

## Tragic road accident in Shatili



By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, on the 64<sup>th</sup> kilometer of Zhinvali-Barisakho-Shatili highway, a minibus fell down an 80-meter rocky slope. The minibus that was carrying 20 passengers belonged to a travel agency. 17 passengers died as a result of an accident and 3 of the survivors have been transported to the hospital. Flags of all administrative buildings across Georgia will be flying at half-mast in honor of the 17 travelers.

According to doctors, those who survived the accident are in heavy condition.

According to PIA, one of the Georgian media outlets, the minibus had not been checked within the defined date of technical inspection. The information is confirmed by the Technical Inspection Service, where they state that the deadline for inspection for the mentioned minibus was July 13<sup>th</sup>.

According to reports, before falling into the ravine, the minibus hit an empty car, parked near the road, as a result of which, the minibus slid and fell down the slope.

The majority of the passengers were young people. The families of the deceased indi-

viduals lay the responsibility for the accident on the tourist agency. They believe that the safety standards of the passengers were not protected.

The investigation has started under

article 276 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which means the violation of traffic safety rules or rules for operating transport.



The employees of the travel agency Traveler.ge have already been questioned.

### Politics

Opposition parties sign memorandum on the protection of votes

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James Stavridis, a former NATO leader, speaks on Georgia and NATO

Former NATO Commander-in-Chief Admiral James Stavridis talks about Georgia's chances of entering NATO and what has to be done for it



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# Opposition parties sign memorandum on the protection of votes

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

30 opposition parties signed a memorandum on August 24th, according to which, representatives of the parties agree to protect their own as well as each others votes during elections. The memorandum was signed at the labour party office and considering the preliminary information, the parties that did not participate in the current meeting will also join the declaration. According to the declaration, the headquarter responsible for the protection of the votes of the electors will be created.

As it was stated after the meeting, the parties will have a collective database, where the violations observed during the elections will be noted. Also, a common coordination mechanism will come into force, which will define how parties should react to possible violations.

The leaders of the opposition



The declaration was elaborated on August 18<sup>th</sup>.

parties state that the declaration will be somewhat prevention of rigging the elections.

“We will protect not only ours but also the votes of every elector so that none of the votes will be stolen,” said Tina Bokuchava, a member of the United National

Movement. Another opposition party member David Bakradze stated: “Up to 30 opposition parties, the majority, agree to protect each-others votes. This is a very powerful political signal about the unity of the opposition.”



Parliamentary elections in Georgia are scheduled on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

The declaration reads that the opposition parties believe that it is their most important task to strengthen public trust and support towards elections. They plan to work in coordination in every region, including the ones where parties have nominated competing candidates. The declaration reads that the task of the par-

ties is not to protect the votes of electors of individual political taste but to protect the transparency of the election process as well as the choice of every citizen.

Parties have agreed to jointly work in coordination with international observers to assure the legitimacy of the elections.

# James Stavridis, a former NATO leader, speaks on Georgia and NATO



The former commander-in-chief of NATO also talks about the occupied territories and their importance.

By ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

James Stavridis, a former NATO leader stated it will be very difficult to persuade the Allies to help the Alliance return Georgian territory. However, he believes that if Georgia becomes a member of the alliance first and then tries to return the occupied territo-

ries, it will make it easier to persuade all NATO members. Stavridis says that during the invasion of Georgia, Russia first used hybrid warfare methods, which were later refined.

“I think at that time there was still hope that somehow we could reset this relationship, we would find a better way, we would not suddenly enter a new Cold War. We have not properly assessed Vladimir Putin and his antipathy, his personal, deep hatred of the United States, and NATO itself. So we took the opportunity - we didn't have a strong enough reaction in terms of economic sanctions, military equipment or training, to make sure that the rest of Georgia became a difficult target for Russia and that they would not dare to do anything else. I think if we had done that, the tragedy in Ukraine would not have happened either,” said Stavridis.

As more time passes, South Ossetia and Abkhazia become frozen conflicts. According to Stavridis, it increases

Georgia's chances of joining NATO.

“I think that Georgia, in particular, has gained its place in NATO, whether it is the result of the war in Afghanistan or the courage with which it opposes the oppressive state.

If I were Georgian or Ukrainian, I would try to consolidate and enter under NATO tents and get these territories back. In any case, it is a very difficult path, but if I were you, I would rather be a member of NATO than a NATO partner. However, I would like to add that it is up to Georgians to decide, not Americans, or the former NATO leaders. This is a decision of the country, which is in a very difficult position,” claimed Stavridis.

The former Admiral also added that when they look at their partners and allies, they should have very, very strong positions against Vladimir Putin, and that should include military, economic and diplomatic efforts.

Georgia is a strong partner of NATO and a particularly strong partner for the United States. Georgia's economy, like all other countries' economies, faces challenges. However, the fundamental factor, which is human capital, is extremely high in Georgia. It is a small country with great potential that has a bright future ahead, despite the difficulties it has faced in the last 12 years since the Russian invasion.



What will make it easier for Georgia to join NATO when the Russian army continues to occupy 20 percent of the country?

## Weather

Tuesday, August 25

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 25°C  
Night Clear  
Low: 15°C

Wednesday, August 26

Day Clear  
High: 27°C  
Night Clear  
Low: 15°C

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# Parliamentary budget office predicts a 90% decrease in tourism in Q3



In the first half of 2020, the Georgian economy shrank by 5.8%. The decline in the second quarter was -12.6%.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

According to the forecast of the Parliamentary Budget Office, the real GDP growth rate in the third quarter of 2020 will be negative (-6.2%). Office analysts say the expected decline in GDP is still due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

“Despite the lifting or easing of various types of restrictions in some cases, the shock of external demand is still significant, and in the face of the global pandemic, the global value chain is still significantly disrupted, leading to supply shocks,” the budget office said in a statement.

As for other forecasts, according to the Parliamentary Budget Office says that private investment will decrease, which, despite the government’s investment activities, significantly contributes to the reduction of total investment and the mentioned negative pace of economic activity.

Along with the sharp decline in trade in services, a decline in trade in goods is also expected. In parallel with reduced consumption and private investment, it is expected that the imports of goods will be significantly reduced. Due to similar

developments in the world, it is expected that the demand for exports will decrease and, consequently, the volume of exports of goods will decrease.

Compared to the third quarter of 2019, the volume of tourism will decrease by about 90%, at the same time the number of tourists leaving the country will be sharply reduced. The document states that a significant decrease in tourism exports will be partially offset by domestic tourism activity.

According to the Georgian National Tourism Administration, 45,842 international visitors visited Georgia in July 2020, which is 94.8% less than the same period last year.

In the second quarter of this year, Georgian residents made 36,691 visits abroad, which is 93.5% less than in the same period last year, according to a re-

port published by Geostat on tourism in the second quarter.

Like the record decline in international visitors to Georgia, the high decline in outbound tourism is explained by the COVID 19 pandemic.

According to statistics, the majority of visits - 88.2% - were made by men, which is probably since, during the pandemic, the majority of visitors went for freight transportation, while the majority of truck drivers are men.

However, according to the data published by Geostat, the age of the majority of visits (48.4%) in the second quarter of this year is 31-50 years.

In the first half of 2019, Georgian residents made 1 million visits abroad, and in the first half of this year - 489.2 thousand, which is a decrease of 53.2%.



In July 2020, the total number of 45,842 visits made by international visitors to Georgia was 94.8% less than the same period last year.



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