

## **Bolivia says retakes station, exports to normalize**

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LA PAZ (Reuters) - Bolivian troops re-took control of a natural gas pumping station that had been occupied by protesters demanding more fuel taxes for their region, and exports to [Brazil](#) and Argentina will normalize by noon on Saturday, a government official said.

A week of protests at plants and pipelines in the southeastern Tarija department forced [Bolivia](#) to cut natural gas exports on Friday by 75 percent to Argentina and by 10 percent to Brazil.

"Exports of natural gas to Argentina will be re-established by midday tomorrow (Saturday)... (all) exports of this important natural resource will be normalized," Presidential Minister Juan Ramon Quintana told reporters in La Paz.

Interior Minister Alfredo Rada said the take-over by security forces was peaceful.

The army dislodged dozens of protesters from the plant run by Royal Dutch Shell Plc Bolivian subsidiary Transredes.

But officials did not say whether or not they had moved out 300 to 500 protesters gathered outside Brazilian company Petrobras's San Alberto field, which also lies in the Tarija region, near the Argentine border.

On Friday evening the San Alberto protesters had vowed to step up the pressure.

"We could even determine to seize control of the plant... we're going to take drastic measures," protest leader Delio Aguilera said outside the field.

### EXPORTS WERE CUT

YPFB executive Sebastian Daroca said on Friday morning that the occupation of the Transredes pumping station had had a knock-on effect on San Alberto's production, because the field cannot send away liquid fuels it produces, and it has nowhere to keep them.

Daroca said San Alberto's output was reduced to 3.4 million cubic meters a day from 10 million cubic meters a day, reducing supplies to Argentina to 1.2 million cubic meters a day from 5 million cubic meters a day, and also cutting supplies to Brazil.

Argentina and Brazil are Bolivia's only natural gas customers.

Argentina said on Friday it would likely cut its own exports to Chile due to the Bolivia cut.

"We are confident that the Bolivian government will reverse this situation by Sunday and that gas supplies to Brazil will not be affected," Brazilian Mining and Energy Minister Silas Rondeau told reporters in Rio de Janeiro earlier on Friday.

He said his Bolivian counterpart assured him that Brazil would be given priority in terms of natural gas deliveries.

Protests this week in Tarija stem from a boundary dispute between two districts wrestling for a share of state revenue from one of the country's largest natural gas fields.

The stakes are high for regions that sit on natural gas, since energy companies are paying much higher taxes since leftist President Evo Morales nationalized the energy industry last year.

Local governments share the new energy taxes with the national government and Morales has promised to use the proceeds from South America's second-largest natural gas reserves to fight poverty and kickstart the economy.

Tarija is home to 85 percent of the country's natural gas reserves, and energy majors such as Spain's Repsol YPF and [France's](#) Total also operate natural gas fields there.