

Protesters Storm Oil Field

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BASRA, Iraq (AP) — Protesters demanding jobs stormed the gates leading to a major oil field in southern Iraq on Monday and damaged some property inside before Iraqi soldiers were summoned to restore order, according to officials.

About 150 protesters, who complained about drawn-out job application procedures, broke through the gates of the West Qurna-2 oil field in Basra and began smashing trailer windows and office furniture, according to police officer and an army colonel in the southern Iraqi city.

They said the offices are part of a project at the site being managed by Samsung Engineering.

"These people have been waiting for a long time to get jobs. They were very angry and things got out of control" the army colonel said. "The police couldn't stop them from entering the site, and that's why the army was called in."

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release the information to reporters.

No casualties were reported.

Oil Ministry spokesman Assem Jihad said people who live near the field were demonstrating because they wanted jobs. He said they threw stones at police, but the disturbance did not affect work at the oil field.

Samsung has a nearly \$1 billion contract with Russia's Lukoil to provide engineering and other work at the site. Samsung, based in South Korea, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Basra, which is Iraq's main oil port, has been the scene of sporadic protests in recent weeks by workers of the state-run South Oil Co., who have been pushing for better compensation packages.

Iraq sits atop the world's fourth largest proven reserves of conventional crude, with about 143.1 billion barrels. Oil revenues make up 95 percent of the country's budget.

Associated Press writers Sinan Salaheddin and Adam Schreck in Baghdad contributed reporting.

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