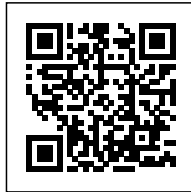


MONGOLIANS PROTEST TO DEMAND TRANSPARENCY AND ACTION AGAINST CORRUPTION

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Hundreds of people have been demonstrating at Sukhbaatar square in the capital Ulaanbaatar since last Sunday amid a corruption scandal.

Protestors are demanding the identities of government officials linked to the “coal theft” be made public and held responsible.

Authority Against Corruption of Mongolia announced this November that a large amount of coal, Mongolia's main export product, may have been sold and embezzled.

No official numbers on the amount of coal have been announced. Amarbayasgalan Dashzegve, the Chief of Cabinet Secretariat, stated that 385,000 tonnes of coal were “stolen” from Mongolia's Tavan Tolgoi coal deposit - one of the world's largest untapped coking coal deposits, and was being investigated by law enforcement authorities.

Dorjkhand Togmid, a member of the opposition in the parliament, made a statement that the amount of stolen coal was valued at MNT 40 trillion (about USD 11.6 billion). However, some parliament members say his calculations are unreasonable.

Protestors mainly consist of the younger generation, demanding action against corruption, transparency, and the dismissal of the current cabinet. On the second day of the rally, protesters stormed into the Government Palace, breaking the metal fences surrounding the building. Christmas trees were burned, and main roads were blocked. But since the 4th day, the protests have been relatively peaceful.

On Wednesday Prime Minister of Mongolia L.Oyun-Erdene came out in front of the Government Palace to reassure protesters that the scandal would be “solved” and the responsible government officials would be punished. The government has proposed to create a task force of about 100 people to investigate the coal theft, and plans to hold a public hearing on December 21.

15 officials are being investigated in connection with the theft of coal, and some of them have been arrested. The officials allegedly leveraged their ownership of coal mines and companies that transport coal to China to make illegal profits.

Mining export, specifically coking coal export to China is a pillar of the Mongolian economy. A quarter of the country’s gross domestic product and about 90 percent of total export comes from the mining sector.

However, the coal scandal is just the tip of the iceberg that triggered the rallies. Rising inflation, low wages, general dissatisfaction, and frustration with the economic and social situation in Mongolia are the main factors for the continuous and adamant protests. Inflation reached 14.5% this October.