

## PM Garibashvili and Armenian PM Pashinyan Chair Inter-Governmental Economic Cooperation Commission

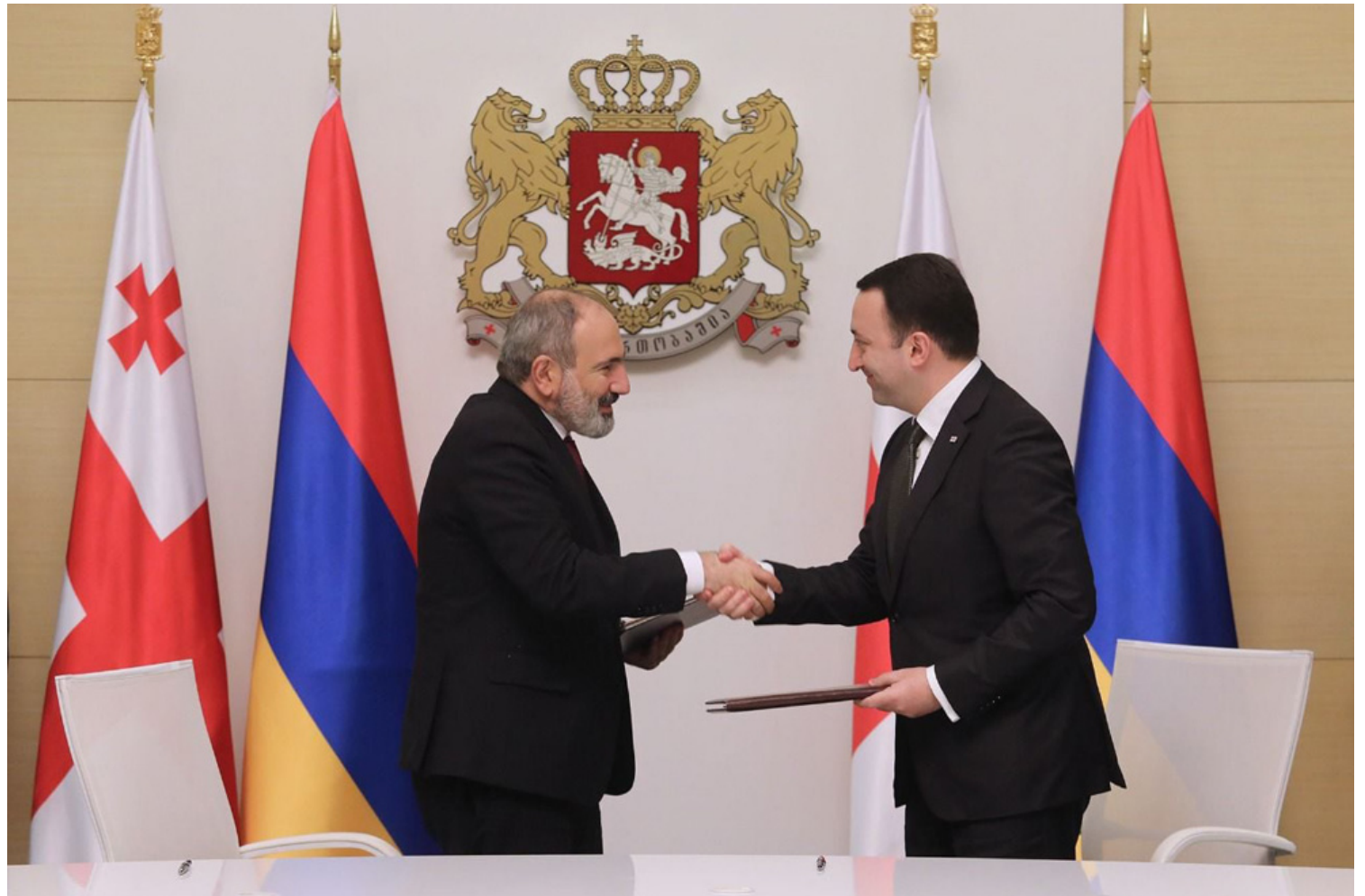
BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili and his Armenian counterpart Nikol Pashinyan chaired the eleventh sitting of the Inter-Governmental Economic Cooperation Commission in Tbilisi yesterday. Before the meeting, Garibashvili hosted the Armenian PM at the Government Administration.

