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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Cuban Sorrow — Sanctions, Sovereignty, and the Humanitarian Cost

THE HINDU

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The US has maintained economic sanctions on Cuba for over six decades. Can unilateral sanctions ever be justified when they cause widespread civilian suffering?"

WHY IN NEWS

Cuba faces its worst humanitarian crisis in decades after the Trump administration intensified fuel restrictions, cutting off Venezuelan oil supplies and threatening tariffs on nations exporting oil to Cuba. Nationwide blackouts, food shortages, and economic paralysis have followed.

The Editorial Argument

The Hindu editorial frames the Cuba crisis as a case study in the humanitarian cost of prolonged unilateral sanctions. The editorial argues that sanctions that cause widespread civilian suffering — blackouts, food spoilage, medical supply shortages — violate the principles of international humanitarian law and urges the global community, including India, to condemn unilateral coercive measures and uphold sovereignty and dialogue.

Cuba's Current Crisis

IMPACT	DETAIL
Blackouts	Nationwide; 12-18 hours/day in Havana; worse in provinces
Cause	Venezuelan oil supply cut off by US secondary sanctions
Food	Refrigeration failure causing mass food spoilage; rationing intensified
Healthcare	Hospitals operating on generators; drug shortages critical
Migration	Over 400,000 Cubans fled in 2024-25 (via Mexico, Nicaragua, Bahamas)
GDP contraction	Estimated -5% to -7% in 2025-26

The Sanctions Regime — History

The US embargo on Cuba is the longest-running unilateral sanctions regime in modern history:

YEAR	EVENT
1960	US imposes partial trade embargo after Cuba nationalises US-owned properties
1962	Full embargo (Proclamation 3447 under Kennedy); Cuban Missile Crisis
1992	Cuban Democracy Act (Torricelli Act) — tightens embargo, restricts US subsidiary trade
1996	Helms-Burton Act — codifies embargo into law; allows lawsuits against entities using confiscated Cuban property
2014-2016	Obama-era thaw: diplomatic relations restored; embassy reopened; travel restrictions eased
2017-2020	Trump reverses Obama-era openings; reinstates restrictions
2021-2024	Biden era: limited easing; Cuba remains on State Sponsors of Terrorism list
2025-2026	Trump 2.0: Intensified fuel restrictions; secondary sanctions on Venezuelan oil to Cuba

The International Law Question

The UN General Assembly has voted **annually since 1992** to condemn the US embargo on Cuba. The 2024 vote was 187-2 (only the US and Israel voting against). While UNGA resolutions are non-binding, the near-universal opposition reflects the international consensus that unilateral sanctions causing civilian harm violate:

- **UN Charter, Article 2(4):** Non-interference in internal affairs

- **UDHR, Article 25:** Right to adequate standard of living
- **Geneva Conventions:** Protection of civilian populations from collective punishment
- **ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights):** Right to food, health, and adequate living standards

India-Cuba Relations

ASPECT	DETAIL
Diplomatic relations	Established 1959; India was among first countries to recognise revolutionary Cuba
NAM connection	Both founding members of Non-Aligned Movement (Bandung 1955, Belgrade 1961)
UN voting	India consistently votes against US embargo at UNGA
Trade	Bilateral trade ~\$500 million; India supplies pharmaceuticals, rice, IT services
Medical cooperation	Cuba trains Indian doctors; India supplies generic medicines
Joint statement	“South-South cooperation” framework; support for UNSC reform

The Broader Sanctions Debate

The editorial connects the Cuba case to a broader pattern of unilateral sanctions used as geopolitical tools:

TARGET	SANCTIONING ENTITY	DURATION	CIVILIAN IMPACT
Cuba	US	64+ years	Severe
Iran	US (CAATSA, JCPOA withdrawal)	Intermittent since 1979	Severe
Russia	US, EU (post-Ukraine)	Since 2014, intensified 2022	Moderate
North Korea	UN Security Council	Since 2006	Severe
Venezuela	US	Since 2017	Severe

The editorial concludes that India, as a voice of the Global South, should advocate for a multilateral framework governing economic sanctions — ensuring they target decision-makers rather than civilian populations.

UPSC RELEVANCE

US-Cuba embargo history, UNGA voting pattern, Helms-Burton Act, NAM founding, India-Cuba diplomatic relations

Impact of US foreign policy on developing nations; unilateral sanctions vs international law; India's position on sovereignty and non-interference

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

US-CUBA EMBARGO:

Imposed: 1960 (partial); 1962 (full embargo under Kennedy)

Codified: Helms-Burton Act, 1996

UNGA condemnation: Annual since 1992; 2024 vote: 187-2 (US, Israel against)

Obama thaw: 2014-2016; diplomatic relations restored; embassy reopened

Trump 2.0: Intensified restrictions; secondary sanctions on Venezuelan oil

INDIA-CUBA RELATIONS:

Diplomatic relations: 1959; India among first to recognise revolutionary Cuba

NAM: Both founding members (Bandung 1955, Belgrade 1961)

Trade: ~\$500 million bilateral; India supplies pharma, rice, IT

UNGA: India consistently votes against US embargo

INTERNATIONAL LAW ON SANCTIONS:

UN Charter Art. 2(4): Non-interference

UDHR Art. 25: Right to adequate standard of living

ICESCR: Right to food, health, adequate living standards

Geneva Conventions: Protection from collective punishment

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Cuba on US State Sponsors of Terrorism list: Re-designated 2021

Cuban Missile Crisis: October 1962; closest the Cold War came to nuclear war

Cuba's healthcare: Universal; doctor-to-patient ratio among highest globally

Cuban medical diplomacy: 50,000+ doctors serving abroad (Henry Reeve Brigade)

CAATSA: Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (2017)

Sources: [The Hindu](#) , [UN General Assembly](#) , [MEA](#)



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