

POLITICS

Opening of the pension fund to be up for discussion in citizen demand, Health Minister says

FULL STORY ON Page 2

United Opposition to pause rallies against alleged rigged elections due to restrictions

FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

\$1.1 billion economic stimulus and social assistance package



FULL STORY ON Page 3

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Coordinating Council has tightened the regulations in force in the country. Some of the new restrictions will take effect on November 28.

The Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia says that the measures taken by the Coordination Council are aimed at stopping the rate growth of the epidemic. He said the public should not have the illusion that the 2-month plan will reduce the number of daily cases to hundreds or tens.

According to the Minister of Health Ekaterine Tikaradze, 'multiple variables' were used to determine what kind of restrictions should be applied to which city. Tikaradze said that the analysis of components such as the prevalence of the infection in each region and city, as well as the number of beds in the clinics and hotels, used to treat patients, the number of beds and the reserve that could be mobilized, and the number of family doctors across the country; population density, number of families, distribution of business and activity in each region made a specific map of the cities where the restrictions were imposed.

According to her, the reduction of infection cases as a result of the restrictions will not come immediately, the cycle of spread is the subject of analysis for the next 2 weeks. Minister noted that under strictly controlled restrictions, some countries achieve 87% reductions in infection rates.

Starting tomorrow, the government imposes new restrictions



► From February, when the first infection was confirmed in Georgia, a total of 118 690 cases were recorded.



► "The economic price of these restrictions will be 0.7% -0.8% of GDP, no more."

Movement of persons from 21:00 to 05:00 both on foot and by transport, as well as being in public space, will be restricted till January 31. Exceptions will be New Year's Eve - December 31 and Christmas Eve - January 6. Regular intercity transportation of passengers, including by rail, bus, and minibus will be prohibited as well. There are no restrictions on cars (including taxis).

Restaurants and food outlets will fully switch to delivery/takeaway/drive service. Work out in gyms and swimming pools as well as activities of sports, art, and cultural circles/studios are not allowed. All kinds of conferences, training, cultural, entertainment events can only be held online.

In big cities of Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Gori, Poti, Zugdidi, Telavi and ski resorts, Bakuriani, Gudauri, Goderdze, and Mestia, the following restrictions are

additionally imposed: municipal transport will stop working; Shopping facilities (except for grocery, animal feed, pharmacies, veterinary pharmacies, household chemicals, and hygiene shops and press booths) will operate only remotely; Open and closed fairs cannot work. Agrarian markets continue to function; Schools, vocational schools, and higher education institutions (other than medical education programs) are fully switched to distance learning; Private and public kindergartens stop working.

As for winter resorts, the work of hotels is allowed only for arranging quarantine spaces; Ski slopes and ski lifts are closed.

Nationwide restrictions will be eased 10 days starting December 24 till January 2: Shopping centers, open and closed fairs will work; The work of both municipal and intercity transport will be restored.

After this, from January 3 to January 15 holidays are announced; All restrictions imposed from 28 November to 24 December shall be reinstated; There are no public or private institutions operating, except for banks and strategic facilities and services.

From January 16 to January 31, the operation of municipal and intercity transport, shops, and open and closed markets (except weekends) will be restored.

During the whole period, the restrictions do not apply to public and private construction-repair activities; Banking and financial activities; Operation of grocery and animal food shops, pharmacies, veterinary pharmacies, household chemicals, and hygiene stores and press booths; Delivery and withdrawal services; Beauty salons and aesthetic medicine centers; Car maintenance and technical inspection services; Home appliance repair services; The agrarian market. It is not restricted to travel by car (including taxi) as well.

In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the restriction in Georgia was initially imposed under the state of emergency declared on March 21. At that time, only a few cases of infection were recorded, however, the curfew was introduced, most of the economic activities were banned, including the closure of cafes and restaurants, and the educational process was completely online.

The state of emergency in the country was lifted on May 23, even though the parliament had previously allowed the government to impose restrictions without a state of emergency. Within the framework of the transfer of these powers that the government imposes point restrictions that are similar to those imposed during a state of emergency.

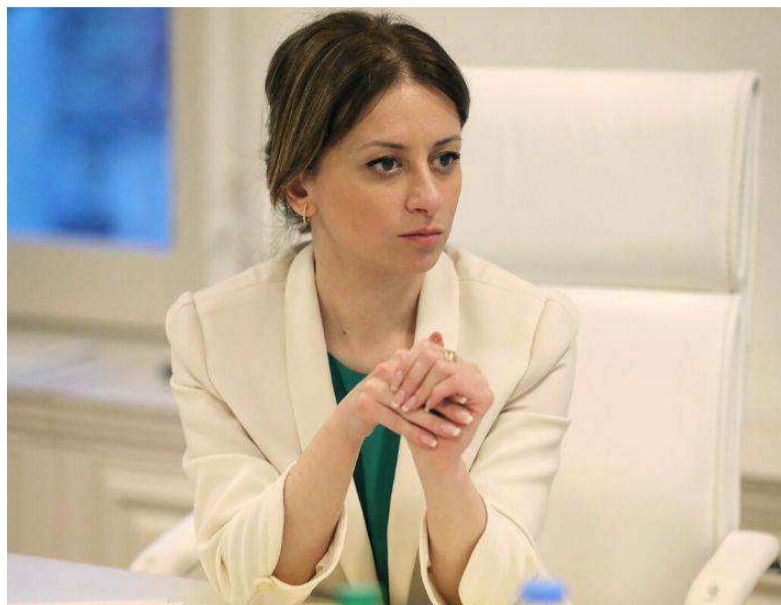
Opening of the pension fund to be up for discussion in citizen demand, Health Minister says

BY LIZA NORWICH-GERWIK

According to the Health Minister Ekaterina Tikaradze, if the availability of the pension fund is the population's demand, they will raise the issue again and it will be discussed.

