

## **Six Mexican states are running short on gasoline, prompting frantic rush to the pumps**

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MEXICO CITY – Mexicans are scrambling for gasoline amid long lines at gas stations and widespread shortages prompted by a change in distribution methods aimed at stemming fuel theft.

State oil company Petroleos Mexicanos said the use of more secure transportation methods has resulted in delays for fuel delivery to gas stations in the states of Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacan, Mexico and Queretaro. It is urging consumers not to panic or hoard gasoline, promising that supply will soon stabilize.

Frantic consumers have made a run on the pumps and social media has been filled with images of gas station signs saying they are out of fuel, and consumers comparing the thin supplies to scarcity for basic goods like bread and milk that plagued Mexico during the 1970s.

The shortage has given ammunition to government critics, who say many of the new administration's policies and goals are throwbacks to past decades.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who took office on Dec. 1, said Sunday that complicity within Petroleos Mexicanos, or Pemex, has allowed the fuel theft to blossom for years, growing from \$500,000 a year more than a decade ago to roughly \$3 billion in stolen fuel last year.

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Lopez Obrador said overhauling the network requires taking on powerful and entrenched interests that have benefited from fuel theft for years. Without going into detail on tactics, the president said Mexico has reduced daily theft to 36 truckloads of fuel from an average of more than 1,000 truckloads a day.

Pemex is trying to stem billions of dollars in losses from criminal gangs that tap pipelines to steal gasoline by instead transporting the fuel via truck. Analysts say truck transport is more expensive, and less efficient.

Gasoline is a hot political issue in Mexico. Former President Enrique Pena Nieto's decision to hike gasoline prices in January 2017 sparked ire that many cite as leading to his party's eventual ouster.