

Armenia lifts coronavirus state of emergency



The Armenian government lifted on September 11 a state of emergency declared six months ago while keeping in place safety rules designed to prevent coronavirus infections in the country.

The government introduced a nationwide “quarantine” regime which will allow it to continue requiring Armenians to wear face masks in all public areas and enforcing social distancing and hygiene rules for businesses.

The new regime, which will remain in force until January 11, stems from a government bill which was passed by the Armenian parliament last week and signed into law by President Armen Sarkissian on Thursday.

The bill also empowers relevant authorities to impose nationwide or local lockdowns, seal off communities hit by COVID-19 outbreaks, close Armenia’s borders and isolate people infected with the disease. The authorities can also ban or restrict public gatherings.

The government drafted the bill to avoid extending the state of emergency again on September 11. The move came amid a steady decline in coronavirus cases registered in the country.

The daily number of new cases reported by the Armenian Ministry of Health varied from 108 to 177 in the course of this week, sharply down from an average of 550-600 cases a day registered in the first half of July. There has been a similar drop in coronavirus-related deaths, which have totaled 1,189 since the start of the pandemic, according to the ministry.

The government already lifted in late August a ban on rallies increasingly criticized by the Armenian opposition. It at the same time set strict physical distancing requirements for organizers and participants of street gatherings.

The government also decided to reopen all schools and universities shut down in March. Classes there will resume on September 15.

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PM attends Sparapet Day celebrations in Khndzoresk, inspects progress in Old Goris rehabilitation project



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan traveled to Syunik Marz of Armenia on September 12 and attended Sparapet Day-dated festivities in Khndzoresk. The Premier was accompanied by RA Defense Minister David Tonoyan, Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan and Syunik Marz Governor Hunan Poghosyan.

Nikol Pashinyan first visited Sparapet's grave and paid floral tribute to Mkhitar Sparapet. Then the separate armored battalion's 15 servicemen took oath in the presence of the Prime Minister. The Sparapet's message was read out and the State anthem of the Republic of Armenia was played

during the oath-taking ceremony.

"Servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, I congratulate you on taking a military oath," the Prime Minister



said in his greeting remarks and congratulated the servicemen on this occasion.



Nikol Pashinyan walked on the swinging bridge of Khndzoresk and watched musical performances staged on the occasion of Sparapet Day. The Premier next headed to the area adjacent to Khndzoresk community hall, where he was greeted with warm applause by the locals. Prime Minister Pashinyan and the high-ranking guests laid flowers at the memorials commemorating our heroes perished in the Great Patriotic War.

Taking the opportunity, the Prime Minister talked to the locals and congratulated them on Sparapet Day. Accompanied by Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan and Syunik Marz Governor Hunan Poghosyan, Nikol Pashinyan toured Goris to get acquainted with the local tourism infrastructure and inspect progress in the Old Goris Rehabilitation Project.

The site adjacent to the observation point used to be a landfill. The ongoing reconstruction will make of it one of the most attractive sights in the city. It offers a splendid view on the "city of rocks," the Old Goris. Funded under subsidy programs to a total cost of 99 million drams, 40% of which is the community's investment, the project seeks to develop the region's huge potential in the field of competitive tourism.

The area is quite competitive in terms of attracting business and investments. A hotel and a restaurant came into operation earlier this year. Several business proposals are being discussed. As a result, new competitive services will be available in 2021-2022,

The Premier toured the Old Goris Historical and Cultural Center to get acquainted with the ongoing rehabilitation activities. Nikol Pashinyan highlighted the ongoing programs, which will give a strong impetus to the development of tourism in Goris and will help enhance its tourism attractiveness.



Armenian economy not in crisis, says Pashinyan



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The Armenian economy has avoided a serious crisis despite contracting during the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan insisted on September 10.

Pashinyan cited government data suggesting that economic activity in the country is slowly picking up after declining sharply in the second quarter of this year. He singled out a 2.5 percent year-on-year fall in the volume of retail trade and services registered in August.

“This [negative] indicator was quite high from March onwards,” Pashinyan told a weekly cabinet meeting in Yerevan. “It’s now falling.”

“These figures clearly show that there is no social [and economic] crisis in Armenia,” he claimed. “Of course, there is no denying that there has been a deterioration of the socioeconomic situation and we lost growth. But it’s very important to take note of this fact.”

According to the government’s Statistical Committee, Armenia’s GDP shrunk by about 14 percent in real terms in April-June 2020 after growing by almost 4 percent in the first quarter. The decline followed a coronavirus-related nationwide lockdown

imposed in late March.

The Armenian government gradually reopened most sectors of the domestic economy, including cafes and restaurants, by the beginning of May. The country’s Central Bank forecast in June that the economy will contract by 4 percent in 2020 due to the negative impact of the pandemic.

Pashinyan said his government has mitigated that impact with more than 163 billion drams (\$336 million) spent on various stimulus measures. He also seemed to imply that unemployment in Armenia has not increased significantly since March.

The prime minister said in that regard that as of July this year the number of officially registered workers in the country stood at over 613,000 and was slightly higher than in July 2019.

The higher number of jobs most probably resulted from a continuing government crackdown on the informal sector of the economy which still employs many Armenians. Employers do not register them to avoid paying their income and pension taxes.

Official statistics suggest that the number of unregistered workers has fallen signifi-

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stressed on Thursday the importance of continued enforcement of the remaining safety rules, warning of the risk of a “second wave” of COVID-19 infections. According to Tatevik Revazyan, the head of the government’s Civil Aviation Committee, the end of emergency rule also means a formal reopening of Armenia’s air space for regular commercial flights. Airlines have carried out only charter flights to and from the country for the last six months.