Garibashvili stressed the importance of peace and stability in the region, noting that Georgia has always been motivated to play a vital role in this process. He pledged that Georgia is always ready to contribute and participate in advancing regional peace and stability. In this regard, Garibashvili stressed that the Peaceful Neighborhood Initiative voiced by him at the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) is aimed at the stimulation of stability in the region.

Garibashvili underlined that the relationship between Georgia and Armenia is at the highest level.

"It can be said with pride and pleasure that such a relationship between us has never existed before," the PM stressed. Garibashvili also noted that he is interested in developing trade and economic relations with Armenia.



"It can be said with pride and pleasure that such a relationship between Georgia and Armenia has never existed before," Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia stressed.



According to Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan, the friendly relations between Georgia and Armenia can contribute to maintaining security and stability in the region.

The PM of Armenia noted that Georgia and Armenia set an ambitious goal in 2019 of increasing the volume of bilateral trade turnover to \$1 billion, however, this process was delayed due to the pandemic. According to Pashinyan, now that everyone is learning to live in pandemic conditions, it is time to achieve this goal.

As the Armenian PM noted, bilateral relations between the two countries have been led dynamically.

"Our current bilateral agenda covers many directions, while friendly relations between our two countries facilitate the maintained security and stability in our region," he noted. Pashinyan also focused on trade and economic cooperation between Georgia and Armenia, which covers transport and energy, advanced technologies, tourism, and other areas.

According to him, one of the preconditions of economic development between the two countries is mutual trust, which is based on the historic friendship between Georgian and Armenian people.

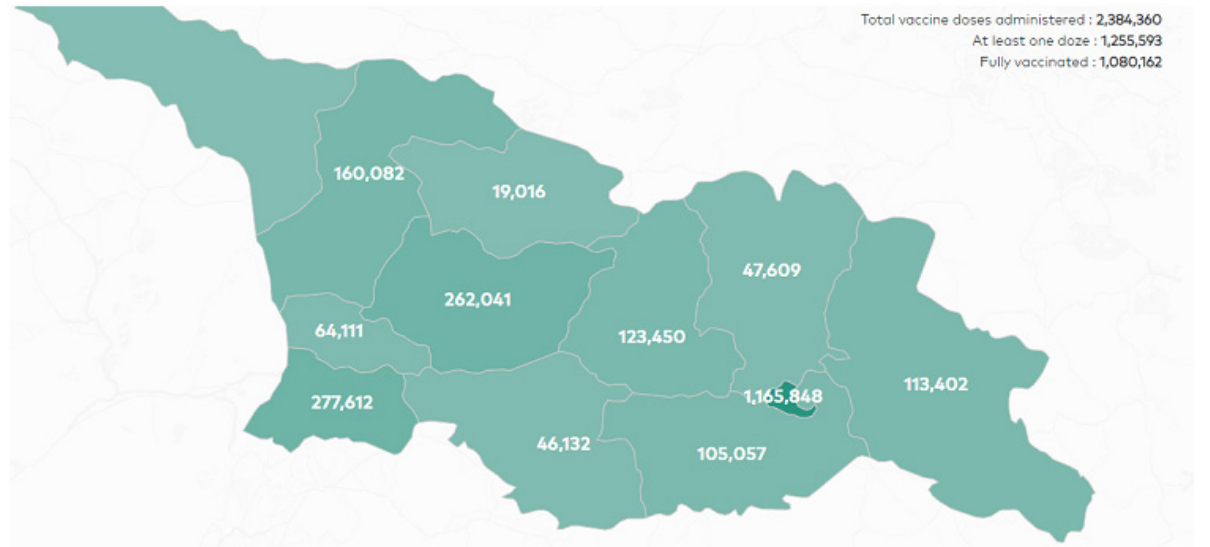
He stressed that this year he met with the Georgian Prime Minister four times, noting that "such cooperation serves as a basis for defining a new level of our economic relationship to further advance the traditional level of our interaction."

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.0914; Euro - 3.4828; GBP - 4.0782; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.1616; Swiss Franc - 3.3457

# Omicron Strain of Covid-19 Confirmed in Georgia



NCDC head once again called on the population to wear face-masks: "If we increase the infamous 28% rate to 90%, we will save 150-200 lives every month."



datacov.moh.gov.ge.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The first two cases of the novel Omicron coronavirus strain were verified in Georgia yesterday.

