘Impact is tremendous’

Díaz-Canel said that no petroleum shipments have arrived in Cuba in the past three months, which he blamed on a U.S. **energy blockade**.

He said the island is running on natural gas, solar power and thermoelectric plants, and that the depletion of fuel oil and diesel forced two power plants to shut down and has limited the generation of power at solar parks.

The most recent **blackout** was blamed on a broken boiler at a thermoelectric plant that forced the **shutdown of Cuba's power grid**.

The president said that Cuba, which produces 40% of its petroleum, has been generating its own power, but that it hasn't been sufficient to meet demand.

The lack of power has affected communications, education and transportation, and the government has had to postpone surgeries for tens of thousands of people as a result, he said, adding: “The impact is tremendous.”

Even with everything we're
putting together, we still need oil
- Miguel Díaz-Canel

“Even with everything we’re putting together, we still need oil,” he said, adding that production output also has dropped. “Without energy, no country can produce at normal levels. All of this has meant making adjustments to employment.”

Last month, Cuba implemented austere fuel-saving measures and has converted more than 115 bakeries to run on firewood or coal.

“Cubans are desperate,” said Elvis Hernández, 62. “You can’t live without water or electricity. That’s why we want a consensus to be reached. If there are talks, let them be productive. Let them achieve something good through those conversations.”

Miguel García, 65, welcomed the news of talks with the U.S.

“If all of this leads to agreements and solutions that will improve our lives, then all the better, because the situation is quite difficult right now,” he said.