"We have discussed this issue, but we believe that it is a long-term reform. However, since it is the request of the population, I will raise the issue again and we will discuss this," said Tikaradze.

At a briefing after the meeting of the Interagency Coordination Council, government officials discussed a number of restrictions that will enter into effect on November 28. The restriction affected many sectors, so the question was asked at the briefing whether it was better to open a pension scheme so that people could withdraw their own money and spend accordingly in times of crisis, the Minister's answer was related to this question.



► Ekaterine Tikaradze

On the same topic, The Minister of Economy Natia Turnava said that the opening of the pension fund so that the people involved in it can already use the existing savings is not planned.

"All the measures we offer, the social assistance package is

fully provided from the budget and we have enough funds for that. I hope that the next parliament will quickly consider next year's budget and this will be reflected partly in this year's budget, partly in next year's budget; As for issues such as pension savings, pension reform, pension



► Natia Turnava

scheme, and fund - this is a long-term issue. Pension reform is one of the fundamental reforms and we should not overlook it, no matter what problems we face," Turnava said.

According to Turnava, the pension scheme is not a problem

to be solved in the short term, as the 'pandemic is a short term problem' if we compare it to the pension scheme and its duration.

"The problem is big, but we should not ruin the pension reform built together," Natia Turnava said.

United Opposition to pause rallies against alleged rigged elections due to restrictions

BY LIZA NORWICH-GERWIK

Leo for Georgia's leader Badri Japaridze told the media that due to the difficult situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, united opposition rallies will be on hold to not worsen the already speedy increase of the virus.

According to Japaridze, even though rallies are going to be paused, boycotts against alleged rigged elections remain the same.

"Of course, we have to take this difficult situation into account in terms of demonstrations and rallies and therefore we must not add additional factors to the already dangerous environment for our fellow citizens. Therefore reflected in the



► Badri Japaridze

plans of the opposition, as for the demonstrations and rallies, they will most likely no longer take place. But other plans do not mean changes if you mean a boycott," Japaridze said.

He also called on government officials to make a new crisis management team and include United Opposition members in the council, as they have failed to show any progress in

Coronavirus crisis management. Japaridze also called on people to follow the recommendations for prevention and be careful as "they cannot rely on the government."

"In general, restrictions seem inevitable in this situation, when the pandemic has become out of control. It is unfortunate that here too the government has failed to show itself with timely steps and management skills. We have reached a state of misery we are in now. If the situation continues like this and we don't use all safety measures, everyone will be infected.

I want to call on the citizens to be careful, it seems that we can not rely on the government. We must use all safety precautions to ensure that the infection rate does not continue to increase. At the same time, yesterday, we called on the government to create a new anti-crisis council, which will have a different composition and will represent the opposition. At the same time, we must end the political crisis with a political agreement," said Japaridze.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 27

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 9°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 2°C

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 28

Day A Few Clouds
High: 9°C

Night Mostly cloudy
Low: 0°C

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia
Founded by Prof. **Zaza Gachechiladze**
Tamar Gachechiladze Publisher

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00
E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge
http://www.messenger.com.ge

Nino Metreveli Commercial Director
Mariam Mchedlidze Editor-in-Chief
Natalia Kochiashvili Executive Editor
Nino Kavelashvili Design and Layout

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail. The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements. The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.

EXCHANGE RATES:

US DOLLAR - 3.3138 | EURO - 3.9424 | GBP - 4.4180 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.3806 | SWISS FRANC - 3.6340 |

\$1.1 billion economic stimulus and social assistance package

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

On November 26, the Georgian government presented a plan to alleviate the aggravated epidemic situation in the country, which envisages new large-scale restrictions.

Against the backdrop of the new restrictions, the government has also introduced a new economic stimulus, business, and social assistance plan that should reduce the economic damage caused by the restrictions.

According to Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, the newly imposed restrictions will reduce the country's GDP by an additional 0.7-0.8%, in line with the 5% reduction that the government had previously predicted.

According to the PM, the total cost of the economic stimulus package drawn up by the government is €1.1 billion. The economic package prepared by the government is as follows:

The Georgian government will cover all utility bills for 4 months. Starting January 1, those who have lost their jobs in the formal sector will receive €200 assistance for 6 months. A similar program was introduced by the government during the first wave of the pandemic, and it only applied to households that did not consume more electricity, water, or gas than the prescribed rate. The program cost the government about €270 million.

"In the conditions of the previous wave, 125 thousand people benefited from this assistance, we think that this wave will be about the same number," he said.

According to him, the self-employed, under the imposed restrictions, will receive one-time assistance of €300 and will help them to defer state bank liabilities. This program will only apply to those citizens whose right to work has been temporarily suspended. We are mainly talking



► Income tax exemption will be extended for six months.

about self-employed people in the field of retail sales. Due to its highly targeted nature, it is expected that the program will benefit almost 50% of the citizens less than during the first wave of the pandemic. Out of the official 840,000 employees in the spring, almost 250,000 received a one-time compensation of 300,000, and this time their number will most likely be 120,000;

Like the previous program, from which 72 000 families received held, the families with 0 to 100,000 points, who have 3 or more minor children under 16, will receive a monthly allowance of €100 from the state for 6 months. In addition, €100 assistance for people with disabilities under 18 will continue for 6 months and cover 43 thousand people.

Extension of income tax exemption program for 6 months. In the first wave of the pandemic this program provided for full



► "Timely activation of the parliament is significant for legislative changes to support social and business."

exemption from salary tax of up to €750, and taxation from salary up to €1,500 from the €750. During the first wave, 33,000 companies and 425,000 employees benefited from this benefit,

which will cost the budget of about €260 million. According to the Minister of Finance, the government will try to launch the program in December.

The tourism sector will be

fully exempt from property taxes in 2021. The sector will also be fully deducted from the deferred 4-month income tax. During the first wave of the pandemic, the government deferred both income and property taxes to the sector for 4 months. This time the government decided to write off the accumulated debt.

The government's decision to extend the benefits to the tourism sector will also apply in part to the restaurant business, as it has been found that the sector is severely affected. Among other benefits, the government will subsidize interest on bank loans to restaurants.

According to the PM, the economic crisis in Georgia will continue next year and 2021 is expected to be a difficult year.

"Timely activation and involvement of the parliament are very important in order to make the necessary legislative changes to support social and business," Finance Minister Ivane Machavariani said at a briefing after the Coordinating Council meeting.

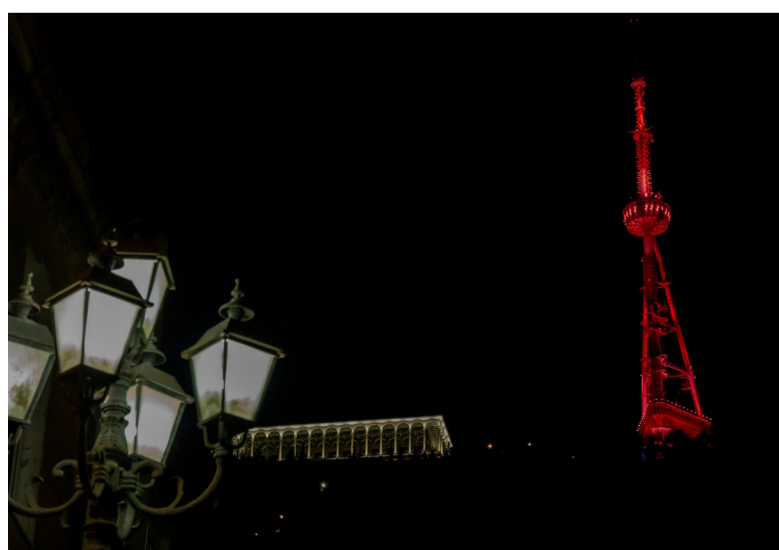
As Machavariani noted, it is necessary to start the budget review process in time. The government needs the support of the parliament because the legislative changes will require making such benefits as, for example, exemption from the property tax of the tourism sector in 2021. According to Machavariani, currently, this term expires on December 1 of this year and the government will technically extend this term until January 1.

"Before that, it must be strengthened by legislation. In general, in addition to the benefits that need legislative changes, next year's budget needs to be reflected in the subsidy and assistance programs we talked about, so it is very important to start discussing the budget and get the 2021 budget on time," Machavariani said.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the TV tower of the capital was illuminated in orange once again. The initiative, which has already become a tradition, has been implemented by the UN Women with the support of Tbilisi City Hall since 2016.

With this symbolic gesture, the capital of Georgia joined the global campaign against gender-based violence. The campaign started on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and will last for 16 days.



The official color of the campaign is orange, so the cities of the world express their support by highlighting the remarkable buildings or objects in orange. Orange dominates the events dedicated to this day. Anyone has the opportunity to participate in the campaign.

The 16-day International Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence has been celebrated since the early 1990s. It aims to raise public awareness and demonstrate solidarity with victims of gender-based violence.

This year the campaign will focus on the 'shadow pandemic'

that followed the spread of the COVID-19 p: given the isolation and restriction of the movement messages reporting all forms of violence against women and girls increased dramatically, especially on domestic violence. UN women's organization joins people who have undergone violence, activists, decision-making bodies, the United Nations system, and all social representatives, to more clearly emphasize the importance of funding, the necessary services, prevention, and data, which will result in more informed response on violence against women and girls.