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The curfew has been in place in Georgia since November

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Protestors were supposed to gather in Namokhvani against the HPP construction

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Police checkpoints, Sinopharm vaccine, and concerns over third wave: COVID-19 update in Georgia



BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

On April 3, 100,000 doses of China-produced anti-coronavirus vaccine,

Sinopharm arrived in Georgia. According to Deputy Minister of Health Tamar Gabunia, the country is expecting to start vaccination with Sinopharm by mid-

April, however, right now, it is waiting for the official approval of the vaccine by the World Health Organization:

"It is already used in various countries

and more than 40 million people have already been vaccinated with it. Vaccine test trials are showing very good results and we expect the vaccine to be approved by the World Health Organization by mid-April," Tamar Gabunia said.

She added that the vaccine is easy to store, as it only requires the average temperature of 2-8 degrees Celsius:

"We think that the vaccination will begin from the second half of April and it will be carried out in the medical facilities that are already involved in the nationwide vaccination program. This [Sinopharm] vaccine will also be added to the list of other vaccines used under our immunization program, and it will allow us to achieve the goals set out in the country's vaccination plan," Gabunia added.

Amidst the surge of the confirmed cases of coronavirus, police checkpoints and field tents have been set up in four villages in western Georgia, including Orsantia village in the Zugdidi municipality, Shroma village in the Ozurgeti municipality, as well as Chkonagora and Chochkhati villages in the Lanchkhuti municipality. According to the official statement of the Interior Ministry of Georgia, all citizens entering or leaving the territory of the aforementioned villages will be required to undergo thermal screening and on-site testing if necessary. Earlier this week, police checkpoints were also set up in three villages of eastern Kaspi - Igoeti, Samtavisi, and Kveo Chala, where a total of 81 cases have been reported within six days.



Deputy Minister of Health, Tamar Gabunia

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Activists gather on Rustaveli Ave. during curfew hours in protest



Protestors called the curfew a 'political weapon' used by the government

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Over the last few weeks, several restrictions were lifted in the country, however, a curfew remains, restricting people from going outside from 9 pm to 5 am without a special permit. Those violating the curfew are fined ₾ 2,000.

The curfew has been in place since November, and in the past few weeks, the public protest against curfew grew dramatically, resulting in several rallies. On Saturday, April 3, a group of activists decided to gather in protest during curfew hours, demanding that the restriction be abolished.

Those participating in the protest said that the curfew is a 'political weapon' in the hands of the government, which negatively affects everyday lives. Among the participants of the rally are the representatives of the movement 'It's a Shame', platform 'Droa', and parties such as Girchi and Lelo.

Those in protest say that the curfew is affecting people's mental health and is destroying the

Georgian economy. They note that because of the restriction, public transportation is more crowded, increasing the chances of infection.

Protestors claim that the Georgian government is using the pandemic, and the curfew to control people.

On the other hand, health experts and the representatives of the Georgian government claim that the current epidemiological situation is bad enough to keep the curfew, adding that it is one of the most useful tools for fighting against the spread of the virus. During the protest, a special stage was built on Rustaveli Avenue, where several Georgian bands performed.

Protesters believe that the curfew is unconstitutional and add that it is not helping reduce the infection rates.



Protestors believe the curfew is affecting people's mental health and is destroying the Georgian economy

Police checkpoints, Sinopharm vaccine, and concerns over third wave: COVID-19 update in Georgia

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As of today, 464 new cases of COVID-19 have been detected in

Georgia, as well as 454 recoveries and 7 deaths. The total number of confirmed cases since February 2020 in Georgia has now

reached 283,833. On April 1, Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control, said that the new set of

restrictions will have to be imposed if the number of clusters in the country increases.

Weather

Monday, April 5

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 21°C

Night 🌧️ Mostly Cloudy
Low: 10°C

Tuesday, April 6

Day 🌧️ Mostly Cloudy
High: 19°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 9°C

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Activists gather in Gumati to protest Namokhvani HPP

BY NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Yesterday, activists gathered once again to protest the construction of the Namokhvani HPP. They were initially planning to gather in Namokhvani, however, as the police had closed the road, activists decided to set up tents in Gumati.

Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria released a statement about the ongoing events and called on the Ministry of Internal Affairs not to interfere in the realization of the constitutional rights of the opponents of Namokhvani HPP.

Lomjaria also called on the MIA to restore movement in the direction of Namokhvani village, not to use signal suppression equipment or other means that would limit informing the population. The ombudsman says that to avoid the risks of confrontation, the MIA should negotiate with the protesters and not use force against them.

Lomjaria calls on the government to suspend the ongoing construction/preparation works until a consensus is reached. The office also called on the ministries to conduct a public dialogue.

The ombudsman noted that on April 3, her representative, who was monitoring the ongoing processes in the Rioni Valley reported that the construction



Demonstrators say that the construction should stop



Activists have been protesting the construction of the Namokhvani HPP for several months

works were carried out in the police's presence.

One of the leaders of the protest Varlam Goletiani has announced potential protests in Tbilisi as well that would be held if their demands are not satisfied.

On Saturday, April 3, the resumption of equipment work in the Rioni Valley was followed by a confrontation with police arresting two people. Activists say Enka has resumed construction, while the company says it is only preparatory work.

In the Rioni gorge, in particular, first in the village of Joneti, and then in Namokhvani, the continuous protest has been going on for almost half a year. Thousands of people have gathered many times and held rallies against the construction of Namokhvani HPP in several villages and cities, including Kutaisi.

Namokhvani Cascade project envisages the construction of two independent HPPs in Rioni Valley: Kvemo Namokhvani HPP (333 mV) and Zemo Namokhvani (100 mV). The annual output of the cascade is 1,500.00 GWh, 12% of annual consumption.

Protesters are demanding that the government stop the construction and cancel the contract with the Turkish company Enka.

MEP Gahler calls for the opposition United National Movement party to reach a compromise over Nika Melia's arrest

BY VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Michael Gahler, a member of the European Parliament, and a member of the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs stated in an interview with TV Pirveli that the opposition United National Movement party should reach an agreement on the issue of Nika Melia's release. MEP added that a possible compromise, in this case, would be agreeing on Melia's release on the condition of him wearing the electronic tracking bracelet. Michel Gahler also noted that the cases of Giorgi Rurua and Nika Melia, both of whom the country's opposition bloc classifies as political prisoners should be considered separately, as, in the case of the former, the option for release would be the presidential pardon, while the latter needs to post his bail to be released from detention.

MEP Michel Gahler was



among the seven signatories of the joint statement of the members of the European Parliament which was released shortly after the last round of failed talks between the ruling party and opposition mediated by Christian Danielson during his second visit to Georgia. In their statement, the MEPs call for the EU

to respond to the parties' reluctance to come to an agreement and de-escalate the political climate in the country:

"Following the refusal from the political parties to compromise, Georgia's leaders should not expect a return to business as usual from the European Union. The European Parlia-



ment, in particular, will call for consequences in terms of EU financial assistance, including both a suspension of further disbursements of and an increase in conditionality linked to EU Macro-Financial Assistance and budget support programmes," the statement reads.

The first round of talks medi-

ated by the special representative of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, was held on March 12. Following the failure of the first round of talks, Danielsson returned to Tbilisi on March 27 to hold the second round of negotiations, however, no agreement was reached.