The World Health Organization has classified the new strain, which was first discovered in South Africa last month, as a 'variant of concern' (WHO). It contains an 'extraordinary amount of spike mutations,' according to the WHO, which is worrying because of the possible influence on the pandemic's course.

Omicron multiplies 70 times quicker in human airways, according to current research, yet the infection in the lungs appears to be milder.

As of now, omicron has been confirmed in more than 90 countries and is expected to increase load on hospitals.

Georgian health official Miran Gamkrelidze, the direc-

tor of Georgia's National Center for Disease Control, says those with the new type are feeling stable and are being treated at home.

He said that 10 suspicious cases were being studied in the country, of which 2 were confirmed, the other 8 were Delta.

"Both citizens are Georgians, one arrived from the US, other from Dubai. They have 26 contacts, which we are investigating," Gamkrelidze said, adding that the virus was expected to spread in the country, but not very quickly.

As the NCDC head explained, this strain is faster, and harms those under 40 more easily.

"It is characterized by a relatively light current, but how it will develop in the future, because it has the ability to transfer easily, is still difficult to predict."

According to him, the replacement of the Delta strain

with Omicron is probably expected in about 2 months. Gamkrelidze does not expect a sudden deterioration of the epidemic until the New Year, and then, most likely, the epidemic will gradually worsen.

According to a study published by Science at Oxford University, which was conducted in South Africa, vaccines maintain efficacy against severe currents. Two doses of Pfizer vaccine protect against hospitalization by 70% with the Omicron variant. However, for Delta Strain, the same figure was 93%.

According to the data of December 20, 1,255,593 individuals have received at least one dose of the vaccine in the country so far, of which 1,080,162 have been fully vaccinated.

He said that according to the available statistics, 40% of the adult population will be vaccinated by the end of December.

Gamkrelidze said that the

only way we can prevent further spread of Omicron and prevent the situation is vaccination, and unfortunately, we do not have a high vaccination rate.

"The double vaccination rate is 37.6% today; the coverage is not high and probably by the end of the year it will reach 40%, we cannot exceed the target 60%. In order for Omicron not to worsen the situation, we must vaccinate," Gamkrelidze said.

According to him, the number of vaccinations is 10k daily, but it is necessary to vaccinate 30k people a day in order to stop the epidemic.

In addition, according to Gamkrelidze, it is necessary to get booster doses. The NCDC plans to submit a proposal to the Interagency Council that for the fully vaccinated, a booster will become mandatory and the time gap between the last vaccine and booster will be reduced for the AstraZeneca and Pfizer jabs.

As for expanding the scope of the Green Passports, the NCDC director said that the Center has prepared a new package of recommendations, which will probably be submitted to the Coordinating Council tomorrow.

Recall that so-called Green Passports came into force on December 1. Fully vaccinated persons, ones who have had a negative PCR test in the last 72 hours, or antigen test in the last 24 hours, or have recovered from the coronavirus, are granted green status.

Georgia has reported 1,296 new cases of coronavirus, 4,127 recoveries and 45 deaths in the past 24 hours. 6.93% of tested individuals had Covid-19 in the past 14 days. 34,238 currently remain infected with Covid-19.

The country has had 910,456 cases of coronavirus since February 26, 2020. 13,116 have died from the virus.

## Economist Ramaz Gerliani Disappears After Exposing Police

By THE MESSENGER STAFF

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched an investigation into the disappearance of economist Ramaz Gerliani.

Family members are still searching for the missing. His traces disappear near the Avchala police station, where his car is parked.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is conducting investigative actions in Ramaz Gerliani's office and car.

The Facebook post posted by Ramaz Gerliani before his disappearance is no longer available. In the post, he accused the police of terror.

"I'm disgraced, disrespected, and my dignity has been violated! All my blood is burning inside me. Every breath has been tortured for more than a month.

"On November 14, I met him in my apartment and he interrogated me with a false motive, insulting me ... I am devastated!" He wrote on his Facebook

post, which he posted on December 19, at 8:40 AM.

Gerliani said law enforcement officers tried to intimidate his family members. He also published information about an employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who, according to him, was collecting information about him using a police uniform, both through the police system and through various means.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched an investigation under Article 143 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates illegal deprivation of liberty.



Ramaz Gerliani

### Weather

Tuesday, December 21

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 8°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 0°C

Wednesday, December 22

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 4°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: -4°C

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