

Power restored to U.S. mission in Cuba

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HAVANA - Electricity was restored Tuesday to the U.S. mission in Cuba after Washington accused Fidel Castro's government of deliberately cutting off the building's power and Havana angrily denied it.

U.S. Interests Section Chief Michael Parmly said power to the building, which was cut June 5, was restored midmorning. Parmly said he still believed the weeklong power outage was deliberate, despite the Cuban government's adamant denials.

"I find it hard to explain otherwise," Parmly said. "They are denying it now because it became public."

U.S. officials in Havana and Washington on Monday accused Cuba of harassing the mission by deliberately cutting off power and lessening the building's water supply.

Castro's government hit back Tuesday with a front-page editorial in the Communist Party newspaper Granma saying the power outage was caused by a problem in the neighborhood grid and that U.S. officials "lie shamelessly."

"Our Revolution would never assault or violate a diplomatic mission," the Communist Party daily Granma said indignantly. "It never has and it never will."

After the outage, the building operated on independent generator power, continuing regular consular tasks such as interviewing refugees and issuing visas.

State Department officials in Washington and Havana on Monday described the power outage as "bullying tactics" by Cuba.

The flap over power at the seven-story mission on Havana's Malecon coastal highway is the latest in recent disputes about the building.

Castro in January complained about the U.S. government's use of the building to display an electronic sign streaming news and human rights messages to passers-by. His government promptly erected a forest of towering poles to fly scores of huge black flags blocking the sign.

"We categorically deny that there have been premeditated cuts in the electrical energy to disrupt the functioning of the (U.S.) Interests Section," Granma said.

The newspaper said heavy rains in recent weeks had damaged a key underground line leading to the mission and the adjacent "Anti-Imperialist Plaza" the Cuban government uses for protests of U.S. policies. Workers were laboring to fix that as well as other affected lines in the area, it said.

Accidental cuts in power lasting days are not unheard of in Havana, which has an antiquated power grid that the government is working to modernize. The Cuban government runs the power company and it was impossible to independently ascertain the source of the problem.

Granma also objected to the State Department's accusations of other harassment by the Cuban government, including the denial of visas for some U.S. officials Washington assigned to work at the mission.

"Cuba fights with clean weapons," Granma said. "It doesn't have to look for pretexts to harass that office.

"It knows whether to say 'yes' or 'no' to those who they seek to represent the Empire," it added, referring to the rejection of visas for some U.S. officials. "It doesn't look for subterfuge, nor does it cut electrical cables to switch off the written rubbish (on the electronic sign). It does not harass functionaries or representatives of the United States."

Havana and Washington have not had full diplomatic relations since 1961 - two years after Castro came to power.

The U.S. Interests Section in Cuba was opened Sept. 1, 1977, during the administration of then-President Jimmy Carter to provide a minimum of communications between the two countries. Cuba also has an Interests Section in Washington.