

POLITICS

Government lifts several coronavirus restrictions, curfew remains in force



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NEWS IN BRIEF

'Pfizer' vaccine supply postponed to arrive at the end of March, says Gamkrelidze



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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

The recent arrest of the head of the United National Movement (UNM) opposition party Nika Melia has been followed by a series of statements made by international partners, urging parties to continue negotiations. The UNM Chairman was arrested at the party headquarter on Tuesday morning.

British Ambassador to Georgia Mark Clayton tweeted that he is "shocked by the scenes at UNM headquarters." The Ambassador stressed that Violence and Chaos are the last two things Georgia needs right now. "I urge all sides to act with restraint, now and in the coming days," he said.

Member of the European Parliament Anna Fotyga referred to the decision of detaining Melia by storming the UNM headquarter as 'unacceptable'. She believes that the political crisis in Georgia cannot be resolved by force, aggression, and humiliating statements.

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has expressed concern over Melia's arrest and called on all sides to avoid escalation of the process and return to negotiations in support of Georgian democracy.

Helsinki Commission leaders, Rep. Alcee Hastings, Rep. Joe Wilson, Senator Roger Wicker, and Senator Ben Cardin

International community reacts to the recent developments in Georgia



► International partners believe all political parties should get back to the negotiation table and help de-escalate the ongoing political crisis.

echoed the recent developments by saying that "storming the headquarters of an opposing political party and arbitrarily detaining its leader is not in keeping with democratic progress." They call on the government of Georgia to release Melia, deescalate the crisis, and "recommit to dialogue rather than aggression."

The PACE monitoring co-rapporteurs for Georgia, Titus Corlatean (Romania, SOC) and Claude Kern (France, ALDE) believe that the police raid on the UNM Headquarters and the arrest of opposition leader Melia 'unnecessarily' escalated tension between the opposition and the ruling GD party and further deepened the existing crisis. "Georgia's democratic development needs restraint, dialogue, and compromise, not escalation and confrontation," said the two co-rapporteurs. They urged all political forces to refrain from any kind of action that could contribute to further escalating of the tension.

The US Department of State stated that Polarizing rhetoric, force, and aggression are not the solution to Georgia's political tension, and called on all sides to engage in negotiation. The United States affirms its readiness to support a democratic, secure, and prosperous Georgia.

Marina Kaljurand, Chair of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee, and Sven Mikser, the European Parliament Rapporteur on Georgia, released a joint statement concerning the developments in Georgia. As stated by MEPs, even though they disapprove 'the non-constructive and provocative tactics' pursued by parts of the opposition, responding to provocations by invading the headquarters of the largest opposition party and arresting their leader "is in no way helpful, nor does it provide a way out of the crisis." MEPs believe that the only way Georgia can resolve this political crisis without putting the country's

Euro-Atlantic aspirations under threat is for all the parties to take a step back, refrain from further polarizing rhetoric and action, and re-engage in dialogue. "It is imperative that all those trusted with power put the legitimate aspirations of the Georgian people before any party political considerations," reads the joint statement. The House Foreign Affairs Committee and Georgia Caucus issued a statement assessing the events of Tuesday morning as 'disheartening to witness'. Representatives Gregory W. Meeks, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Michael McCaul, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Gerry Connolly and Adam Kinzinger, Co-Chairmen of the House of Representatives Georgia Caucus stated in their joint statement that "years of hard work by the Georgian people to build a stronger and more prosperous democracy are being gravely threatened by excessive force and undemocratic actions."

US Senators Jim Risch and Jeanne Shaheen and Congressmen Kinzinger and Connolly released a joint statement calling on the government on the immediate release of all political prisoners including Nika Melia, as well as Giorgi Rurua, and urged all political parties to stop provocations and negotiate for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The chairman of the UNM was transferred to Rustavi penitentiary establishment #12 on Tuesday. Yesterday, the opposition members and the supporters of Nika Melia drove from Tbilisi to Rustavi by cars and performed the Georgian national anthem in his support. Protestors, who urge the UNM chair's release, say rallies will proceed until their demand is met. UNM agrees to resume talks with the ruling party only if Nika Melia will be sitting at the dialogue table.



► UNM chair supporters performing the national anthem at Rustavi prison where Melia was sent.

Government lifts several coronavirus restrictions, curfew remains in force



► As the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava stressed, it will be strictly monitored that no social events are held in restaurants.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

On Wednesday, after the meeting of the Inter-agency coordination council, the newly-elected PM Irakli Garibashvili unveiled a plan for the gradual easing of COVID-related restrictions.

According to the government's decision:

- Hotels in ski resorts reopen on February 25, cable cars will resume operations from March 8
- Intercity traffic resumes from February 25
- Municipal transport will be allowed to operate on weekends as well
- Restaurants and other food facilities will resume full services on March 1 in Batumi, and on March 8 in the rest of Georgia, except for weekends
- Conferences and training, museums, and libraries will reopen on March 1

- Gyms will reopen on March 15
- Public and private kindergartens will reopen on March 1, once every two weeks, 20% of the preschool facility employees will have to undergo mandatory Covid-19 testing
- Theaters, sports clubs, professional ensembles will be able to resume rehearsals from March 15

public attendance at their events will be allowed from April 1

- Higher and vocational schools will be able to resume clinical, practical, laboratory activities and conduct exams in-person from March 1, conduction of educational process in auditoriums will be allowed from March 15

- Shopping malls and markets, currently allowed to work only on weekdays, will recommence services on weekends from March 8

Per Interagency Coordination Council's decision, a nationwide curfew from 21:00 to 05:00 remains in force. As Deputy Health Minister Tamar

Gabunia stressed, restriction on movement has been highly effective, hence "maintaining this measure is crucial so far".

