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# New 'Dona cluster' in Batumi, all restrictions lifted in Mestia-Lenjeri



► Employees as well as the owner of Dona Bake Shop tested positive for COVID-19.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The epidemiological situation in Batumi, Adjara region has escalated after employees in both branches of the confectionery shop 'Dona' tested positive for the COVID-19. Out of 38 recently confirmed coronavirus cases countrywide, 22 of them are from the 'Dona cluster'. The infected individuals are mostly employees of the shop, however, it is yet unknown how far the virus has spread.

The confectionery shop Dona has published a statement explaining that they had been following and abiding all the recommendations closely since day one. All the infected are under medical treatment, the persons in contact with them have been quarantined and the confectionery shop remains closed.

According to the head of NCDC, Amiran Gamkrelidze, the situation is not alarming and the lockdown of Batumi does not remain on the agenda. He

stated that epidemiological research will be extended there. One more tent will be put up in the boulevard which makes a total of three tents where free testing is available.

Also, there are 3 laboratories in Batumi working on taking 1600-1800 tests daily. Gamkrelidze calls on everyone who has visited the bakeshop to monitor their health and immediately contact 112 in case any symptoms occur.

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated that even though the epidemiological situation in Batumi has worsened compared to the other regions of Georgia, the lockdown of Batumi is not up for discussion. As he noted, there is a high concentration of tourists in Batumi right now, therefore intensification of testing is needed.

As for the Svaneti region, the government has lifted all the restrictions there. Mestia and Lenjeri were closed on August 10th, after 17 new cases were detected in the village of Lenjeri. The police had been observing quarantine restrictions for 22 days in continuous mode; eventually, the coordination council decided to free the region of all the restrictions.

"We handled a possible epidemic outbreak in Mestia-Lenjeri and managed to operate successfully, that is why all the restrictions are lifted since the epidemiological situation enables us to do so," the PM said at the coordination council meeting.

On September 2nd, the highest rate of COVID-19 cases has been recorded since April. 38 new cases have been confirmed. Gamkrelidze stated that in up to 15 cases, the source of the infection is unknown. In total, out of 1548 confirmed cases, 1270 patients have already recovered. Unfortunately, 19 people died from COVID infection.



► Mestia, Svaneti region.

# Ousted de-facto gov't and mass protests - What's happening in Tskhinvali?

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Hundreds of protesters, including Jabiev's relatives and representatives of so-called opposition parties, have been hitting the streets of Tskhinvali center, demanding the resignation of Kremlin-backed leader Anatoly Bibilov and the occupied region's 'prosecutor general' Uruzmag Jagaev over the death of 28-year-old inmate Inal Jabiev.

Protests erupted following reports about Jabiev's death on the 28th of August, after his hospitalization from the detention facility, where the inmate had been allegedly subjected to severe beatings. The young man was detained on attempted murder of the occupied region's then 'interior minister' Igor Naniev. Jabiev's relatives say that he was tortured in the Tskhinvali police station for two days, which caused his death. The situation in the Tskhinvali region escalated after the photos of Dzhabiev's body were published on social media. The photos showed that the deceased young man had injuries on his body.

Anatoly Bibilov, Moscow-backed leader of the Tskhinvali region first responded to the protests by firing Naniev, and the entire 'government' following late on August 28th. Bibilov's decision was preceded by a resignation notice of Erik Pukhaev, 'prime minister' of the Kremlin-backed region. Bibilov said that the lack of professionalism of law enforcers caused the tragic death of the 30-year-old man.

RES media agency reported that Tskhinvali's prosecution bodies have detained 7 suspects in relation to Jabiev's death, they all happen to be staff members of the 'interior ministry.'

No official charges have been yet brought as investigations are still underway and forensic medical examination has been scheduled.

The so-called Tskhinvali Ombudsman Inal Tasoev says Nikolai Tskhovrebov, who was detained



► The so-called Opposition lawmakers say they will not continue working in the de facto parliament until the so-called interior minister and prosecutor general is held accountable.



► Protest rallies in the so-called occupied Tskhinvali were followed by the resignation of the government.

along with Inal Jabiev, was also beaten. According to Tasoev, he is in the hospital and told the 'ombudsman' about the methods of torture against him in the pre-trial detention. According to the publication 'Kavkazsky Uzel', another detainee, Gennady Kulaev, was reportedly beaten.

