Attacked Gas Plant to Partly Resume Work

AOMAR OUALI, Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — The Algerian gas plant that was the scene of a hostage crisis that left dozens of foreigners and militants dead will soon be partially operational, its director announced Thursday during a media tour of the site.

Lotfi Benadouda said one of three gas units of the Ain Amenas plant — which is jointly run by Algeria's Sonatrach, Britain's BP and Norway's Statoil — was only lightly damaged and would be operable soon.

He said that would result in the restoration of 35 percent of the plant's production capacity of 24 million cubic meters of gas a day.

The attack Jan. 16 on one of the most important sites of gas production in this energy-rich country resulted in a four-day hostage standoff between al-Qaida-affiliated militants and the army that ultimately killed at least 37 foreign workers and 29 militants.

In a company statement, Statoil announced that all five missing Norwegian employees had finally been accounted for and confirmed dead. Another 12 company employees survived the attack. The last missing Norwegian to be confirmed dead was 56-year-old Victor Sneberg. Norway sent a forensic team to Algeria to help identify the dead victims.

The trip to the site, some 800 miles (1,300 kilometers) from the capital Algiers, included some 150 foreign journalists, including from Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States.

The site, now heavily guarded, still bore the traces of the fighting, including bullet holes all over the living quarters. In the factory, machinery was blackened from fires and explosions.

"The real drama was in the living quarters where they found the foreigners and seeing that the army had arrived they screamed 'kill them!'" said Benadouda, describing the initial attack by the militants in the early hours of the morning.

Bringing the plant back online is an act of defiance against the attackers, he said, adding, "We have been here since Saturday to show the terrorists that they have failed."

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