

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

March 2-4

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia

1. Hospitalized Aslan Bzhania's Supporters Demand Resignation of Acting Abkhaz Leader

Hundreds of supporters of Aslan Bzhania, one of the three hopefuls running for Moscow-backed Abkhazia's leadership, stormed 'presidential administration' office in Sokhumi on March 3, demanding the resignation of acting leader Valery Bganba, local media Apsny Press reported.

Some of Bzhania's supporters believe that the key opposition leader was poisoned again to prevent him from participation in the repeat 'polls' of March 22. Bzhania, the Soviet KGB school graduate, was Abkhaz leadership hopeful and the main rival of then incumbent leader, ex-KGB officer Raul Khajimba during the 2019 race as well, however, he had to drop out as he was then poisoned with heavy metals.

Meanwhile, Russian media reported on Tuesday afternoon that Bzhania, who was hospitalized in Russia yesterday, came out of coma (*Civil.ge, March 3, 2020*).

2. Acting Abkhaz Leader Summons Moscow Envoy, as Bzhania Diagnosed with Double Pneumonia

On March 4, acting Abkhaz leader Valery Bganba summoned Russian diplomat Alexey Dvinyanin, a resident representative in the region, raising concerns about "Russian media outlets' undisguised attempt to foment destabilization in Abkhazia" by disseminating news about Aslan Bzhania's alleged poisoning, on the authority of anonymous sources.

Bganba demanded his top benefactor state – Russian Federation – to "immediately hand over to the Abkhaz authorities all available information kept by the said outlets, as well as medical reports for preliminary verification." He also entreated the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation to launch investigation into alleged poisoning of Bzhania, who holds Russian citizenship (*Civil.ge, March 3, 2020*).

3. De facto Abkhazian gov't urges Russia to investigate Aslan Bzhania's possible poisoning

De facto Abkhazian government urges Russia to investigate Aslan Bzhania's possible poisoning. As Russian media reports, de facto government has already appealed to the Prosecutor General of Russia.

Earlier this month, one of the so-called presidential candidate of Russian-occupied Abkhazia Aslan Bzhania was hospitalized with signs of poisoning. Later, Bzhania campaign announced that Aslan Bzhania would not be able to run in the elections on March 22. Bzhania campaign plans to discuss the postponement of the elections (1tv, March 4, 2020).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Armenia's Pashinyan Meets Georgian Leaders in Tbilisi

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who is paying a two-day official visit to Georgia on March 3-4, met his Georgian counterpart Giorgi Gakharia today.

During the face-to-face meeting this morning, the two PMs discussed future projects, which, according to Pashinyan "will have their impact on regional developments."

At the meeting, PM Gakharia spoke of the importance of peace and stability in their "difficult region," noting that Georgia's integration with NATO would guarantee its peace, stability and security. As part of his visit to Georgia, Nikol Pashinyan meets with President Salome Zurbishvili, Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze, and Georgian Orthodox Church's Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II (Civil.ge, March 3, 2020).

5. Georgian PM gifts Caucasian Shepherd puppy to Armenian PM

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia gifted Caucasian Shepherd puppy to his Armenian counterpart Nikol Pashinyan. The puppy is called Bombora (1 TV.ge, March 4, 2020).

President of Georgia – We have to care about preservation of stability and peace strengthening in the region together

President of Georgia and Armenian PM talked about important issues for development of Georgia-Armenia political and economic cooperation during the face-to-face meeting.

President Zurbishvili underlined that bilateral visits would deepen neighborly relations between the two countries (1TV, March 3, 2020).

6. NDI resident director Laura Thornton resigns

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) resident director in Georgia Laura Thornton resigns. The Public Relation Office of NDI has confirmed information. Thornton has been served as NDI resident director in Georgia since the fall of 2014 (Rustavi2, March 2, 2020).

7. Freedom House: Georgia remains "Partly Free" as Score Declines Slightly

Georgia experienced a two-point decrease in the Freedom in the World score, according to the new report by Freedom House, an international watchdog. In 2020 ranking, Georgia garnered an aggregate score of 61 points (24 points in political rights and 37 points in civil liberties), which constitutes a modest decrease compared to last year's result (63 points). As in previous years, Georgia was classified among the "partly free" nations (Civil.ge, March 4, 2020).

❖ Internal Affairs

8. Centuries later we are still in awe of King Tamar - US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan.

Today, US Ambassador Kelly Degnan delivered a speech at a meeting on the prevention of violence against women in politics and elections, organized by the United Nations Gender Thematic Group. "Georgia with its long history of women's leadership has directly experienced the fact that women have much more to offer in national leadership roles. Centuries later we are still in awe of King Tamar. The United States recognizes the important role women can play in leadership and funds numerous programs in Georgia and around the world to advance women's participation in politics and to ensure that they feel comfortable running for office", -said the Ambassador (Rustavi2, March 4, 2020).

9. President Zurbishvili Delivers Annual Parliamentary Address

President Zurbishvili opened her 34-minute speech by focusing on the main challenges that Georgia faces today, including the recent spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), "which has already moved beyond the health sector and is already measured by its economic and financial impact."

In her today's address, the Georgian President spoke of the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, as one of the "very serious" challenges for the country.

She said, Russian occupation violates human rights on both sides of the dividing line on a daily basis.

President Zurbishvili further added that "the policy of Russia, which as in the past fails to accept our independence and prevents the establishment of normal neighborly relations."

President Zurbishvili said in her address that after recovering its independence less than 30 years ago, Georgia now stands "at the door of the EU as one of the frontrunner associate members," and is also among NATO's "most trusted and appreciated partners."