Ex-leader Eduard Kokoity, Russian-backed Tskhinvali leader in 2001-2011, posted a video ad-

dress on his Instagram profile, calling Bibilov to immediately resign. Kokoity said Bibilov had "declared war against his own people" and threatened his return to Tskhinvali/South Ossetia if his demands were not met.

Note that according to the media 'Caucasus Real' the former so-called President Kokoity was not allowed in the occupied region, on the basis of 'restricted

border control due to coronavirus.' Jagaev has announced the conditions upon which he will resign following protests sparked by the death of resident Jabiev while in police custody. Jagaev says he will resign if the so-called MPs who led the protest rallies in the region following the death of the 28-year-old also resign since according to him, opposition MPs use "the tragic death of Inal Jabiev for

their self-interests and put pressure on law enforcement agencies to paralyze their legal activities."

The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality responded to the death of Jabiev in occupied Tskhinvali.

The statement states that the death of the prisoner once again confirms the difficult security and humanitarian situation of the population of South Ossetia, expressing deep concern over the violation of the right to life, gross violations of fundamental human rights, and recent alarming developments.

The Ministry called on international partners to continue to put pressure on the occupation regime to end human rights abuses in the occupied territories.

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has also called on the international community to 'strongly react' to the 'grave situation' in the Russia-occupied region of Tskhinvali.

Zurbishvili asked the heads of the United Nations and the European Union as well as co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions to use all of their levers to avoid escalations in Tskhinvali as well as to ensure public safety on the ground.

**SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 3**

Day Partly cloudy  
High: **33°C**

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: **21°C**

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**FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 4**

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: **32°C**

Night Partly Cloudy  
Low: **20°C**

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## S&P says Georgia's monetary policy is more effective than other countries in the region

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

International rating company S&P has left Georgia's sovereign credit rating at BB and the outlook for 'stable' unchanged. According to the Ministry of Economy, this decision of S&P is especially important given the circumstances in which the report was published, namely the negative impact of the coronavirus on the Georgian economy.

Moreover, according to the report, S&P considers it possible to increase Georgia's credit rating if economic growth is reflected in higher income levels and the country's exports become more diversified, both in terms of products and geography. The rating company named maintaining strong economic stability despite the external challenges as a strength of the country's sovereign rating. S&P considers Georgia's institutional strength to be a significant economic advantage.

The S&P report notes that the Georgian government's economic reforms, which are focused on long-term economic growth, include: implementation of infrastructure projects, further improvement of the business environment, education, and state-owned enterprise reforms. The pace and strength of the economy indicate the government's ability to reduce its debt to GDP ratio.

The rating company forecasts that the economic contraction in 2020 will result in 6% as a result of preventive measures taken against the spread of the coronavirus. The pandemic has done the most damage to the tourism sector, which is an important employer, a significant source of



► One of the largest Big Three credit-rating agencies, S&P Global Ratings (previously Standard & Poor's) is an American credit rating agency and a division of S&P Global that publishes financial research and analysis on stocks, bonds, and commodities.



► "I hope that our macroeconomic and fiscal policy will allow us to think about raising the rating by one step soon," Machavariani said.

consumption of local goods and services, and a significant flow of currency. According to the report, despite the opening of the borders, the recovery of the tourism sector will be slow, as long as the measures of social distance remain in force. According to the forecast of the rating company, the Georgian economy will return to the level of 2019 in 2022.

S&P positively assesses the monetary policy of the National Bank, despite the growth in the first half of 2020, inflation was below 4% on average in 2010-2019. The rating agency emphasizes the effectiveness of Georgia's monetary policy compared to other countries in the region. According to the rating company, the effectiveness of Georgia's monetary policy is high - The volume of foreign reserves of the National Bank has increased by an average of \$ 250 million annually since 2016, which creates a buffer against the balance of payments risks. According to experts at Standard & Poor's, the long-standing floating exchange rate in Georgia - with some interventions - is particularly important for economic stability. The company said in a statement that in previous periods, in response to the weakened external economic environment, the exchange rate was quickly adjusted, thus avoiding drastic one-time changes. This helped maintain financial stability and allowed Georgia to avoid a sharp slowdown in lending in other countries in the region in recent years, exacerbating their economic woes.