It is also noteworthy that from March 1, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus will be added to the list of countries whose citizens are allowed to enter Georgia by providing a negative PCR test result at the airport upon arrival.

Yesterday, Georgia reported 443 new cases of Coronavirus, 461 recoveries, and 6 deaths. As of February 24, Georgia has had a total of 269,438 confirmed Coronavirus cases since February 2020. Currently, 2,692 individuals remain infected with Covid-19. The daily test-positivity rate stands at 2.33 %, while the weekly rate- 2.36%.

According to the Head of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Amiran Gmkrelidze, Georgia has reported three cases of the UK coronavirus strain so far. 31 people have been in contact with the three patients. As he stated, "serious research is underway about the new coronavirus strain."



► "Three cases of the UK coronavirus strain confirmed in Georgia," said Amiran Gmkrelidze, the Head of the NCDC.

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 25

Day ☁️ Cloudy skies
High: 1°C

Night 🌙 A few clouds
Low: -5°C

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 26

Day ☁️ Partly cloudy
High: 8°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: -2°C

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‘Pfizer’ vaccine supply postponed to arrive at the end of March, says Gamkrelidze



Director of the National Center for Disease Control Amiran Gamkrelidze spoke at today's briefing about the reasons for the delay in the introduction of the Pfizer vaccine which is now to arrive at the end of March. According to him, Georgia had confirmation from the Covax-platform and the WHO that the vaccine would be introduced in the country at the end of February. However, due to not fulfilling the EU's recommendations, the introduction of Pfizer doses in Georgia has been postponed.

"Pfizer is one of the largest manufacturers today and wants to meet its standards in the EU, which is why there is a problem in the supply of the 18 countries

that we had to supply from the Covax platform. Moved to the end of March," Gamkrelidze said.

According to Gamkrelidze, the government is working on getting vaccinations for Astrazeneca. Gamkrelidze stated that "several hundred thousand doses should arrive if we are not betrayed."

As the director of the National Center for Disease Control noted, the country is doing its best to start vaccination in March.

"We really want to vaccinate at least 200 thousand people twice by the end of May and then, starting from June, the so-called extended vaccination campaign," Gamkrelidze said.

Curfew has a great importance against pandemic and will not be seized yet, Turnava says

"At this point we reserve that, we'll see in the future," the Minister of Economy Natia Turnava answered Rustavi 2's question about whether the curfew will be lifted. Turnava claims that limiting night hours is "one of the most effective ways" to curb mobility.

"Since the pandemic has not disappeared anywhere, because we do not know how adequately these openings will be perceived, whether the epidemic will worsen, it would not be right and it would be irresponsible not to leave effective leverage to the authorities to quickly rectify the situation. These openings led to a deterioration of the epidemic.

One of the most effective ways to get rid of mobility, which has brought the current improved situation since

November 28, is to limit the night hours outside, whether we like it or not.

"I also see that this is an inconvenience for each of us, but believe me, it has been proven and tested that one of the levers that gives us the opportunity to maintain a normal situation and run a business is to limit night mobility," Natia Turnava said.

From November 28, the curfew in Georgia has been in effect from 21:00 to 05:00. Until then, for three weeks, nighttime travel restrictions used to begin at 10 p.m. A few weeks ago, NCDC Deputy Director Paata Imnadze said that the curfew would be lifted "probably at the very end." He did not expect the nighttime restrictions to continue in April, but said it all depended on the situation in the country.

PACE: Police raid on UNM office and Melia's arrest deepen political crisis

Titus Corlatten and Claude Kern, Co -Rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Monitoring Group on Georgia, expressed concern over the current developments in Georgia .

"It is true that no one should be above the law, but the police raid on the UNM headquarters and the arrest of opposition leader Nika Melia have led to an unnecessary escalation of tensions between the opposition and the ruling majority

and deepened the political crisis in the country," say the co-rapporteurs.

"Georgia 's democratic development needs restraint, dialogue and compromise, not escalation and confrontation," noted Korlattenma and Kearns .

The co-rapporteurs call on all political forces to refrain from actions that could lead to further escalation of tensions and return to the negotiating table to find a political solution to the current crisis that is mutually acceptable.

TI Head Office: Arrest of Nika Melia will only aggravate political crisis

Transparency International's Berlin Headquarters has issued a statement on the current events in Georgia.

Transparency International (TI) believes that the decision to invade the office of the United National Movement and arrest the party leader Nika Melia will only aggravate the current political crisis in the country.

"Recent events in Georgia, which have long been considered a positive example

among post-Soviet states, are another manifestation of the extremely high degree of concentration of power and the disturbing trend towards state seizures. The erosion of the rule of law and the independence of institutions, as well as the ongoing attacks on active civil society groups, are causing a significant setback in terms of democracy.

Of particular concern is the lack of an independent judiciary and the influence

of the ruling party over law enforcement agencies being used as a weapon against political opponents.

"It is unfortunate that in the country once known for its effective anti-corruption reforms, impunity is increasingly settling into the norm in cases of high levels of corruption. We call on the Georgian authorities to engage in a political dialogue to protect the country's democratic future and to create an environment in

which real anti-corruption reforms can be implemented," the statement said.

Opposition party leader Nika Melia was detained by police at the United National Movement office on February 23 at around 10 am. His arrest has already provoked strong reactions from the international community.

The Tbilisi City Court ordered the Ministry of Internal Affairs to detain Nika Melia on February 17.



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