

Anti-Namakhvani HPP protest continues in Tbilisi, protesters urge government to fulfill their demands

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

Protesters against the construction of the Namakhvani Hydro Power Plant gathered in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia on May 23, calling on the government of Georgia to fulfil their demands by 12 p.m. May 24. One of the rally organizers, Varlam Goletiani, presented an action plan urging the government to halt the agreement with Enka and cancel all documents issued since 2015. The protesters also demand Enka's departure from the Rioni Gorge, a moratorium on HPPs, and criminal proceedings against Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava and all those who signed the contract. The rally organizers warned that if the government fails to make a decision, they would 'paralyze the entire city'.

On Monday, opponents of the construction of the Namakhvani HPP blocked the road near the House of Justice and Rustaveli Avenue. The tents were set up on First Republic Square. Protesters announced they would block more central places and would not stop until their demands are fulfilled.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili called on anti-Namakhvani HPP protesters on Monday that "speaking the language of the ultimatum is categorically unacceptable." The PM stressed that the state will have an appropriate response for all citizens who violate the law. According to him, he is meeting the HPP project investor by the end of May to clarify details. He also added that the government has invited the EU Special Representative to study project details and their influence on the environment.



Protesters who oppose the construction of the Namakhvani HPP blocked the area around the House of Justice yesterday. Tension occurred as law enforcers urged the protesters to clear the road.

In response to protests against Namakhvani HPP, Turkish construction company Enka has announced that it is ready to continue the discussion with all interested parties.

Yesterday, Kakha Kuchava, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, announced readiness to "meet as many people as possible to have a constructive conversation." According to him, the

meeting would aim to determine how much the protesters see the need for the involvement of Parliament in this process. Kuchava said the meeting must be public and suggested live broadcasting on TV, Facebook, or social networks. Goletiani, the protest organizer, agreed to communicate with Kuchava and 'listen to what he has to say,' however, he refuses to enter into any dialogue.

As Goletiani stressed, protesters will engage in dialogue only if a moratorium is announced and the demands set by them are met. Goletiani said they would not compromise with the government and emphasized that all the methods that the ruling party suggests have already been exhausted.

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According to Varlam Goletiani, the leader of the Rioni Gorge Defenders civic movement, the protesters are not going to compromise with the government. They refuse to enter a dialogue until their 4 main demands are met.

Georgia condemns detention of opposition journalist Protasevich in Belarus



© Roman Protasevich

its official Twitter page, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the “forcible detention is completely unacceptable”:

“We welcome the safe landing of the Ryanair flight to its original destination - Vilnius, Lithuania and are happy for the people onboard. All the passengers must enjoy the freedom of safe travel. Their forced detention is completely unacceptable,” read the statement.

On Sunday, the Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania with approximately 171 passengers on board was ordered to make an emergency landing in Minsk airport after being notified by Belarus Traffic Control of a potential security threat on board. Shortly after the flight has landed, Roman Protasevich was detained and escorted out of the plane by the law enforcement authorities.

Roman Protasevich hosted Belarus of the Brain Telegram channel and previously worked as the editor-in-chief of NEXTA Telegram channel which covered the large-scale protests against President Lukashenko which erupted after the recent presidential elections in the country. Belarussian authorities added Protasevich to the list of individuals accused of conducting alleged terrorist activities, and the international wanted to list. Protasevich may be facing the death penalty in Belarus for the

charges brought up against him.

Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, whose team Protasevich is on, has already issued a statement condemning the detention of the opposition journalist and demanded his immediate release:

“The regime forced the landing Ryanair plane in Minsk to arrest journalist and activist Raman Pratashevich. He faces the death penalty in Belarus. We demand immediate release of Raman, International Civil Aviation Organization investigation, and sanctions against Belarus,” Tikhonovskaya posted on her Twitter.

The international community has also condemned the attack, including the US Ambassador to Belarus Julie Fisher who stated that “Lukashenka and his regime today showed again its contempt for international community and its citizens”, adding that “faking a bomb threat and sending MiG-29s to force Ryanair to land in Minsk in order to arrest a Nexta journalist on politically motivated charges is dangerous and abhorrent”.

The EU has also expressed concerns over the incident and the President of the European Council Charles Michel has stated that the “unprecedented incident” will be discussed by the EU leaders and it “will not remain without consequences”.

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On May 23, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a comment in regards to the emergency landing of the Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius and the detention of a 26-year old opposition journalist Roman Protasevich. In a post on

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EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell has called on the sides to start a dialogue and create a platform where all actors will be involved.

Earlier, the Georgian government announced that the HPP construction would be suspended for 9 to 12 months until the environmental, geological, and seismicological surveys are reviewed. However, protesters plan to continue rallies as they recall statements of GD members stressing that the HPP would be con-

structed anyway. Before rallies in Tbilisi, the protests against the Namakhvani HPP had been underway in western Georgia for almost six months. Activists and locals protesting the construction of the HPP in the region, claim that sufficient research had not been carried out before launching the construction and believe that the risks, including immediate security risks due to active seismic activity, had not been considered.