“We are now calling and sending letters to airlines to inform them that all restrictions are lifted so that they can resume flights as soon as possible,” Revazyan told RFE/RL’s Armenian service. “But it’s obviously up to the airlines to decide which flights will be restored.”

Because of the continuing pandemic Armenian citizens are still not allowed to travel to the United States, Russia and virtually all European countries.

Yerevan similarly banned foreign nationals from entering Armenia in March. The ban was lifted late last month. Foreigners arriving in the country have since been required so self-isolate for two weeks.

Pashinyan announced on September 10 that they will now be given the option of undergoing a coronavirus test upon arrival at the Yerevan or Gyumri airport. “If a person tests negative, they will not have to be quarantined,” he explained.

cantly since Pashinyan came to power in May 2018. According the State Revenue Committee (SRC), private entities reported more than 87,000 new jobs to the tax service from May 2018 through December 2019.

The SRC and other government agencies have not yet come up with any estimates of the number of Armenians who have lost their jobs or businesses during the coronavirus crisis.

The government’s handling of the crisis and its socioeconomic consequences is strongly criticized by opposition groups.

Armenian Teachers Tested For COVID-19 Ahead of School Reopening

(RFE/RL) - Teachers in Armenia queued up at polyclinics on September 9 to undergo mandatory coronavirus tests ahead of the reopening of the country's schools scheduled for September 15.

The Armenian government shut down all schools and universities in March because of the coronavirus pandemic. Virtually all of them switched to online classes that continued until the end of the last academic year in June.

The government decided last month to reopen all educational institutions amid a falling number of coronavirus cases recorded in the country. Under the safety protocols issued by it, there can be no more than 20 students in a classroom at a time and all of them will have to wear face masks during classes.

For their part, the school administrations will have to provide the students with hand sanitizers and regularly disinfect classrooms. They must also ensure all teachers get tested for COVID-19 by September 15.



There were chaotic scenes on Wednesday at Yerevan's Polyclinic No. 8 where teachers from two schools were scheduled to have coronavirus tests. Not all of them observed physical distancing as they waited in a long line formed in a crowded polyclinic courtyard. Many decried the lack of space there, saying that they risk getting infected with COVID-19.

"We are jeopardizing not only ourselves but also our students," one angry teacher told RFE/RL's Armenian service. "If you consider this barn a medical institution then I don't know what to say."

"I'm not concerned, I'm angry because

all this testing could have been organized inside schools in proper a manner without this fuss," said another.

Other teachers were too scared to enter the building and waited their turn outside it. "I have a small child and an elderly person at home and am now afraid of entering the building in these conditions," explained one of them. "They are not preventing but actually contributing to the spread of the disease."

"Maybe we summoned too many teachers at a time and are having such a problem because of that," acknowledged the polyclinic director, Armine Harutyunyan.

The Ministry of Health reported in the morning that a record-high 3,518 coronavirus tests have been carried out across Armenia in the past day. The daily number of such tests has averaged roughly 2,000 during the pandemic.

A ministry spokeswoman confirmed that the sharp increase is the result of the mass testing among schoolteachers.

MP Arsen Julfalakyan quits Parliament

MP Arsen Julfalakyan from the ruling My Step faction has announced the decision to quit the parliament.

Julfalakyan cited "fundamental disagreements with Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Arayik Harutyunyan on the current management approaches of the spheres under his jurisdiction" as the reason for the decision.

"I think that the adopted path is unpromising, will not ensure the solution and development of the existing problems in the mentioned spheres. Therefore, my further activity in such conditions will certainly not serve my mission as



Member of Parliament to effectively defend the interests of our state and citizens," he said in a Facebook post.

"I would like to emphasize that during my nearly two years at the legislature, I have

had effective partnership relations with the "My Step" political team based on mutual respect, mature professional discussions, and dignified approaches. It is very important that during this time healthy, allied, and even friendly relations with some of them have been formed, and we have struggled to solve the existing problems with the necessary dedication," he added.

Julfalakyan said it was an honor to get an opportunity to serve the country in the capacity of a lawmaker, as well, noting that the decision to lay down the mandate should also be seen as part of that service.

French Armenian Astrid Panosyan named Knight of the National Order of Merit

French Armenian politician and businesswoman Astrid Panosyan has been honored with a rank of the Knight of the National Order of Merit.

President Emmanuel Macron handed over the Order during a ceremony at the Elysee Palace.

Astrid Panosyan is the co-founder of La République en Marche (LREM) a centrist and liberal political party in France. The party was founded on 6 April 2016.

Mrs. Astrid Panosyan has been Chairwoman of the Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer at Societe de Tayninh SA since September 1, 2015. Mrs. Panosyan has been the Chief Resources Officer and Member of the Management Board at Unibail-Rodamco SE since September 1, 2015 and serves as its Chief Executive Officer in



charge of Central Operations.

She served as an Advisor and Member of the Cabinet of French Minister of Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs, where she was in charge of economic attractiveness and international investments.

She served as the Secretary of the Board of Groupama S.A. until September 22, 2014 and General Secretary since 2011. She joined Groupama S.A. in 2002, where she held various senior positions in the international department, the department

of strategy and the department of finance.

