Libyan Militia Surrenders 4 Oil Terminals

ESAM MOHAMED, Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — A key Libyan militia in the east has agreed to hand back control of four oil terminals it captured and shut down last summer in its demand for a share in oil revenues, the official Libyan news agency reported.

The seizure and the shutdown of the terminals has cost Libya billions of dollars and escalated a political crisis that has threatened to plunge the country into even greater turmoil, unseen since the 2011 civil war that ousted longtime strongman Moammar Gadhafi.

After months of a tense standoff — exacerbated by an attempt by the eastern militia to use a North Korean-flagged tanker to export oil from one of the seized terminals — the state news agency LANA reported that a deal was reached with representatives from eastern Libya late on Sunday.

The deal could help bolster the authority of the weak central Libyan government in the face of the country's powerful militias, most of which have drawn their members from the former rebels who fought against Gadhafi.

LANA quoted Justice Minister Salah Margani as saying that under the deal, the militia would immediately hand over the terminals of Zuwaitina and al-Hariga. Two other oil terminals, Ras Lanouf and Sidra, would be returned to government control in two to four weeks.

According to the report, the deal was signed by Ibrahim Jedran, head of a militia demanding more autonomy for eastern Libya, where most of its oil resources are located.

Libya's Justice Ministry website reported the details of the six-point deal. They include an investigation into militia allegations of government corruption in oil sales and also probes into ways to more justly distribute oil revenues among the country's regions, which was a key complaint by the eastern militia.

The deal also includes a planned mediation with the general prosecutor's office to halt any prosecution of militiamen who took part in the seizure of the terminals.

According to the reports, the deal paves way for a smooth handover and return to operations at the terminals, and includes a pledge that there will be no more attempts of mutiny or seizure of oil terminals.

Since Gadhafi's fall, Libya has been torn among multiple rival and heavily armed militias affiliated to regions, cities and tribes, while the central government has been weak, unable to bring its authority over the country, inheriting Gadhafi-era

military and police forces in disarray.

The eastern half of Libya has long complained of discrimination by Tripoli, saying Gadhafi's government starved it of resources during his 42-year rule. In 2012, a group of politicians, activists and some powerful tribes declared autonomy for the region, which is historically called Cyrenaica or, in Arabic, Barqa.

A year later, the Jedran militia, complaining of government corruption — which it claims allegedly marred oil sales — and advocating for regional autonomy, occupied the terminals and shut them down.

In neighboring Egypt, the Cairo international airport announced that flights resumed Monday to the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. All flight were grounded after protesters set up a blockade Sunday around the Benghazi airport and burned tires, demanding the dissolution of parliament. The house was supposed to dissolve in early February but an Islamist-led motion prevailed to extend its mandate by another year.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2015 - 7:39am*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2014/04/libyan-militia-surrenders-4-oil-terminals