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Business Story

Libyans queue for petrol as oil shortage fears rise

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FEARS of an oil shortage in Tripoli are making people's lives a "nightmare", forcing many to spend the night in their cars at petrol stations in a bid to be first in line to fill up their tank.

"I have been waiting in vain for three days to have fuel for my car," said Fuad Arabi, a doctor who works in one of Tripoli's hospitals.

"I live far from my work and if I do not get fuel, I can't get to work."

The authorities in the oil-rich country have moved to scotch rumours circulating in Tripoli that a fuel shortage was imminent, saying oil distribution companies had "large quantities" of the commodity.

But the assurances have not stopped endless queues from forming at petrol stations in the Libyan capital.

"It is a nightmare that is haunting the people of Tripoli," said Salema Gheryani, a 30-year-old teacher. "I have been queuing for four hours now."

Faisal Shami, a 50-year-old engineer, said he had to leave his car at the petrol station.

"I will not go to work tomorrow, but I will return here in the morning and hopefully I will be able to fill up my car," he said as he left a Tripoli petrol station. "It is the war. I am afraid things will get worse, and prices will soar."

The National Oil Corporation said last week that production had plummeted to 400,000 barrels per day as a result of the insurrection shaking the country for more than a month and spurring the mass evacuation of foreign workers.

Most oil companies operating in Libya, including France's Total and China's CNPC, have partly or

completely shut down production since the uprising erupted against Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi.

Libya has the largest known oil reserves in Africa, and is the continent's fourth biggest producer.

The official *JANA* news agency has insisted that oil distribution companies say the large quantities of oil that they have would be enough to cover all demand.

Many people spend the night in cars waiting for their turn, as armed men stand guard at petrol stations to break up possible quarrels.

The crisis has led to a taxi shortage, too.

"I think I will stop working. I do not know how I will manage," said one taxi driver. "I have a large family, there are nine of us. How am I going to feed everyone?"

But Yusef Bash, 75, was optimistic. "The crisis will pass. The world will not stop because there is no petrol left," he said.

"We can live the same way we lived in the past. The most important thing now is the country. May God protect it and its people."

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