Previously, she joined AXA's strategy department in 1998. She served as Head Officer of Strategy and Head Officer of Business Support & Development Asia-Pacific at AXA. She began her career at the AT Kearney. She serves as a member of the Board of Directors of Unibail-Rodamco

Participations SAS and U&R Management BV.

She served as a Director of Cegid Group SA from December 20, 2011 to November 27, 2014. She was a member of the Board of Directors at CEDID Group S.A. Mrs. Panosyan graduated from HEC Paris, IEP Paris, Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales de Montreal and Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University.

Armenia strongly rejects instigation of inter-ethnic animosity



Armenia resolutely rejects racial and ethnic profiling and instigation of inter-ethnic animosity, as these can only cultivate fertile ground for radicalization, Mher Margaryan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the UN, said at the High-Level Forum on

the Culture of Peace convened by the President of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly. "We have welcomed the launch of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and remain a strong contributor to the international efforts for the prevention agenda. As demonstrated so many times before, intolerance, cultivation of hate speech against ethnic and religious groups, if not properly addressed, can lead

to mass atrocities and crimes against humanity," he said.

"We have been consistent in supporting multilateral efforts aimed at prevention of genocide and strengthening early warning capacities of the United Nations. The UN resolutions tabled by Armenia on the prevention of genocide constitute important manifestation of effective multilateralism which we are strongly supporting," the Ambassador stated.

He reiterated Armenia's unwavering adherence to the promotion of the ideas, goals and principles enshrined in the Declaration and Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace.

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Armenian Central Bank touts deferred loan repayments



During the coronavirus crisis Armenian commercial banks have suspended the repayment of hundreds of thousands of loans worth a combined 1.3 trillion drams (\$2.7 billion), according to the country's Central Bank.

The Central Bank governor, Martin Galstyan, told reporters on September 8 that the deferments benefited about 550,000 individual borrowers and 17,000 firms. As a result, the commercial banks temporarily lost an estimated 100 billion drams in rev-

enue, he said, according to the Armenpress news agency.

The banks began deferring loan repayments in March as the Armenian government imposed strict restrictions on people's movements and ordered the closure of most firms to tackle the spread of the coronavirus. The lockdown plunged the Armenian economy into recession, leaving many people without jobs and income.

The government lifted the ban on virtually all types of business activity by the beginning of May. Most banks resumed loan repayments at around the same time.

The government and the Central Bank have since faced opposition calls for imposing a prolonged freeze on all loan repayments. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other government officials have opposed this, saying that the banks should deal with defaulting clients on a case-by-case basis.

Galstyan also argued against such a freeze still advocated by some opposition figures, saying that additional financial losses could deal a serious blow to the Armenian banking sector.

"Can banks constantly and continuously make expenditures without expecting any revenue in return? In our view, that would be a bit reckless," he said.

Galstyan also pointed out that since March the banks have extended a total of 80 billion drams (\$165 million) in loans subsidized by the government as part of its efforts to mitigate grave socioeconomic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

The government's stimulus package, worth about 150 billion drams, has also included cash handouts to various categories of the vulnerable population as well as grants to some struggling businesses and farmers.

Regular flights to/from Armenia reopen

The regular flights to and from the Republic of Armenia have reopened, the Civil Aviation Committee informs.

At the same time, the Committee notes that it's up to airlines to make decisions regarding the resumption of flights, frequencies and directions.

The conditions and restrictions on the entry of passengers leaving Armenia for another country are regulated in accordance with the rules established by that country.

For more detailed information, it's neces-



sary to contact the airlines or their representative offices in Armenia.

For information on airlines it's necessary to call 1-87 or visit the website of Zvartnots

International Airport.

According to the Armenian government decision of August 12, non-citizens will be allowed to Armenia. They can choose to self-isolate for 14 days or take a PCR test and leave the quarantine, if the result is negative.

Foreign citizens can obtain a visa to Armenia only at the Armenian diplomatic representations abroad (embassy, consulate, consular post) or through e-visa electronic system.

Skrill money transfer system launches in Armenia

The Skrill online payment system has been launched in Armenia and is fully functioning, Minister of High-Tech Industry Hakob Arsahakyan informs.

From now on individuals and legal entities have the opportunity to receive and transfer money through VISA cards registered in Armenia, as well as to withdraw cash from banks or ATMs via VISA card by simply registering on Skrill.com website or



the corresponding application.

The launch of this system in Armenia will create a new opportunity for individuals and companies providing online services, and will contribute to the development of online trading firms.

Work is underway to launch other similar tools (PayPal, TransferWise, etc.) in Armenia, the Minister said on Facebook.

EU and WHO deliver COVID-19 tests and essential medical supplies to Armenia



The European Union and WHO deliver COVID-19 tests and essential medical supplies to Armenia

The European Union and WHO handed over 100 oxygen concentrators, 20 electrocardiographs and 10,000 PCR tests for COVID-19 to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia.

The supplies, procured by WHO with EU support, will help increase testing capacity and help patients recover from severe illness due to COVID-19.

Oxygen concentrators are a non-invasive way of providing oxygen to patients hospitalized with COVID-19. Such supplemental oxygen is the first essential step for the treatment of patients with low blood oxygen levels due to severe COVID-19.

Electrocardiographs help health professionals listen to and monitor a patient's heart for complications. ECGs are especially important for patients being treated

in intensive care units.

The 10,000 tests delivered will ensure timely detection, isolation and management of patients, which is important both for patient care and for containing the epidemic in the country. The tests are of a type included in WHO's list of quality-assured supplies and are capable of producing accurate results in just 75 minutes. This short processing time saves healthcare workers' time and energy, helps decrease the probability of human error and allows a larger number of tests to be carried out per day.

Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia, Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin, WHO Representative in Armenia, Egor Zaitsev, RA Deputy Minister of Health, Lena Nanushyan were at the Republican Center for Humanitarian Aid SNCO to receive the shipment of tests and equipment.

The EU Ambassador and WHO Representative handed over the tests and equipment to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia as part of a larger assistance package to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the country. The tests and equipment will be provided to the national laboratory and healthcare institutions.

The EU and the WHO Regional Office for Europe have been actively supporting Armenia in its battle against the virus since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. On 20 June,

a group of experts co-funded by WHO and the EU arrived in Armenia to help scale up the response in the country. On 1 July, 10 000 PCR tests were delivered to help increase testing capacity.

This support is part of the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which currently affects more than 216 countries and territories. On 27 March 2020, the EU announced an assistance package of €30 mil-



lion to help prevent, detect and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in six countries of eastern Europe and the Caucasus, including Armenia.

The funds are initially being used to meet immediate emergency needs, such as procuring critical supplies for health-care workers, frontline responders and patients. In the longer term, the assistance will go towards strengthening the country's capacity to respond to public health emergencies.

Hayastan Fund sends \$70,000 in aid to Syrian Armenian community

To alleviate the dire socio-economic and healthcare situation resulting from the Covid 19 Pandemic that the Armenian community in Syria is currently facing, on September 9 the Executive Director of the Hayastan All Armenian Fund Haykak Arshamyan passed on \$70,000 to the Armenian Embassy in Damascus for distribution.

\$30,000 will be donated to 502 teachers and 42 support staff of Armenian Educa-



tional Institutions in Syria and \$40,000 to support those individuals currently receiving treatment for Coronavirus.

These funds

were donated to the Hayastan All Armenian Fund by thousands of individuals around the world as part of the Covid 19 United Against the Pandemic Fundraising Campaign.

The Fund continues to support Armenian communities around the world and stand strong with our brother and sisters in need

A number of airlines to resume flights to Armenia later this month

One or two dozen airlines will resume flights to Armenia later this month, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told a cabinet meeting on September 10.

He said the Civil Aviation Committee is accepting applications to see which airlines are ready to resume regular flights.

"We have implemented changes in the quarantine regime, as well, and foreigners arriving in Armenia, who don't want to self-isolate, can now take a PCR test and get the result within 24 hours. The person can quit the quarantine if the result is negative," Pashinyan added.



ECHR ruling in Armenian Officer Gurgen Margaryan murder case appealed

Armenia has referred the European Court ruling in Gurgen Margaryan murder case to the Grand Chamber. The appeal has been filed by lawyers of the applicants Siranush Sahakyan and Levon Grigoryan.

The Court ruled in May 2020 that Azerbaijan violated the European Convention on Human Rights by releasing an extradited officer who had murdered an Armenian soldier during training in Hungary.

The Court found that although Azerbaijan had clearly endorsed Ramil Safarov's acts, not only by releasing him but also by promoting him, paying him salary arrears and granting him a flat upon his return, it could not be held responsible under the stringent standards of international law which required a State to "acknowledge" such acts "as its own".

However, it found that there had been no justification for the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to enforce the punishment of Ramil Safarov and to in effect grant him impunity for a serious hate crime.

In January 2004, Gurgen Margaryan and Hayk Makuchyan travelled to Budapest to attend a NATO-sponsored, English-language course. The two men, along with participants from each of the former Soviet Socialist Republics, including Azerbaijan,



were provided with accommodation by the Hungarian University of National Defense.

On 19 February 2004, one of the Azerbaijani participants, Ramil Safarov, murdered Gurgen Margaryan while he slept by decapitating him with sixteen blows of an axe. Safarov then tried to break into Hayk Makuchyan's room, shouting ethnic slurs, but was quickly apprehended by the police.

Ramil Safarov later admitted that he had murdered Gurgen Margaryan on account of his Armenian origin. He showed no remorse for the killing.

It emerged during the criminal proceedings that Ramil Safarov had purchased an axe in a local store with a view to killing both of the Armenian soldiers in order to mark the anniversary of the beginning of

the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

On 13 April 2006, the Budapest City Court found Ramil Safarov guilty of the premeditated murder of Gurgen Margaryan and preparation for the murder of Hayk Makuchyan. He was sentenced to life imprisonment (with the possibility of conditional release after 30 years) and his sentence was to be served in a Hungarian prison.

Ramil Safarov's repeated requests to be transferred to Azerbaijan, in order to serve his prison sentence, there, were initially refused by the Hungarian authorities. But the Hungarian Minister of Justice ultimately approved Safarov's renewed request in August 2012.

On 31 August 2012, Ramil Safarov was transferred to Azerbaijan in agreement with Hungary under the Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons. He was met with a heroes' welcome upon his arrival in Baku. A few hours later, he was pardoned by President Ilham Aliyev, promoted to the rank of major, awarded eight years of salary arrears, and offered an apartment

Turkey's actions undermine effort towards peace and stability in the region, Armenian FM says

Turkey's actions undermine the effort towards peace and stability in the South Caucasus, Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakyan said at a joint press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry.

He said during the recent escalation at the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, Turkey was the only country to take a one-sided, very aggressive approach: one-sided in support of Azerbaijan, and aggressive approach toward Armenia and the Armenian people, in rhetoric at all levels and in action.

