

Romania asked UNESCO Thursday to delay a decision on whether to accord world heritage list status to the Rosia Montana gold-mining region, the latest twist in a long-running saga. Known since antiquity for its large gold deposits, northwestern Rosia Montana is one of 30 candidates being considered by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee meeting in Bahrain. The precise reasons for Bucharest's request were not clear.

But in a statement the Romanian culture ministry implied that the UNESCO decision could have a bearing on whether or not it would have to pay damages in a case brought by Canadian mining company Gabriel Resources.

It said it had asked UNESCO to delay the decision until the complaint brought by Gabriel Resources had been settled, "to protect the national assets and financial interests of the Romanian state".

"We are not willing to pay \$4 billion from the pocket of the Romanian citizen," the ministry's statement said.

The site has been the subject of wrangling dating back almost 20 years to 1999, when Gabriel Resources first won a licence to exploit the site.

The firm said it could extract 300 tons of gold over a period of 14 years using a method that would involve using cyanide.

However, the project sparked protests from activists who feared the environmental impact of toxic waste on nearby villages and in 2014 the Romanian Parliament shelved the project. Gabriel Resources took the case to a World Bank tribunal, demanding \$4.4bn (3.8bn euros) in damages from the Romanian state.

Many NGOs have urged the government to back UNESCO designation, saying that it would help stimulate development and attract tourism and that the government is mistaken to link the issue to Gabriel Resources' complaint.

The UNESCO committee meeting runs until July 4.

Source: dailystar