

Tens of thousands of people in more than 50 cities in Serbia protested on December 4 against the referendum law, the expropriation law and Rio Tinto's plans to build a lithium mine near Loznica.

As they announced earlier, protesters blocked all major roads throughout Serbia at 2 pm. In Belgrade, protesters blocked all bridges in the city, except the Old Sava Bridge.

The police had to intervene in Novi Sad when a group of about 30 young men attacked the protesters. But the protesters united, beat up the hooligans and forced them to flee. Violent incidents were also reported in Belgrade, Stara Pazova, Vranje and Valjevo.

Protesters, led by a number of environmental organisations, have expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the expropriation law passed by the Serbian parliament, arguing that the law allows the state to be "sold" to foreign corporations such as Rio Tinto.

The Rio Tinto project is one of the most hated projects in Serbia, with many Serbs seeing it as classic neo-colonialism, which will only bring pollution to the country.

Serbian journalist Boris Malagurski recently made a very popular documentary about Rio Tinto in Serbia, highlighting all the bad aspects of Rio Tinto's work around the world.

Some opposition political representatives in Serbia have tried to use the protests to confront the current government. Dragan Djilas, leader of the Party of Freedom and Justice, appeared at the protests in Belgrade.

However, he, like other opposition leaders, said that although he supported the protests he had nothing to do with their organisation.

Serbian Defence Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic said that while the people are suffering, Djilas and the like are trying to provoke instability and return to power at any cost, against the will of the people. "President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic is talking to people in the Loznica region, and these are the people Djilas is leading to blockades in Belgrade," he said.

During the protest, Vucic visited the villages around Loznica, where there is the greatest concern about the research conducted by Rio Tinto. He appealed to the citizens to keep in mind that the exit of investors from Serbia is very expensive and reiterated that no one from Belgrade will make a decision against their interests.

"We will solve the problem related to the law on expropriation in the next seven to eight days," he said.

The Jadar lithium project will help Rio Tinto meet demand for lithium, which is expected to grow strongly in the coming years as the metal is used in electric car batteries, consumer electronics like smartphones and other applications. According to Rio Tinto, if the project goes ahead, the company will become Europe's biggest lithium supplier for 15 years.

The protests ended late Saturday afternoon, and organisers announced new protests next

Saturday.

After the protest, the Minister of Finance Sinisa Mali said that the amendments to the newly adopted Law on Expropriation should be discussed by the government of Serbia at the session scheduled for December 9.

He said the law on expropriation recently adopted by parliament had not yet been signed by Vucic, adding that the law was in line with the constitution, but would be amended due to the short deadline of just five days to decide on the sale of property.

According to Mali, the amendments to the Law on Expropriation were not made due to the Jadar project or the Rio Tinto lithium mine in western Serbia, an accusation made by protesters.

Source: intellinews.com