"Of course, we see the military build-up that they are attempting. We are hearing about the use of the foreign terrorist fighters to be transferred to Azerbaijan or maybe they are already transferred. We see the heavy military presence, the build-up. These are exactly the moves which undermine the effort toward peace and stability in the region," the Foreign Minister said.

"We are resolute in our defense and we will also resolutely deny any such policies which project power, which are aggressive in their nature and which are of destabilizing nature. We see this power projection from Eastern Mediterranean to North Af-



rica, to the Middle East and to the South Caucasus as well. So, these are not welcomed policies at all," he added.

As far as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is concerned, Minister Mnatsakyan said "we have been and remain extremely focused on the most important existential issues of our compatriots – the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh."

"Our focus and our ultimate priorities concern the sustainability of the very physical security of our compatriots in Nagorno-Karabakh and the question of status, the recognition of the right to self-determination and implementation of it without limitations. The security is in the heart of

this very important priority for Armenia so far as the resolution is concerned," he stated.

The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship, which comprises France, Russia, and the USA, has been and remains the only important international platform, format within which we are seeking solution to this conflict, the Minister said.

According to Zohrab Mnatsakyan, "the conflict resolution can be based on compromise and compromise means that each of the parties has to take respective steps towards a balanced, measurable solution, which meets the interests of all."

"It cannot be a 'my way or no way' solution. Within this, I think we have the sensitivity of the international community towards this conflict. There is no such thing as bundling conflicts together and viewing them through one single prism. So far as Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is concerned, this conflict has its peculiarities, its history, its nuance, its important differences. Within this we value very much the very careful approach of all our partners towards the strictly peaceful resolution. There is no military solution to this," he stated.

Artsakh Defense Army stands ready to rebuke any aggression – FM

Artsakh Defense Army stands ready to rebuke any aggression as it has done before, Artsakh's Foreign Minister Masis Mayilian said in an interview with Catalan National news agency.

"If one considers the pace and scope with which Azerbaijan builds up its military arsenal, it becomes clear that it doesn't buy arms to store in a warehouse, but rather with an intention to use them one day. And it will use every opportunity to test the grounds, to check if it is the right time to start a new aggression," the Foreign Minister said.

"We have seen Azerbaijan doing so in April 2016, and quite recently, on July 12, on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, in the Tavush region of Armenia. In both cases Artsakh and Armenian defense forces gave an appropriate response. There is no reason to believe that Azerbaijan will not give it another try when it feels itself strong enough to unleash another military adventure. And, of course, we know it and Artsakh Defense Army stands ready to rebuke any aggression as it has done before," Minister Mayilian added.

He said Artsakh's stance remains unchanged. "We have always been in favor of the resolution of the conflict exclusively by peaceful means. This position has been voiced on numerous occasions both publicly and during the meetings with the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minsk Group Co-chairs, and many statements of the foreign ministry circulated in the international organizations like OSCE, UN, CE etc. We make no secret of the fact, that we want peace, at the same time we realize what an ancient Latin philosopher had in mind noting "Si vis pacem, para bellum -If you want peace, be prepared for war". And we have gone through it already."

The Minister said "a single glance at the region is enough to understand the under-



lying reality of the developments taking place in the conflict zone." He reminded that thousands of demonstrators in Baku demanded from the Azerbaijani government to start a large-scale war.

"In fairness, however, it should be noted that the demonstrators that broke into the country's parliament building also had an anti-government agenda. It just shows the role the conflict plays in the internal life of Azerbaijan and how prepared is the Azerbaijani society, and the government for peace or the peaceful settlement of the conflict," the Foreign Minister stated.

Minister Mayilian stressed that peace cannot be reached unilaterally, and all sides to the conflict should strive for it.

"And no matter, how loudly we announce of our readiness to reach peace with our neighbors, they should be both receptive and perceptive of peace. Unfortunately, for years the anti-Armenian sentiments in Azerbaijan have been cultivated into a state-run policy and instead of preparing its population for peace, Azerbaijan has been preparing it for war. This is the reality we face today. And this is the reality the international community should deal with. Independent of the fact whether the country is recognized or unrecognized, it is the people that we should think of. And we do our part not only to ensure the security and safety of our people, but to play a constructive role in contributing to peace and stability in the region," he added.

The Minister emphasized that Azerbaijan and the relevant international agencies should work towards improving Azerbaijan's human rights record, fostering democratic developments in the country and educating its society about the benefits of peace and not war.

As for Turkey's stance on the issue, Mayilian said "it has never been neutral despite being a member of the OSCE Minsk Group.

"It is the only country in the region, that has not only publicly voiced its support for the brotherly Azerbaijan but also has backed the Azerbaijani blockade of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh. It is not a secret that Turkey also helps Azerbaijan in army-building, considering that many Azerbaijani officers are trained in Turkey and Turkish military consultants advise the Azeri military leadership."

"We consider the statement by the Turkish Government in support of the provocations and violations of the ceasefire regime by Azerbaijan unacceptable. We emphasize once again that such a position of Turkey makes its membership in the OSCE Minsk Group senseless," he added.

The Foreign Minister noted that "the South Caucasus is a region with a very complex geopolitics and multiple players; both regional and outside the region; with varying levels of interests. And it is not by chance that the Co-chair countries of the Minsk group dealing with the conflict are Russia, France and the US."

"One thing is clear: if the hostilities resume in the region it will be catastrophic not only for the region, but for the whole international community. The Republic of Artsakh stands ready to take its share of responsibility for maintaining peace and security in the region, it's time for other stakeholders do the same," the Minister concluded.

