

Cuban Police Try to Dissuade Rafterers;
Crowds Desert Beaches as Deadline and Rough Weather Approach

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Body

Cuban police began cracking down today on would-be emigrants working furiously to launch rafts ahead of a Tuesday government **deadline** after which no departures by sea will be allowed.

An Interior Ministry **police** captain patrolling this popular beachfront this morning said he was under orders to "persuade" **rafterers** not to leave. He added, however, that **police** were not instructed to interfere with the departures of any rafts already waiting at the **beach**.

Cuba is acting under terms of an accord signed Friday with the United States calling on President Fidel Castro to halt an exodus of **rafterers** that has flooded U.S. detention centers with 30,000 migrants. In exchange, Washington agreed to permit the number of legal **Cuban** migrants to rise from the current 2,700 per year to 20,000.

State-run television said that in compliance with the accord, **police** would immediately begin confiscating any vehicles used to transport rafts to the coast and that drivers would be arrested.

Scores of **police** officers were visible patrolling Havana's seafront Malecon boulevard, while checkpoints were established on key highways leading to **beaches**.

At several of the most popular launching points here in Cojimar, about 11 miles east of Havana, activity had significantly diminished today in comparison with a packed beachfront Friday and Saturday.

Police officers in olive-green uniforms, carrying sidearms and clubs, stood at various points observing the activity. Onlookers, tourists and **beach** vendors stayed away, in contrast to the scene here a week ago when hundreds of observers **crowded** the **beaches** and cheered each launch.

"The Gestapo passed through here early this morning," said Ramon, a Cojimar resident who sold an inner-tube raft for \$ 200. "They told everyone they would have better chances [applying for immigrant visas] at the U.S. Interests Section."

On Saturday, residents here said, the **Cuban** government dispatched students, factory workers and other government employees to circulate among **rafterers** at the **beach** to urge them not to leave.

Whereas on previous days anti-government rhetoric was heard everywhere, the small gathering of onlookers and **rafterers** today seemed reticent in the presence of **police**.

Cuban Police Try to Dissuade Rafters; Crowds Desert Beaches as Deadline and Rough Weather Approach

"The rocks have ears. The rafts have ears. Today is not a good day to believe what you hear," cautioned a man who would identify himself only as Carlos.

The police captain, who would not give his name, said his officers have been told to fire on anyone who makes threatening moves toward police enforcing the ban on rafters. Previously, rafters have warned of violence if police attempted to interfere.

"We are not supposed to shoot anybody ever. Warning shots are allowed, but if you try to attack me, yes, I will shoot you," the captain said. "We will enforce the law by any means necessary, and the law says no more rafts can be transported to the beach."

Nature was poised to offer a helping hand late today as a tropical depression approached southeastern Cuba. Weather forecasters predict high winds, rain and rough seas tonight through Tuesday, threatening to make raft launchings after today a dangerous prospect.

Graphic

CHART, EBB AND FLOW OF CUBAN RAFTERS (CHART NOT AVAILABLE.), TWP

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