

Aid flotilla arrives in Cuba as US oil blockade bites

● Two more ships are due to arrive

● Trump subsequently threatened to slap tariffs on any country shipping oil to Cuba

AFP | Havana, Cuba

The first boat of a flotilla carrying medical supplies, food and solar panels reached Cuba on Tuesday to aid the island as a US fuel blockade deepens its energy crisis.

The Maguro shrimp fishing boat docked in Havana three days later than hoped after battling strong winds, currents and a pesky battery during its journey from Mexico.

As they approached Havana's colonial-era fortification, the international activists stood on the cabin roof of the boat -- symbolically renamed "Granma 2.0" as a tribute to the yacht used by Fidel Castro's guerrilla fighters to launch their revolution in 1956.

They held a sign reading "Let Cuba live" while others waiting for them on the dock chanted "Cuba yes! Blockade no!"

"I wish everyone would unite, even Cubans abroad, and come and do the same because it is the



People ride an electric three wheel motorcycle as the vessel Maguro -- symbolically renamed "Granma 2.0" as a tribute to the yacht used by Fidel Castro's guerrilla fighters to launch their revolution in 1956 -- arrives from Mexico with humanitarian aid as part of the Nuestra America convoy, docks at the port of Havana

people who are suffering," said Amado Rodriguez, a 59-year-old driver walking near Havana Bay.

The first shipments arrived by plane from Europe, Latin America and the United States last week as part of an air and sea mission, dubbed Our America Convoy, to bring some 50 tonnes of aid to Cuba.

Two more ships are due to arrive Tuesday or Wednesday.

Activists say the mission, which had the support of the government, aims to bring relief

to Cubans amid a de facto US oil blockade that President Donald Trump launched in January.

Critics have slammed the effort as benefiting the communist government more than ordinary people.

Convoy organizer David Adler, a US citizen, told AFP the mission brought urgently needed aid directly to Cubans and showed the world "the human costs of Trump's siege on Cuba."

"It demonstrated that international solidarity can tri-

umph over forced isolation," said Adler, coordinator of global left-wing group Progressive International.

The country has suffered seven nationwide blackouts since 2024 -- two of them this past week -- due to aging thermoelectric plants and oil shortages.

The situation has deteriorated since Trump ordered a military operation to capture Cuba's chief regional ally, Venezuelan socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, in January -- depriving the

island of its main oil supplier.

Trump subsequently threatened to slap tariffs on any country shipping oil to Cuba.

Trump's 'greed'

The Maguro left from Mexico's Yucatan peninsula Friday carrying 32 people, including activists from Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico and the United States, and AFP journalists.

As the boat motored across the sea, Brazilian activist Thiago Avila said other nations should come to Cuba's aid.

"We cannot allow the world and international law to be buried under the greed of Donald Trump," Avila told AFP.

"That's why we are here, that's why people decided to mobilize for this and decided to donate."

Avila was among the organizers of a flotilla that had tried to bring aid to Gaza last year despite a naval blockade. That effort was intercepted by Israeli forces.

Fellow Brazilian activist Lisi Proenca said the group was applying the experience it gained from the Gaza flotilla to bring aid to Cuba.

"The interesting thing is that we're able to carry much larger items, like solar panels," she told AFP.



Cuba is the only country in the world where all children receive free education and health-care from the state.

'Political sideshow'

In addition to daily outages, fuel prices have soared, public transport has become rare and trash is piling up as garbage trucks are no longer running.

Cuba has blamed Washington for the country's hardship, pointing to the fuel blockade and a decades-old trade embargo.

Cuban exiles and other critics, who say the communist government is to blame for the economic crisis, said the convoy is giving political support to Havana.

"All of this is nothing more than a political sideshow," Luis Zuniga, a former Cuban political prisoner now based in Miami, told AFP.

"The electricity crisis in Cuba does not stem from the oil embargo imposed by (Trump). It dates back to long before that," Zuniga said.

Xiaomi quarterly profit slumps despite annual EV gains

AFP | Beijing, China

Chinese electronics giant Xiaomi announced a dip in quarterly profit yesterday after slower smartphone sales, while electric vehicles drove a modest surge in annual revenue.