Salome Zurbishvili spoke of the upcoming parliamentary elections and the ongoing political confrontation over the electoral system reform as well.

Stressing that she would not share her personal views on this sensitive issue as a “non-partisan, independent, above parties President,” Zurabishvili said, as a President she has offered “to all political forces the presidential platform to allow the dialogue to continue.” (*Civil.ge, March 4, 2020*)

10. We want the President not to say new nonsense - opposition boycotts Salome Zourabichvili's annual report

The opposition does not attend the president's annual speech.

Lawmakers recall Zurabishvili's statements and say that during the year Salome Zourabichvili has repeatedly damaged the country in her speeches.

“The political opposition is in a boycott, but Salome Zourabichvili, whose presence there is an insult to this institution, is not in our interest. We want the President not to say new nonsense and not to hurt the country again. We have no serious questions to her. This place bought her Ivanishvili”, - said Irma Nadirashvili, a member of the parliamentary faction “European Georgia - Movement for Freedom” (*Rustavi2, March 4, 2020*).

11. MOH - People under quarantine or self-isolation receive compensation from employers

According to the Ministry of Health, people under quarantine or self-isolation will receive compensation from employers. Georgia has confirmed three cases of the novel virus so far (*1TV, March 4, 2020*).

12. Tbilisi Infectious Hospital - 16 patients test negative for COVID-19

The medical director of the Tbilisi Infectious Hospital Marina Ezugbaia, says 16 patients tested negative for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). They will be taken to the quarantine zone.

Marina Ezugbaia added that currently 24 patients remain in the clinic. (*1TV, March 4, 2020*).

13. According to Amiran Gamkrelidze, banknotes can spread virus

Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia addressed the citizens with another recommendation to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

According to Gamkrelidze, one of the sources of the spread of the virus can be banknotes. In addition, he appealed to banks to arrange disinfection areas in all branches (*1TV, March 3, 2020*).

14. 26 patients observed in Abastumani quarantine zone – none of them have the symptoms of coronavirus

For prevention of coronavirus, 26 patients are under the observation in Abastumani quarantine zone.

At the moment, none of them have high temperature or other symptoms characteristic to the coronavirus.

They will stay in Abastumani 14 days (*Rustavi2, March 2, 2020*).

15. Disinfection process ongoing in the underpasses of Tbilisi

Disinfection process ongoing in the underpasses of Tbilisi, as a part of the prevention of coronavirus.

The works was carried out in 54 underground passages. Disinfection works will continue (*Rustavi2, March 2, 2020*)

16. Quarantine zone set up at Gori Military Hospital

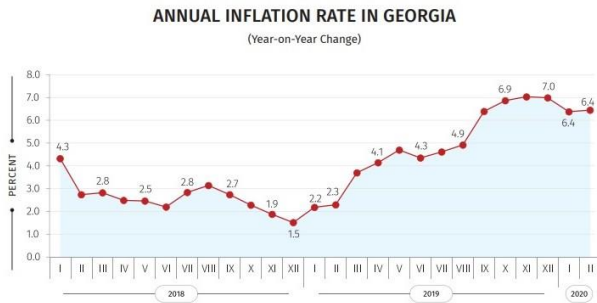
A quarantine zone has been set up at the Gori Military Hospital of the Ministry of Defense as part of the new coronavirus prevention measures. If needed, the military hospital will receive and treat 180 patients (*Rustavi2, March 2, 2020*).

17. The MIA destructed drugs worth of 6.5 mln GEL seized from the illegal circulation

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has destructed drugs seized as evidence at various stages of investigation of 765 criminal cases. The value of the destructed drugs at the so called “black market” is approximately 6.5 million Gel (*Rustavi2, March 4, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Geostat: Annual Inflation 6.4% in February



Georgia's annual inflation stood at 6.4% in February 2020, while on a monthly basis prices increased by 0.3%, the National Statistics Office (Geostat) reported on March 2. As for the annual core inflation¹, the prices increased by 4.6%, while the annual core inflation without tobacco² amounted to 3.8%.

The annual inflation rate was mainly influenced by price changes for the following groups:

Food and non-alcoholic beverages: the prices in the group increased by 12.7%, contributing 3.95% to the

overall annual inflation rate. Within the group the prices were higher for the following subgroups: fruit and grapes (25.1%), milk, cheese and eggs (19.2%), meat (15.1%), sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionery (11.2%), vegetables (11.1%), fish (10.3%), mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices (8.7%), oils and fats (7.4%), bread and cereals (5.6%) and coffee, tea and cocoa (5.0%); Restaurants and hotels: the prices went up by 8.7%, contributing 0.39% to the overall annual inflation rate.

The prices in the group increased for catering services (9.5%) and accommodation services (1.3%) (Rustavi², March 2, 2020).

Additional Information

April 30, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7860 GEL









1 GBP - 3.5652 GEL

100 RUB -4.2438 GEL

1 EUR - 3.1064 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4583 GEL

100 JPY - 2.5916 GEL

Tomorrow 06/03/2020	Saturday 07/03/2020	Sunday 08/03/2020	Monday 09/03/2020	Tuesday 10/03/2020	Wednesday 11/03/2020	Thursday 12/03/2020	Friday 13/03/2020
							
14°	13°	11°	10°	10°	13°	14°	11°

- **Movie Events - English Sessions - [Tickets](#)**
- **Friends of Museum (Membership to access Georgian National Museums For free of charge after one payment) - [Membership](#)**
- **Marjanishvili Theatre - [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Rustaveli Theatre - [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Opera and Ballet - [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Concerts - [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Sports - [Events and Tickets](#)**