Armenia competitive environment improving, says US State Department 2020 report

The US State Department says in its 2020 Investment Climate Statements: Armenia report that Armenia's progress in fighting corruption after the 2018 revolution and improvements in several sectors are increasing the country's appeal for investments and that the competitive environment for foreign investments is improving.

"Over the past several years, Armenia has received respectable rankings in international indices that review country business environments and investment climates. Significant U.S. investments are present in Armenia, most notably ContourGlobal's acquisition of the Vorotan Hydroelectric Cascade and Lydian International's efforts to develop a major gold mine.

U.S. investors in the banking, energy, pharmaceutical, information technology, and mining sectors, among others, have entered or acquired assets in Armenia. Armenia presents a variety of opportunities for investors, and the country's legal framework and government policy aim to attract investment, but the investment climate is not without challenges.

Obstacles include Armenia's small market size, relative geographic isolation due to closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan, weaknesses in the rule of law and judiciary, and a legacy of corruption. Net foreign direct investment inflows are low. Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, a customs union that brings Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia together in an integrated single market.

In May 2015, Armenia signed a Trade and



Investment Framework Agreement with the United States. The TIFA establishes a United States-Armenia Council on Trade and Investment to discuss bilateral trade and investment and related issues. In November 2017, Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the European Union, which aims in part to improve Armenia's investment climate and business environment.

Armenia imposes few restrictions on foreign control and rights to private ownership and establishment. There are no restrictions on the rights of foreign nationals to acquire, establish, or dispose of business interests in Armenia.

Business registration procedures are straightforward. According to foreign companies, otherwise sound regulations, policies, and laws are sometimes undermined by problems such as the lack of independence, capacity, or professionalism in key institutions, most critically the judiciary. Armenia does not limit the conversion and transfer of money or the repatriation of capital and earnings. The banking system in Armenia is sound and well-regulated,

but investors note that the financial sector is not highly developed.

The U.S.-Armenia Bilateral Investment Treaty provides U.S. investors with a variety of protections. Although Armenian legislation offers protection for intellectual property rights, enforcement efforts and recourse through the courts require improvement.

Armenia experienced a dramatic change of government in April/May 2018. Parliamentary elections in December 2018 led to the exit from power of numerous parliamentarians known to have significant business holdings in Armenia and exercise outsized sway over large sections of the economy. An anti-corruption campaign is underway as part of efforts to eliminate systemic corruption. Overall, the competitive environment in Armenia is improving, but several businesses have reported that broader reforms across judicial, tax, customs, health, education, military, and law enforcement institutions will be necessary to shore up these gains.

Despite progress in the fight against corruption and improvements in some areas that raise Armenia's attractiveness as an investment destination, investors claim that numerous concerns remain and must be addressed to ensure a transparent, fair, and predictable business climate. An investment dispute in the country's mining sector has attracted significant international attention and remains outstanding after several years", it said in its executive summary.

Baku violated a key European convention: Baroness Cox pens letter to Azerbaijani Ambassador

Azerbaijan violated a key European convention by pardoning, rewarding and glorifying an Azerbaijani army officer who hacked to death a sleeping Armenian colleague in 2004, Member of the House of Lords, Baroness Caroline Cox said in a letter to Azerbaijan's Ambassador to the UK Tahir Taghizade.

She reminded that according to a recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, Baku's actions amounted to the "approval" and "endorsement" of the "very serious ethnically-based crime."



"Over a four-day period in April 2016, Azerbaijani forces launched an offensive into the territories controlled by Armenian forces in Nagorno Karabakh, resulting in many deaths," Baroness Cox said.

Furthermore, she added, in July this year Azerbaijan deployed artillery batteries close to civilian populations in Tavush, with reports that the Azerbaijani military opened fire in the direction of a face mask production factory, as well as a kindergarten in the village of Aygepar.

Also, in July, pro-war demonstrations were held in Baku, during which thousands of protesters demanded from the Azerbaijani government to dully deploy the army, chanting "Death to Armenians," with some even entering the national parliament.

Viva-MTS: Borderland villages of Tavush region are in the spotlight of the partner organizations



More streets will get illuminated in Nerqin Karmiraghbyur village. The efforts of the partner organizations to support the borderland village have already launched. With the support of Viva-MTS, the



Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets has already started the second stage of introducing the energy-efficient lighting system in the village. The works were postponed for a while due to the unstable situation on the frontline, but luckily the project has already been restarted.

A resourceful solution found in the village will solve the problem of thirty years. Due to the shortage of financial means, the problem was resolved partially to the possible degree. In order to be ready for the unpredictable behavior



of the enemy, the dimmed lights were attached to old wooden pillars in the territory of the village. The villagers repurposed plastic bottles to protect the lights from rain. The old lighting system has been tossed since the LED energy-efficient system has been put in place.

“When I first saw you in a video





trying to fix the illumination light with your own means, I felt we have to respond immediately. I am happy to see the problem is now solved. Those who live in borderland villages have to be sure they are not alone. Stay strong, cultivate your land, and always hope for the best. We are by your side,” Viva-MTS founding General Manager **Ralph Yirikian** said in a video call.

In 2019 the partner organizations installed 48 LED lights in Nerqin Karmiraghbyur, which illuminated around 1800 m of main streets of the village. Now 1200m-long-streets are in the process of illumination with the 32 LED lights. The head of the settlement’s administration mentions the advantages of the new energy-efficient system.

