

Ruling party rules out postponing municipal elections



► According to the PM of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili, the October 2 municipal elections will not be postponed and they will be held in 'a transparent, free, fair, and Covid-safe environment'.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria has called on healthcare officials and politicians to assess the epidemic-related risks involved in holding October 2 municipal elections, stating that "the issue of postponing the elections is not purely political, it is more an epidemiological and human rights issue". She announced that the addressee of her appeal was the Prime Minister of the country, as he has the right to declare a state of emergency, which is the only way to postpone the elections.

The initiative of the Public Defender has been echoed by many opposition party leaders, some of them claiming that against the background of surging infections, postponement of the election should be considered. "We are losing up to 60 people a day, if professionals think that this slaughter can be stopped only by imposing a lockdown or postponing the elections, health officials should talk about it," announced United National Movement (UNM) leader Nika Melia on Tuesday.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili announced yesterday that the opposition parties are campaigning for the postponement of elections as they are 'destined for defeat'. Garibashvili stressed that elections would be held, noting that even when there was no coronavirus vaccine, no country delayed the elections. According to him, the opposition 'has used the Public Defender's office' to push the government to postpone the elections'. PM promised that the government and political team would take responsibility for holding the elections in a transparent, free, fair, and Covid-safe environment.

As Shalva Papuashvili, Public Relations Secretary of the Georgian Dream said, demanding the postponement one month ahead of the elections directly means political capitulation. According to him, by supporting the idea of election postponement the United National Movement intends to prepare in advance an excuse to boycott the self-government elections, if defeated, blame their failure on the epidemic situa-

tion, and conduct a discrediting campaign against the government in the pre-election period.

As he stated, considering the experience of last year's elections, the CEC fully ensures that all security measures are observed on the election day. "Elections will be held, and they will be held safely," said Papuashvili.

Giorgi Vashadze, the leader of Strat-

egy Builder, addressed the Director of the National Center for Disease Control Amiran Gamkrelidze and said that it was his responsibility to say if it is necessary to tighten regulations in the country and if the election process poses a risk to the deterioration of the epidemiological situation. According to him, against the background of people being afraid of a pandemic because the system is not being run properly, statements of the Georgian Dream are irresponsible.

Ex-Prime Minister, the leader of the For Georgia party Giorgi Gakharia echoed the recent situation saying that it is irresponsible to talk about postponing the elections. According to him, the government and the ruling party must manage the pandemic without damaging the economy and the political processes of the country. He believes that the government should ensure holding safe elections.

Yesterday, UNM leader Melia said that he never asked for election delay, however, he believes that leading epidemiologists should inform the public of the possible month-long scenario and assess the risks related to holding elections.

The local elections are scheduled for October 2. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced yesterday, 30 ODIHR long-term observers will arrive in Georgia in the coming days. According to the ministry, the leadership of the mission will hold a press conference in the nearest days, where they will discuss the role of observers, after which the mission will officially start monitoring activities in Georgia.



► According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 ODIHR long-term observers will arrive in Georgia in the coming days to observe municipal election processes.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.1191 | EURO - 3.6609 | GBP - 4.2228 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.2193 | SWISS FRANC - 3.4163 |

5 arrested in Pankisi on charges of Islamic State membership



► People arrested in the Pankisi Gorge have been formally charged.



► State Security Service said 5 detained on terrorism charges in Pankisi were members of IS.

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The counter-Terrorism Center of the State Security Service has detained 5 Georgian citizens during a special operation in the Kakheti, Pankisi region on 24th of August. Allegedly, young men have joined the ranks of the terrorist organization 'Islamic State' and planned to leave for a terrorist camp in Syria. 3 young people aged 18 to 20 have been detained in the village of Koreti, and 2 people have been picked up in the village of Duisi.

"As a proof of loyalty, they had taken the oath of allegiance

(bay'ah) to the current leader of the Islamic State and spread video footage featuring the oath among persons with "links to terrorists. The members of the group openly expressed their support for the terrorist organization and systematically demonstrated terrorist symbols while moving in the streets," the State Security Service said in a statement.

