Syria Says Rebels Attacked Gas Pipeline

BEN HUBBARD,Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria has blamed rebels for blowing up a natural gas pipeline Monday in the country's oil-rich east, disrupting distribution.

A statement carried by Syria's state news agency blamed a "terrorist group," the regime's description of rebels seeking to topple President Bashar Assad.

The news agency said the blast Monday some 30 kilometers (18 miles) north of Deir el-Zour caused the loss of around 1.5 million cubic meters of gas. It quoted an Oil Ministry official as saying the station fed electricity plants and a fertilizer factory and that engineers were repairing the leak.

Rebels have repeatedly targeted Syria's oil infrastructure in an effort to sap government finances. Last week, they reported seizing the al-Tanak oil field, also in eastern Syria.

In Damascus, Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi acknowledged the difficulties to the Cabinet on Monday, blaming them on "unfair" international sanctions on Syria and rebel attacks on infrastructure.

"The armed terrorist groups targeted the productive and service institutions and caused huge damage to the national economy and the daily life of the citizens," he said.

Al-Halqi said the government was trying to reopen oil facilities to provide for Syrian's needs.

Anti-regime activists say more than 45,000 people have been killed since the uprising against Assad began in March 2011. Since then, it has evolved into a full-scale civil war with scores of armed groups across the country fighting regime forces.

The war has badly damaged Syria's economy, weakened its currency and led to shortages and price spikes for many basic goods.

Although Russia and China have vetoed efforts to sanction Syria in the U.N. Security Council, the U.S. and European Union have imposed multiple rounds of sanctions on Syria.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an anti-regime activist group, said rebels were clashing with government forces near a number of military bases in the country's north as well as in the central city of Homs and in suburbs southeast of the capital, Damascus.

The group also said 11 rebel fighters were killed in the Damascus suburb of Moadamiyeh, and eight people, including four children and one woman, were killed in government shelling on the al-Marjah area of Aleppo.

Rebels have made gains in recent months, though few expect the war to end soon.

An international plan to end the civil war with a cease-fire and the formation of a transitional government has gone nowhere, mostly because both sides still seek a military victory.

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