“People used to stay at home after 19:00 before the system was installed, but the picture has now changed. We are excited. Life in the village continues even after the midnight. People are less concerned, the village stands strong the enemy sees a village filled with light,” said Leon Arakelyan, the head of the local administration.

By the end of the year Viva-MTS and the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets will continue the project aimed at solving the lighting problem in the villages of Armenia. LED bulbs are the best in terms of savings, environmental efficiency and light quality.

The first large-scale open-air charity concert after the lockdown

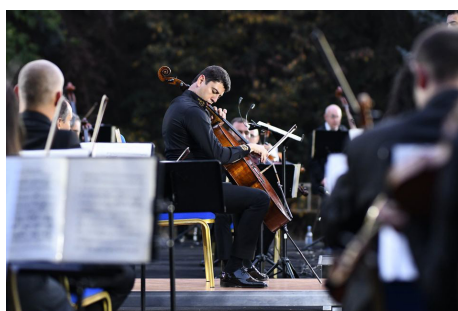


Music united us all in the park of the RA National Assembly on September 4. The first large-scale open-air charity concert after the lockdown... September 4th witnessed a spectacular cultural celebration. After almost six lengthy months of pause, the first large-scale cultural event took place in the courtyard of the National Assembly of RA.



The open-air musical event featured the live concert performance of Verdi's magnificent *Traviata*, which was made all the more stunning by the Assembly's gorgeous garden and the idyllic metropolitan evening atmosphere. The Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Eduard Topchyan performed Verdi's music with leading opera singers of Armenia Liana Aleksanyan and Liparit Avetisyan, as well as other well-known Armenian singers and an opera singer from Belarus Ilya Silchukov. It was an unprecedented well-organized per-

formance with special feelings. The event was Armenia's sincere way of expressing



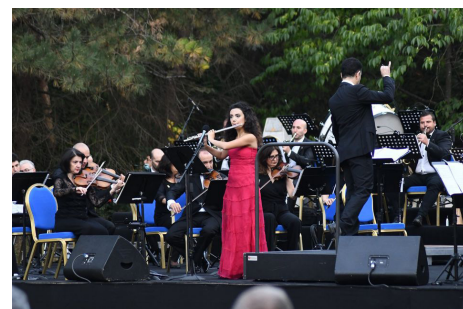
her cordial cultural support to the devastated Beirut. All of the event's proceeds had been matched by the AGBU and would be forwarded to Lebanon for the reconstruction of Armenian cultural centers that had suffered that recent explosion. Afterwards, it was announced that 10,500,000 AMD was collected and donated for that purpose.

The 21st concert series of Yerevan Perspectives International Music Festival started with a spectacular concert on September 7, in the border city of Berd of Tavush Region. It was for the time that classical music by the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra was performed in Berd, Soranner Dendropark.

Through this concert the Festival combined culture and politics, using the "soft power" of art as one of the most important weapons of our country.

The concert hosted the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, Mrs. Anna Hakobyan, Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan, the Governor of the Tavush Region Hayk Chobanyan, the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Arayik Harutyunyan, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, statesmen, guests, and people from the Tavush Region.

The open-air musical event featured the music pieces of Aram Khachaturian, Armen Tigranyan, Komitas, Bellini, Verdi, Barsegh Kanachyan, Tchaikovsky. The concert was performed by the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra,



conducted by Eduard Topchyan, The performers were opera singer Artsvik Demurchyan, who performed with inspiration arias from Anush opera, songs by Komitas and Barsegh Kanachyan,. The well-known cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan played Tchaikovsky (Variations on Rokoko theme). What was remarkable that the flute player Lilit Baghdasaryan from the city of Berd played with the ANPO from Bellini's opera.

The concert was well received by the residents of Berd and the guests from Yerevan.



Donald Trump nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

Donald Trump has been nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize following his efforts to broker peace between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The US president's name has been put forward by Norwegian politician Christian Tybring-Gjedde, according to *Fox News*.

"For his merit, I think he has done more trying to create peace between nations than most other Peace Prize nominees," Mr Tybring-Gjedde, a four-term member of parliament, told the channel.

Tybring-Gjedde, in his nomination letter to the Nobel Committee, said the Trump administration has played a key role in the establishment of relations between Israel and the UAE.



"As it is expected other Middle Eastern countries will follow in the footsteps of the UAE, this agreement could be a game changer that will turn the Middle East into a region of cooperation and prosperity," he wrote.

On Tuesday, a White House official announced Mr Trump will hold a signing

ceremony on 15 September for a groundbreaking Middle East agreement normalizing relations between Israel and the UAE.

As part of the deal, [announced at the White House](#) on 13 August following what officials said were 18 months of talks, the Gulf state agreed to normal relations with Israel, while Israel agreed to continue with plans to suspend its annexation of the West Bank.

In 2020, there were 318 candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Submissions must be made online and all nominees are discussed before a shortlist of the most worthy and interesting is drawn up.

45 Armenian students to study in the world's top universities



On 8 September, Oshakan Culture House hosted the ceremony of granting My Step Foundation's Scholarship Program Certificates to its recipients.

Forty-five students now have the opportunity to study in the world's top universities, provided that they return to Armenia and put into practice their knowledge and skills for the development of their Homeland.

Scholarship Certificates were awarded after the application, all the necessary doc-

uments and the results of the interview with the Selection Committee were summarized. The Foundation finances professions which are on the priority list of Armenia's development (agriculture, veterinary science, healthcare management, medical science, data science, statistics, urban planning, etc.).

