

Ilyumzhinov Says Gadhafi Wants Rebel Talks

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The  **Moscow Times**

Moammar Gadhafi's oldest son has said the Libyan leader is willing to negotiate with rebels to end the violence that has gripped the country since February, former Kalmykia leader Kirsan Ilyumzhinov said after a trip to Tripoli.

Ilyumzhinov, head of the World Chess Federation and a previous visitor to Libya, said in an interview that he met with Gadhafi's eldest son, Mohammed, during his three-day visit.

"Gadhafi is ready to conduct talks with the rebels without any conditions in order to stop the bombings," Ilyumzhinov said, relaying information that he said Mohammed Gadhafi had told him.

"They want dialogue, and in that dialogue Gadhafi is ready to work out plans with other sides for an election or a referendum," he added, speaking by telephone from Moscow's World Chess Federation headquarters.

The New York Times has called Ilyumzhinov an informal go-between for the Kremlin

and Libya, a role he denied he plays. He said he has gone to Libya to inspect the state of chess schools in the country and carries no messages from Moscow.

Ilyumzhinov's comments came as Kommersant said Tuesday that Gadhafi was sounding out the possibility of handing over power, but the Libyan government denied it was in talks about the veteran leader stepping down.

Ilyumzhinov also denied the report that Gadhafi was seeking to negotiate his exit from Libya and was looking for guarantees for his security if he were to leave.

"Such talk comes from people who have no idea what is happening inside the country. Mohammed said his father has no intention of leaving," Ilyumzhinov said.

Five months into a conflict that has embroiled NATO and become the bloodiest of the Arab Spring uprisings, there has been a flurry of reports about talks on Gadhafi ending his 41 years in power in exchange for security guarantees.

Russia on Monday held talks with NATO that were dominated by differences between the once Cold War foes over the North Atlantic bloc's mission in the country. Russia abstained in a UN vote that authorized Western force in Libya, but has criticized the scope of the mission since.

Ilyumzhinov travels regularly to Libya and previously met with Gadhafi in June, when he had the chance to play chess with the colonel.

"He looked in good shape, we drank tea together, he is a good player," said Ilyumzhinov, who cuts a colorful figure in Russia with claims to have been abducted by aliens.

One of Gadhafi's motives for wanting to stay in the country, Ilyumzhinov said, includes the belief that his support among Libyans is strong enough to win an election or referendum following an end to violence.

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