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Greenpeace Ends Standoff With Gazprom

By Roland Oliphant

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Activists attaching their boat to mooring lines linking a support ship and the Prirazlomnaya oil platform Tuesday. **Denis Sinyakov**

Greenpeace activists have left the vicinity of the Prirazlomnaya oil rig, bringing to an end a five-day standoff at Gazprom's pioneering ice-class oil platform.

But the group promised further actions against both Gazprom and other oil firms interested in Arctic drilling, like Shell and Statoil.

"Our actions delayed efforts here by a couple of days. And given how narrow the window is to begin drilling, we must hope that buys us more time to continue our campaign on land," said Kumi Naidoo, executive director of the environmental group, by satellite phone from the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise.

Greenpeace said the vessel left the vicinity of the rig after one final attempt by activists to

prevent the Anna Akhmatova supply ship from docking with the platform early Tuesday morning.

Activists attached a speedboat to a mooring line between the Anna Akhmatova, which acts as a dormitory for workers on the rig, and the platform in an attempt to prevent a shift change at about 5 a.m. Tuesday morning.

As the mooring line tightened, the boat rose into the air and capsized, and activists were thrown into the sea. Greenpeace said both the boat and its crew were recovered unharmed.

The group spent five days trying to disrupt operations at the oil platform, beginning with a 15-hour occupation of the rig by climbers on Friday.

On Monday, activists in inflatable speedboats attached themselves to the anchor chain of the Anna Akhmatova for several hours before being dislodged by high-pressure hoses.

Scientists reported Monday that sea ice in the Arctic had fallen to the lowest level on record.

Gazprom is one of several oil and gas companies hoping to access new deposits as the region warms, plans that are opposed by environmentalists.

Kumi said an online petition supporting a ban on mineral exploitation, industrial fishing and military activity in the region had gathered signatures at the rate of seven a second since the start of the action on Friday.

But analysts doubted that either Gazprom or the Russian government would shift policy toward the region.

“Gazprom is never going to abandon a project they’ve already invested so much money in,” said Denis Borisov, an oil and gas analyst at Nomos-Bank.

“Nor will Russia abandon other plans to develop Arctic fields. Production in Siberian fields has already peaked, and in 20 years it will fall critically. The country needs an alternative, and the Arctic is the most promising option,” he added.

A spokeswoman for Gazprom Neft Shelf asked for questions to be submitted by e-mail.

No answer to inquiries was received Tuesday.

Prirazlomnaya is the world’s first ice-resistant oil platform and will make Gazprom the first company to commercially produce oil from offshore deposits in the Arctic when it comes online.

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