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Russia Hopes Armenia Can Solve Problems Via Dialogue – Foreign Ministry

By Reuters

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Artyom Geodakyan / TASS

The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that Moscow hoped that Armenia's ruling party and the opposition could hold talks about their differences, the RIA news agency reported.

“We hope... that all political forces will show a responsibility and readiness for constructive dialogue,” Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters, according to RIA.

Armenia will get a new prime minister next week after nearly two weeks of street protests, with opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan, who has led the demonstrations, shaping up as the favorite.

The demonstrations, driven by public anger over perceived political cronyism and corruption, looked to have peaked on Monday when Serzh Sargsyan quit as prime minister.

But demonstrators have made clear they view the whole system tainted by his drive to shift power to the premier from the president. They want a sweeping political reconfiguration before ending their protests, which continued on Thursday.

Although the demonstrations have been peaceful, the upheaval has threatened to destabilize Armenia, an ally of Russia, in a volatile region riven by its decades-long, low-level conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan.

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Moscow has two military bases in the ex-Soviet republic, and Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke to Armenian President Armen Sarkissian by phone on Wednesday.

They agreed that political forces must show restraint and solve the crisis through dialogue, the Kremlin said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held talks in Moscow on Thursday with his Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandian, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Armenia's acting vice premier, Armen Gevorkyan, also met Russian presidential administration officials to discuss the situation in Armenia, relations between the two countries and preparations for the upcoming summit of the Russia-led economic Union.

Protest leader Pashinyan said on Wednesday he had received assurances from Russian officials that Moscow would not intervene in the crisis, and Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian was in Moscow on Thursday for talks.

Earlier this week he ruled out challenging the presence of Russian military bases in Armenia or the country's membership in Russia-led military and economic alliances.

'A People's Prime Minister'

Armenia's ruling elite has been scrambling to try to appease the protesters and the parliamentary speaker said on Thursday parliament would elect a new prime minister on May 1.

Protest leader Pashinyan, a former journalist turned lawmaker who has been instrumental in organizing the protests, has said he is ready to become prime minister.

Pashinyan, if elected, wants to reform the electoral system to ensure it is fair before holding new parliamentary elections.

"We will have a people's prime minister and after the election a people's government and parliament," said Anna Agababyan, a 38-year-old teacher who was protesting in Yerevan, the capital, on Thursday, holding a small national flag.

Armen Sarkissian, the president, on Thursday hailed what he called "a new page" in Armenia's history and called on lawmakers to help forge a new country while respecting the existing constitution.

Pashinyan and his allies have been busy trying to build support for him with the ruling Republican Party and other parties and Pashinyan is expected to hold talks with Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of the second-biggest party in parliament, later on Thursday.

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