Minister of Economy of Georgia claims that the construction of Namakhvani HPP is highly strategic for the country. As she stressed, the HPP would be one of the most important parts of the system that would be the basis for strengthening Georgia’s independent economy and sovereignty.



Weather

Tuesday, May 25

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 25°C

Night Showers

Low: 14°C

Wednesday, May 26

Day Rain

High: 22°C

Night Showers

Low: 13°C

published by
The Messenger

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0108, Georgia
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Exchange Rates: US Dollar -3.3126; Euro - 4.0473; GBP - 4.6820; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.4992; Swiss Franc - 3.6926

USAID launches \$330 Million grant program in Georgia

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

A grant agreement has been signed between Georgia and the United States, according to which the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will provide Georgia with a grant of up to \$330 million over a period of 5 years.

The signing ceremony of the grant agreement "For the Promotion of Sustainable Development of Georgia" was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia last week.

Bilateral agreements includes a number of strategic areas - conflict resolution, agricultural and private sector development, the rule of law, human rights, democratic governance, civil society, basic education, as well as social services and the environment, that serves the economic growth and sustainable development of our country, as well as the strengthening of the free market and, in general, the Western orientation.

The ceremony was opened by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, and the US Ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degan.

"This is a new phase in our relationship, based on the progress that Georgia has made in developing democratic institutions, developing a market economy and becoming more integrated into the Euro-Atlantic area... We are working on new initiatives to increase economic opportunities, increase people-to-people relations," the ambassador said.

Degan said that the agreement will support the country's economic and demo-



"Through the grant agreement, a new energy security program will be created, Georgia will be able to diversify its energy resources and reduce its dependence on Russia," said Kelly Degan, US Ambassador to Georgia.



The grant agreement was signed by USAID Mission Director Peter Wiebler and Minister of Finance Lasha Khutsishvili.

cratic development and will boost the country's resistance to foreign threats. Georgia will be able to diversify its energy resources and reduce its dependence on Russia. It will be able to reduce costs for the Georgian people. US Ambassador has stated that the agreement reaffirms the 'common values' between Georgia and the US and the US continued support for its strategic partner. She said the U.S. will continue to invest in school education, beyond the \$7 million that is being implemented under the U.S. Agency for International Development, which began last year.

PM has stated that at the initial stage Georgia will receive \$67 million. According to the head of the government, the Grant Agreement with the US aims at high-paying employment opportunities, strengthening democratic achievements and promoting accountable governance.

"USAID assistance to our country is \$1.8 billion. About 335 programs have already been implemented in the fields of agriculture, energy, infrastructure, environment, education and health. The US support will ensure the creation of jobs and assist the country's pandemic-affected economy," Garibashvili said, expressing gratitude towards the US government.

USAID Mission Director Peter Wiebler clarified that at this stage, the three main areas of the grant agreement include fight against harmful influences, which includes energy security, accountability of democratic institutions and the strengthening of democratic institutions and strengthening of the country's economy.

Georgia begins vaccination with Chinese Sinovac, soon to receive additional doses of AstraZeneca and Sinopharm vaccines

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On Monday, Georgia reported 338 coronavirus cases, 1,357 recoveries, and 17 deaths. Georgia's total confirmed cases reached 337,961, among them, 319,956 people recovered and 4,639 died. As of May 24, the daily test-positive rate is 4.04%, for the last 14 days - 3.99%, and for 7 days - 4.19%.

The vaccination process against coronavirus with Chinese Sinovac started yesterday in Georgia. Currently, the country is also using AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Sinopharm vaccines. According to the

Ministry of Health, Sinovac is based on the traditional method and is recommended for people over the age of 18, in a two-dose schedule with a spacing of 21 days. As NCDC Deputy Head Paata Imnadze said, the Sinovac is an inactivated COVID-19 virus vaccine that may have mild side effects. Its efficacy in preventing hospitalization varies between 85 and 100%.

The World Health Organization (WHO) approval for Sinovac is expected shortly, but as the ministry of Health reports, the Sinovac vaccine has been positively evaluated by the Strategic Ad-

visory Group of Experts on Immunization. 100,000 doses of the Sinovac vaccine were gifted to Georgia by China.

It was reported yesterday that Georgia will receive an additional 43,200 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in mid-June and will also import half a million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine by early July. According to the Head of Georgia's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Amiran Gamkrelidze, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will donate 100,000 doses of the Sinopharm

vaccine this summer to Georgia. According to him, Georgia is engaged in negotiations to receive Moderna and Novovax vaccines in the coming future.

According to WHO Program Manager for Immunization and Vaccination of Managed Diseases Siddhartha Datta, the fact that 4 different types of vaccines are available in the country shows the great efforts of the government in the process of managing Covid-19. Datta has also stressed that the government is trying to manage the process transparently.



Chinese Sinovac is still waiting for WHO approval, however, the vaccine has a very good assessment from the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization.



According to the Head of Georgia's National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) Amiran Gamkrelidze, negotiations are underway to receive Moderna and Novovax vaccines in the coming future.