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SERBIA

'It's over': months of protests force Serbian government to scrap planned lithium mine



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@rahulsai222



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Serbia cancels plan for lithium mine following protests

Following weeks of major protests, the Serbian government has put an end to a planned lithium mine in Serbia. Protesters still want to push for a complete ban on lithium mines.

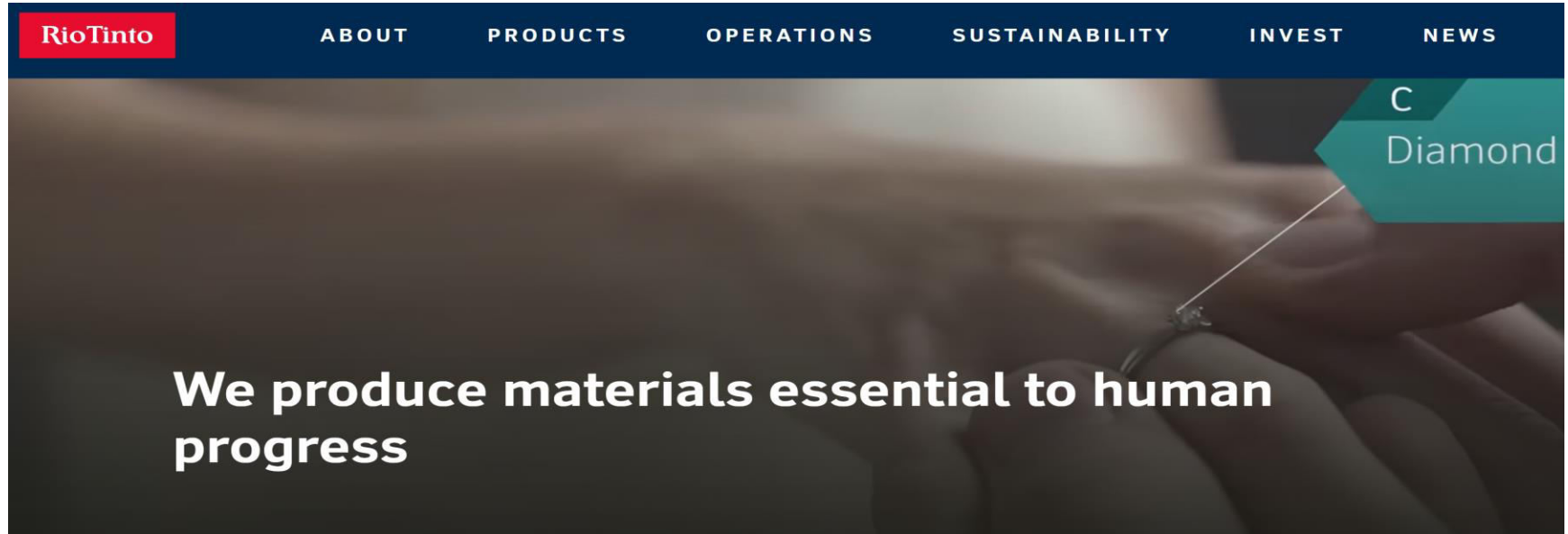
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The News

- Recently, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic announced the cancellation of a plan to allow **Australian mining giant Rio Tinto to build a lithium mine in Serbia.**
- The decision marks a **U-turn for the Brnabic government after months of weekly protests that brought thousands out onto the streets.**

Why the Protests?



Rio Tinto has bought up land in the Loznica region after discovering lithium deposits in 2004. The company had planned to invest \$2.4 billion (€2.12 billion) in the project. Lithium is a key component in modern technologies like electric cars.

Why the Protests?

- Serbians have been taking to the streets, blocking main roads and bridges and halting traffic, to protest against Rio Tinto's plans to mine lithium in the Jadar valley near Lozinca town in the country.
- According to sources, the lithium mine would have produced enough lithium to operate one million electric vehicles along with boric acid and sodium sulphate. When fully functional, the mine would have created "58,000 tonnes of refined battery-grade lithium carbonate" every year, which would have made it Europe's most lithium-producing mine.

Where is this happening?



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The Real Reasons

- Serbia is ranked as Europe's fifth and the world's 32nd most polluted country in a list of 98 countries.
 - Serbia is one of the top ten countries with the most deaths due to pollution — 175 deaths per 100,000.
 - Serbian capital Belgrade is surrounded by lignite mines and coal power plants powered by these mines, which only make the pollution worse.

The Real Reasons

- Adding to the already worsening pollution problem, **the government has recently brought two controversial laws in November 2021:**
 1. **Law on referendum** (Referendum law lowers the referendum requirement and states that it would not anymore require 50 per cent of the registered voters to turn out for a referendum to pass)
 2. **Law on Expropriation** (The expropriation law would allow for a speedy expropriation of property, specifically within five days)

The Project Tanked

- Trying to defuse large protests by environmentalists, **Serbia's populist government decided to cancel all licenses for mining giant Rio Tinto to open a lithium mine near the town of Loznica in the west of the country.**
- **Serbian PM:**
 - “We have fulfilled all the requests of the environmental protests and put an end to Rio Tinto in the Republic of Serbia. **Everything is finished. It's over.**” PM Ana Brnabić also accused Rio Tinto of not disclosing all essential information about the project.

Is Rio Tinto at fault?

- The protestors have been pointing out that lithium mining in the \$2.4-billion project would irrevocably pollute the drinking water. **Rio Tinto has said that, it will fulfil all Serbia's and European Union's environmental standards.**
- Rio Tinto is not the only mining company to which the Serbian government had sold land rights to, the government had also sold land to China's Zijin copper miner.
- The protestors are also protesting against President Aleksandar Vučić who had called China to be a "saviour" for its copper mining projects in Serbia at the Bor copper mine.
- **Critics in Serbia have argued that by sidelining Rio Tinto, the government is doing damage control ahead of April general elections.**