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NEWS

# Bolivians protest over lithium deal with German company

Locals are demanding more benefits from a planned German lithium project. The raw material is key to expanding battery cell production for electric cars.



Demonstrators on Monday launched a series of rolling protests demanding the Bolivian government grant more benefits from a massive lithium project with Germany's privately owned ACI Systems.

Residents in the province of Potosi say they will not receive enough royalties from the plan to build a factory for electric vehicle batteries and a lithium hydroxide plant.

*Read more:* [Germany hopes to mine lithium, the white gold of e-mobility](#)

Protesters marched and blockaded streets in the first of a series of protests planned by the Potosi Civic Committee, which will amplify their demands in the coming days with public and education strikes if President Evo Morales doesn't respond.

The committee's president, Marco Antonio Pumari, and its general secretary, Josefina Zuleta, are on a hunger strike in the capital, La Paz.

The [Uyuni salt pans](#) are believed to have one of the world's largest deposits of lithium, a key raw material for battery cell production.

*Demand for battery metals such as cobalt, nickel and lithium is soaring as the German auto industry scrambles to build more electric cars and*



Pumari and Zuleta during their hunger strike

[The joint venture between Bolivian state company YLB and ACI systems](#) aims to produce up to 40,000 tons of lithium hydroxide per year over a period of 70 years, beginning in 2022.

More than 80% of the lithium will be exported to Germany, Wolfgang Schmutz, CEO of ACI Group, the parent company of ACI Systems, said last December.

German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier has urged German industries to secure raw materials for electric batteries to reduce dependence on Asian suppliers.

*Read more: [Does Europe, does Germany really need its own battery cells?](#)*

President Morales has sought to avoid lithium being exported only as a raw material — and Germany's willingness to build production facilities in the country helped it secure the joint venture over seven rivals from Canada, Russia and China.

The Bolivian government says the project will bring jobs to a poor region of the Andean country.

It blames the opposition for organizing the protests ahead of Bolivia's October 20 presidential election, in which Morales is seeking a fourth term.

cw/stb (AP, EFE, Reuters)

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