Georgia has a floating exchange rate regime, which is an important factor in economic

stability. The National Bank periodically intervenes to reduce excess fluctuations.

High levels of dollarization remain a challenge. Despite the declining trend in recent years, it is still an obstacle to the effectiveness of Georgia's monetary policy. The Rating Company appreciates the measures that the economy dollarization reduction is directed, including national and foreign currency obligations of the different liquidity requirements, pension reform, and local debt capital market development, and the introduction of deposit insurance. It is noteworthy that the company has downgraded the outlook for several countries, including Estonia, Serbia, Slovakia, Uzbekistan, Greece, Bulgaria, and Portugal.

"After the rating agency Fitch, already the second rating agency - S&P has left Georgia's credit rating at BB level and also, the outlook has remained unchanged, which once again indicates that we have a fairly solid and stable macroeconomic and fiscal policy," said the Minister of Finance Ivane Machavariani. As he noted, the rating company names maintaining strong economic stability despite the external challenges as a strong point of the country's sovereign rating. According to him the report also names strong institutional governance as our strength. The work that has been done with donor organizations in terms of raising funds is especially positively mentioned.

"Traditionally, our high import dependence and consequent current account deficit have been named as weaknesses," he added.

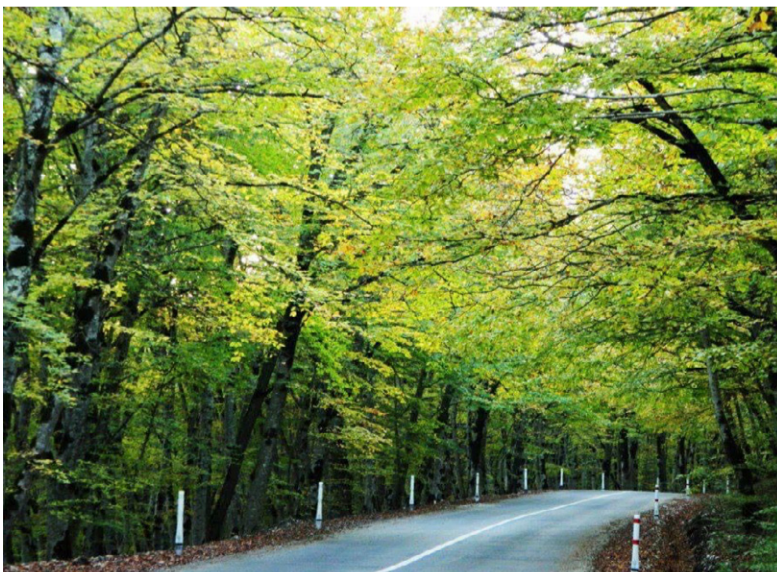
## Georgia receives €33 million grant from Green Climate Fund

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Green Climate Fund has allocated €33 million to the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia to support forest sector reform and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Local governments and residents of seven municipalities in Kakheti, Tianeti, and Guria will be actively involved in the 7-year project (March 2021-December 2027).

The presentation of the project was opened by the Minister of Agriculture, Levan Davitashvili. Alongside the local government, the event was also attended by the ambassadors of Germany and Sweden to Georgia.

According to Davitashvili, the project will be carried out in Kvareli, Telavi, Lagodekhi, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, and Tianeti municipalities. As he said there will also be business promoting projects, which means that fuel made from alternative biomass will be produced. These



► A 7-year project financed by Green Climate begins in March 2021 and ends in December 2027.

will be small processing factories that will enable to create alternative fuel in the country, which will simplify the access to fuel for the people. The Minister stated that the abilities of forest agencies will

strengthen and steps will be taken to improve the forest ecosystem. Davitashvili told the audience that it is a priority of the ministry to rebuild degraded forests and improve the ecological condition



► Local governments as well as the ambassadors of Germany and Sweden attended the presentation.

of the forest. German ambassador to Georgia, Hubert Knirsch stated that it is important for Germany to support the forest sector in Georgia, therefore the government of Germany will actively

support Georgia to implement this project. The Green Climate Fund grant will be provided to institutions in Georgia through the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ).