

POLITICS

Tamar Gabunia says the Ministry will continue supporting Gouri's health expenses



FULL STORY ON Page 2

ECONOMICS

NBG leaves monetary policy rate unchanged at 8%



FULL STORY ON Page 3

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The Georgian government has announced the lifting of several coronavirus-related restrictions due to the decrease in daily infections. Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stressed in a statement yesterday that any restrictions planned to be eased from next week will be maintained over the weekend.

Gakharia said the positive rate among daily tested individuals had dropped below 4%, giving the government an opportunity to ease the restrictions earlier than announced.

According to the government administration, as of February 3, the daily positive rate is 3.51%, for the last 14 days - 4.41%, and for 7 days - 3.79%. The overall number of people recovered increased to 251,748. A total of 3,240 people have died from the virus in Georgia since the pandemic spread.

Starting February 8th, full-scale municipal transport will be launched in Georgia, which means that metro, bus and minibuses will start operating in all cities across the country, including Tbilisi, Rustavi and Kutaisi. After the introduction of municipal transport and schools, the government will monitor the dynamics and then make a decision on the development of intercity transport. From upcoming Monday, all types of markets and fairs will be fully operational as well.

According to the gov't decision, schools all over the country will resume studies in the classroom from February 15. Kindergartens remain closed. As for food establishments, restaurants will be allowed

Government lifts several restrictions



The government says that they will observe the situation and other restrictions may also be lifted in the coming days.

to receive guests in open spaces starting February 15 as well. Note that 200 restaurants were planning to reopen despite restrictions on February 6th in protest. According to Shota Burjanadze, the head of the Restaurant Association, even though this decision by the Coordination Council is not what they demanded, it is still a relief for the business and step forward for some operators.

It was also announced that in the

event of a deliberate violation of coronavirus rules, organizations will no longer be able to participate in state support activities. Burjanadze replied that this is nonsense, since the law doesn't state that those who protest against a particular decision, will not receive subsidy.

PM also spoke of an upcoming change in sanction - in case of violating the rule of wearing a mask for a second time, the fee will double. Note that this violation

results in administrative liability and a fine of €20 in accordance with Article 42 (11) of the Criminal Code. He said that in addition to easing restrictions, it is important to think about tightening the rules.

According to Gakharia, subsidizing 80% of the bank loan interest rate for 6 months, will apply not only to restaurants, but to the sports industry, sports facilities (up to 100 operators) and private kindergartens too (up to 50 small ones), as there was a serious demand from them. He informed that there were about 2000 applications, although for technical reasons only 420 met the requirements and the gov't will make a decision to alleviate these technical requirements in order for the 2,000 restaurants to be able to benefit. Applications will start on February 8th and last until March 5th and anyone who has not used this program yet, or could not use it due to some shortcomings, will be able to use it. According to the Economy Minister, the subsidy program has been extended and will apply to loans taken from both banks and microfinance organizations.

"These are the organizations and these are the businesses that have also suffered as a result of the pandemic," Gakharia said.

At the gov't session, the PM also presented the new head of the government administration, Kakha Kemoklidze, who, as Gakharia underlined, has been working in the public service for years and 'has great experience'.

"Recently, Kakha became the head of the National Security Council. He has participated in important events for the country, such as the Geneva talks, IPRM meetings, and he has enough knowledge to guide the effective work of the Georgian government administration," the PM noted.



Restrictions will be maintained over the weekend.

Tamar Gabunia says the Ministry will continue supporting Gomuri's health expenses

MAKO GOMURI LOST ONE OF HER EYES DURING JUNE 20-21 PROTESTS IN TBILISI

By Nika Gamtseplidze

Mako Gomuri, the activist who lost one of her eyes as a result of the violence of the riot police on June 20-21 in 2019, said that her eye prosthesis broke about 3 weeks ago. As she wrote, she is now using the first one that she owned, however, it is very painful and harms her health.

Gomuri wrote about this on her personal Facebook page, saying that the last time she went abroad to see a doctor was before the 2020 parliament elections. She was supposed to have another appointment 3-5 months, however, as she says, she has not heard from the ministry regarding this.

According to the Deputy Health Minister of Georgia, Tamar Gabunia, the ministry will continue supporting Gomuri. As she said, Gomuri's health is still very important to the ministry, and that the services will continue to be provided to her. According to Gabunia, the necessary expenses for this will be fully covered by the ministry.

Gabunia noted that the Ministry of Health is fully prepared and mobilized to ensure that Gomuri receives all the services and assistance needed for her well-being.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia Maia Tskitishvili, says that funding for the treatment of people who were injured during the dispersal of the rally on the night of June 20 will continue. "We had a course of treatment for Mako Gomuri. We helped Mako and other victims as well," added Tskitishvili.

As Gomuri said, she was very angry after reading the statement of the Deputy PM. Gomuri said that she does not think that it is 'help' the gov-



► Gomuri wrote about this on her personal Facebook page



► Deputy Health Minister says that the services will continue to be provided to her

ernment provides, rather- their responsibility.

As she said, she was recognized as a victim by the government, thus, they are responsible to take care of her health and treatment.

On June 20, 2019, a civil protest followed Gavrilov's arrival in Georgia and his taking the Speaker's chair. The main demand was the resignation of the Speaker of the Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze, who signed the agenda of the Assembly. After a small part of the protesters voiced their intentions to enter the parliament, a confrontation took place between them and the police.

During the dispersal of the rally, many were injured. One of them was Mako Gomuri, who lost one of her eyes.

FRIDAY	FEBRUARY 5
Day	Sunshine and clouds
	High: 12°C
Night	Partly cloudy
	Low: 6°C
SATURDAY	FEBRUARY 6
Day	Partly cloudy
	High: 11°C
Night	Partly cloudy
	Low: 3°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 – 3.3140 | EURO – 3.9834 | GBP – 4.5203 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE – 4.3576 | SWISS FRANC – 3.6859 |

NBG leaves monetary policy rate unchanged at 8%

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

At the Monetary Policy Committee meeting of the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) it decided to leave the refinancing rate unchanged at 8.0%.

According to the National Statistics Office, in January 2021, compared to the previous month, the inflation rate in Georgia was 1.1 %, and the annual inflation rate was 2.8%.

According to the NBG head, Koba Gvenetadze, this reduction in the last two months is related to the subsidy of utility bills by the government and is of a temporary nature. According to him, as a rule, central banks do not respond to temporary deviations of inflation due to similar types of exogenous factors and are guided by the medium-term inflation forecast.

According to the current forecast, under other equal conditions, inflation will remain at an average of 4 % in 2021 and then gradually approach the target. Compared to the previous forecast, among the factors affecting the dynamics of inflation is a significant increase in prices in international commodity markets, which was especially pronounced in January.

“However, upward pressure on inflation is maintained against the backdrop of the prolongation of pandemic-related constraints due to rising production costs and a depreciating rate. The latter, in turn, increases imported inflation and intermediate costs,” Gvenetadze explained.

NBG president also informed, that despite the relatively strong domestic demand, aggregate demand is still reduced due to the sharp decline in external demand. However, the depre-



▶ According to current forecasts, economic growth in 2021 is expected to be within 4% and its main driver will be local demand. In contrast, external demand will remain significantly reduced and small growth is projected in 2021 as well.

ciation of the nominal effective exchange rate weakens the downward impact of aggregate demand on projected inflation, and due to the high dollarization of the economy, the transmission of exchange rate fluctuations to inflation is palpable.

In addition, the completion of the partial subsidy of interest expense on mortgages actually has a similar effect to the tightening of monetary policy.

The Committee also noted that uncertainty remains high about both the dynamics of the recovery of global economic activity and the growth rate of local lending. Taking into account the above-mentioned factors, the need to maintain a tighter monetary policy was identified.

Gvenetadze noted that according to preliminary indica-



▶ “If tourism is not restored at all, according to current estimates, economic growth in 2021 will be around 1%,” NBG president said.

tors, the joint demand is weak. The current estimates indicate that economic activity in December fell by 7.9 % annually, and the 12 month average is -6.1 %. After declining in 2020, a gradual recovery of economic activity from 2021 is expected.

As for current figures, revenues from international travelers are minimal and, according to preliminary data, fell by 93 % year on year in December. Amid weak aggregate demand and a depreciating exchange rate, imports of goods fell 18 % year on year in December.

According to the President of the NBG, monitors the current economic processes and financial markets on a continuous basis and will use all the tools at its disposal to ensure price stability.

The next meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee will be held on March 17, 2021.

PM Gakharia: Organizations that violate COVID-19 induced regulations will not be eligible for subsidies

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

During the February 4th government meeting Prime Minister Gakharia announced that those organizations that violate the existing healthcare regulations will not be eligible for any government support and will not receive subsidies. Gakharia noted that that the deliberate violation of the rules will be taken very seriously, and the organizations that choose to go through with it will not be able to receive governmental support established during the pandemic.

Earlier this week, approximately 200 restaurants announced that they will reopen on February 6th despite the existing violations. Chairman of the Restaurant Association of Georgia Shota Burjanadze said



that the government failed to provide this sector with a reasonable solution to the crisis and postponed the scheduled meeting. He added that this was a difficult decision to make and the restaurant owners understand the risks associated with it.

Founder of the Association of Entertainment Centres Giorgi Mtiulishvili claimed that the “government turned into a python and is literally strangling us”.

“There are 232 countries in the world and they are not closed down like we are, only 708 countries have similar restrictions in place, and one of them is Zimbabwe [...] They [Georgian government] did not offer us a solution. Turnava should have apologized to us today, she should have presented a feasible plan on how to move forward

instead of threatening us,” Mtiulishvili said in an interview with PalitraNews.

Should the restaurants go through with their decision and reopen on February 6th despite the existing restrictions. Individuals who choose to eat at the restaurants that illegally open will be fined €2,000, whereas the establishment will be fined €10,000.

The movement “Shame” has announced an event to take place on February 6th, Saturday 20-00 in front of the parliament building. The movement claims that the previous public unrest has already brought about some positive results as some of the restrictions got lifted. They expect a feasible crisis management plan to be announced and the curfew to be abolished.