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10,000 Protest in Moldova Over Missing $1.5 Billion

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CHISINAU, Moldova — About 10,000 people staged an anti-government protest in Moldova's capital on Sunday, demanding a probe into the up to $1.5 billion that disappeared from three of the country's banks last year.

Some protesters scuffled with police and tried to push their way into Parliament. Protesters gathered in a main square in Chisinau for the fifth consecutive week of anti-government demonstrations, which began on Sept. 6.

Protesters want a probe into the missing money and for those responsible to be prosecuted. The losses were covered by state reserves in Moldova, one of Europe's poorest countries.

Vasile Nastase, a leader of the Dignity and Truth nongovernmental organization which has staged the protests said: "From tomorrow, we will declare acts of civil disobedience." He urged Moldovans not to pay bills, and to go on strike in state institutes, such as schools. "We will block this government."

Protesters are also demanding early elections and for the president, the prime minister

and others to resign.

Separately, in the past 24 hours, two crews from Russia's NTV television channel have not been allowed to enter Moldova. They were stopped at the airport and later sent back to Moscow, the station reported. Moldovan authorities said they did not have local press accreditation.

On Saturday, two pro-Russian parties erected about 250 tents near Parliament, blocking the capital's main street. They took the tents down Sunday.

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