According to the agency, the leader of the support group of the terrorist organization was identified, who openly stated that he was a representative of the extremist organization and "emir of Georgia" and helped above-mentioned suspects join

the ranks of IS. The agency reported that they periodically held conspiratorial meetings and discussed the ongoing processes in Syria-Iraq and future plans for Georgia. The families of the detainees exclude their children from links to terrorism and do not agree with the accusation made by the State Security Service.

Lia Tsikhesashvili, the mother of 19-year-old Hamzat Baghakashvili, one of the detainees in the village of Koreti, told RFE/RL that a special operation was carried out at their home at 7:00 a.m. when her son was returning home from a vil-

lage mosque. According to her, her son went to Turkey a month ago to pick tea, worked a total of three weeks and came back. "Other times Hamzat is herding sheep in the village, how could he have anything to do with terrorism? We do not have any versions of what could be connected with the arrest of him and 3 other villagers," said the mother of detainee Hamzat Bagakashvili.

Family members of detainees in Duisi do not contact the media. Tamila Kavtarashvili, the mother of another person arrested in Koreti, Ramaz Margoshvili, also categorically denies her son's connection to terrorism.

A local in Pankisi, Malkhaz Machalishvili, whose 19-year-old son Temirlan Machalishvili was killed in a counter-terrorism operation back in 2017, connects the arrest of 5 people in Pankisi with the upcoming self-government elections. He says that before each election, dozens of people are detained in the gorge and then their family members are forced to vote for the Georgian Dream in the elections.

According to preliminary information, the investigation is underway under Article 327 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates membership in a terrorist organization, participation in the activities of a terrorist organization, creation or leadership of a terrorist organization, foreseeing imprisonment for a term of 10 to 12 years. The investigation is being conducted by the Counter-Terrorism Center of the State Security Service. One of the detainees is charged under 2 articles of the Criminal Code - membership of a terrorist organization and aiding and abetting membership in a terrorist organization, while the rest are charged only with membership.

As the lawyer Ana Liluashvili told journalists, several volumes of case materials were handed over to the defense.

Mestia-Lentekhi and Ushguli roads to be completed in 2023 and 2022, PM announces

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili stated yesterday that construction of a new road connecting Mestia, the central town of Zemo Svaneti, to Lentekhi, a central town of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti regions, will be completed in 2023. The length of the Lentekhi-Mestia connection road is 27km and once the rehabilitation is finished travel time in the Lentekhi-Mestia direction will be reduced by almost 1.5 hours. The €100 million projects will provide safe and comfortable movement for the local population, as well as tourists, and will support the economic potential of the region. According to Gharibashvili,



► Reconstruction of Lentekhi-Mestia road will reduce travel time and provide safe and comfortable movement for the local population as well as tourists.

the road heading to Ushguli, a Georgian village recognized as the Upper Svaneti UNESCO World Heritage Site, will be finished by 2022.

PM also announced that rehabilitation of Tetnuldi ski Resort would start this year and water

and sewage systems would be installed, to cost a total of 5 million. He emphasized that the deconstruction of the old Hatsvali ropeway has already started and will be completely replaced with a new one.

The PM stressed that the



► Rehabilitation of Tetnuldi ski resort will start this year and will cost €5 million in total.

Laghani district in Mestia would become a new tourist attraction. The project envisages full urban renewal of the Laghami neighborhood and rehabilitation of three village towers in Ushguli. The project also includes the arrangement of internal streets,

lighting, engineering communications, and parking. In total, €33 million is planned to be spent on the renovation of the Laghami district. Six million has been allocated to arrange a new central park and modern standard sports complex in Mestia.

THURSDAY		AUGUST 26	
Day		Sunshine	High: 33°C
Night		Mostly clear	Low: 20°C
FRIDAY		AUGUST 27	
Day		Sunny sky	High: 35°C
Night		Mostly clear	Low: 22°C

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