The Beijing-based firm, one of the world's largest smartphone makers, has expanded rapidly since its launch in 2011 to produce home appliances and electric vehicles and is now eyeing the artificial intelligence market.

Its performance is considered a bellwether for consumer sentiment in China, where authorities are seeking to make domestic spending the main driver of economic growth.

Xiaomi's total revenue last year was 457 billion yuan (\$66 billion), up 25 percent from the previous year, according to a filing with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Adjusted annual net profit reached 39 billion yuan, up 43.8 percent compared to 2024.

However, adjusted net profit was down 23.7 percent on-year in the last three months of 2025, the first quarterly decline since mid-

2024 and the biggest drop since the same

period in 2022.

Xiaomi said "headwinds" at the end of last year had hurt its business but defended its economic strength.

"In the fourth quarter of 2025, despite headwinds such as significantly increased memory (chip) costs and intensifying industry competition, we maintained resilience across all business segments," the company said in the statement.

Electric vehicles were a bright spot.

Xiaomi entered China's highly competitive EV market in 2024, aiming to win over buyers with a range of high-tech features.

It reached 411,082 vehicle deliveries in 2025 -- surpassing a goal of 350,000 -- to notch 106.1 billion yuan in revenue from its business segment covering smart EVs and AI.

"In 2026, we will strive to achieve the target of delivering 550,000 vehicles for the entire year," Xiaomi said in the statement.

Its business segment that includes smartphones, the company's traditional strength, still accounted for the bulk of sales, with revenue reaching 351.2 billion yuan last year.



Australia, EU agree sweeping new trade pact eight years in the works

● The two sides also agreed to step up cooperation on defence as well as on critical raw materials.

AFP | Canberra, Australia

The European Union and Australia struck a long-awaited free-trade deal on Tuesday, while also agreeing to boost defence cooperation and access to crucial rare-earth minerals in the face of global uncertainty over trade.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen's visit to Australia comes as the 27-nation bloc and the import-reliant nation navigate renewed energy vulnerability sparked by the war in the Middle East.

Key sticking points on Australian use of European geographical names as well as how much beef can be exported to the continent were overcome to reach the deal after eight years of negotiations.

Another compromise will see Australian winemakers allowed to use the term "prosecco" domestically, but they must stop using it for exports after 10 years.

Australia will also be allowed to keep using some geographical



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (R) and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese walk through the corridors of Parliament House in Canberra

names, such as feta and gruyere, in cases where producers have used the name for at least five years.

And European carmakers will benefit from Australia raising the threshold for a luxury car tax on electric vehicles -- three-quarters will now be exempt.

The two sides also agreed to step up cooperation on defence as well as on critical raw materials.

Addressing the Australian parliament on Tuesday, von der Leyen described a world that was "brutal, harsh and unforgiving".

In that context, she said the EU and Australia were bound by common values and must work together to mitigate over-reliance on countries such as China for rare-earth minerals.

A 'fair deal'

Von der Leyen told Australian lawmakers that the agreement on trade was a "fair deal, and one that delivers for your businesses and one that delivers for our businesses".

Under the accord, the EU said it expected exports to Australia to grow by a third over a decade.

The quota of Australian beef allowed into the bloc will increase more than 10 times the current level over the next decade. That upset both Australian farmers, who had hoped for more, and their European peers, who had pushed for the opposite.

Australia's National Farmers' Federation said it was "extremely disappointed" by a deal that European agriculture lobby group Copa-Cogeca said included "unacceptable" concessions.

Others were more pleased. European carmakers group ACEA welcomed the pact and the EU's top business lobby, BusinessEurope, hailed it as "a win for both sides, geopolitically and economically".

EU firms exported 37 billion euros (US\$42.9 billion) of goods to Australia last year, and 31 billion euros of services in 2024.

And Australia said the deal could add AU\$7.8 billion (US\$5.4 billion) to its gross domestic product by 2030.

Australia's largest export market is China, and the United States is its largest source of investment.

However, Canberra has redoubled efforts to diversify export markets for farmers since a 2020 dispute with Beijing saw agriculture shipments blocked for several years, and the global imposition of US tariffs last year.



The EU-Australia trade deal eliminates tariffs on over 99% of goods traded between the two sides.