



School energy storage havana

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Cuba will keep all non-essential workplaces and schools closed through Sunday as it battles a crippling island-wide electricity shortage and recovers from a deadly hurricane.

The energy-saving measures come as the government scrambles to restore power across the nation, which went dark Friday after its largest power plant collapsed and fuel failed to reach other plants, causing the entire energy grid to collapse.

Originally, the government said workplaces and schools would reopen on Thursday.

Visiting the southeastern town of San Antonio del Sur, which was clobbered by a flash flood caused by the hurricane, President Miguel Diaz-Canel told residents Wednesday, "You are not alone or abandoned."

Cuba's electricity is generated by eight ageing, oil-fired thermoelectric plants, some of which are broken down or under maintenance, seven floating plants leased from Turkish companies that have faced fuel shortages, and many diesel-powered generators.

The large thermoelectric plants were built in the 1970s and have a lifespan of between 25 and 30 years, according to Jorge Pinon, a Cuban-born energy expert at the University of Texas at Austin. "They're breaking down all the time," he told Al Jazeera, comparing them to the classic old US cars that are a popular tourist attraction in the capital, Havana.

"They have a structural problem and they need to recapitalise the whole system," he added.

Concerned about social unrest and sporadic street protests, Diaz-Canel has warned that his government will not tolerate attempts to "disturb public order".

In July 2021, blackouts sparked an unprecedented outpouring of public anger, with thousands of Cubans taking to the street and chanting slogans including "Freedom!" and "We are hungry."

Dozens of people took to the streets over the weekend in one neighbourhood, banging pots and pans and shouting "Turn on the lights."

The Cuban government and its allies blame the United States's 62-year-old trade embargo on the island for its economic and energy problems, including the sanctioning of oil tankers that deliver fuel from Venezuela.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday that the Cuban government's "long-term mismanagement of its economic policy and resources has certainly increased the hardship of people in Cuba".



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