"The idea behind the Foundation's Scholarship Program is to enable Armenian youth to acquire professions in the world's

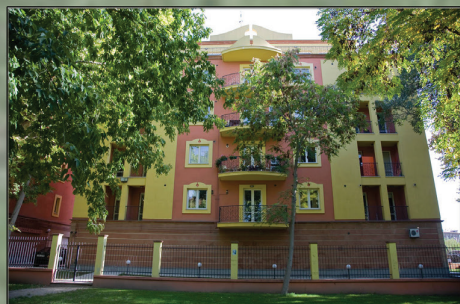
top universities required for assurance of Armenia's sustainable development," Hovhannes Ghazaryan, Executive Director of My Step Foundation, said in his opening remarks.

Artur Martirosyan, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, read out the greeting speech of Minister Arayik Harutyunyan, mentioning, "Encouraging sustainable professional growth, sectoral development and progress in Armenia, from 2018 on MY STEP Foundation awards scholarships to young people admitted to the world's leading educational institutions who wish to acquire professions based on Armenia's sustainable development priorities, to apply their knowledge and skills to the progress of our Homeland.



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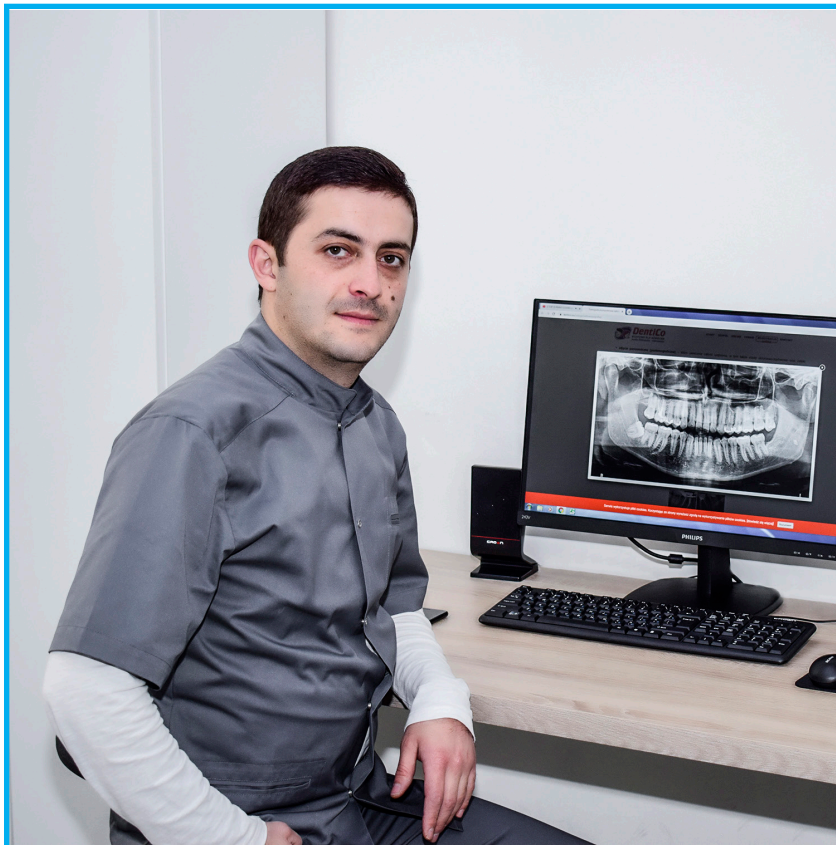
Paris Office: 34 Avenue des Champs Elysees
Phone: 011 33 1 43 59 66 72
Yerevan Address: 8, Khorenatsi St.

Dr. Tigran Paytyan

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AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Durachweg 15
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Phone No: +41 52 632 09 10
Fax: +41 52 632 09 11

AZAD Pharma AG

Bahnhofstrasse 9
CH-3125 Toffen
Phone No: +41 31 810 40 10
Fax: +41 31 810 40 11

Canada

AZAD Fine Chemicals Ltd.

1895 - 55th Avenue
Dorval, Qc H9P 1G9
Phone No: +1 514 636 19 99
Fax: +1 514 636 75 55

Atlit Inc.

16 Westminster Ave.,
Suite 306A
Montreal, Qc H4X 1Z1
Phone No: +1 514 369 25 91
Fax: +1 514 369 81 67

China

Hangzhou Representative Office of AZAD Pharmaceutical Ingredients AG

Room 801-087, Lixin Plaza,
#102 Moganshan Road
310051 -Hangzhou China

Phone +86-571-8761 5336
Mobile +86-153-5505-0903
Fax: +86-571- 8895 8963

Germany

AZAD Pharma GmbH

Fritz-Reichle-Ring 6a
DE-78315 Radolfzell
Phone No: +49 7732 939101510
Fax: +49 7732 9391016

Armenia

AZAD Pharmaceuticals LLC

Vanahovit 8, Proshian
Ashtarak Ave., Kotayk Marz
Phone No: +374 93 40 40 62
Fax: +374 93 40 34 40



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E-mail: contact@nt.am

URL: www.nt.am

Address in Armenia:

28 Isahakian Str., Yerevan, 0009, RA
Tel.: (+374 60) 35-11-22 (+374 60) 35-11-24

Address in France:

Masion De L'Armenie,
Paris 17e-95, Bld. Gouvion, France
Tel.: (+33) 01 43 59 66 72

Address in USA:

1146 E. Lexington Dr., #112,
Glendale, CA, USA, 91206
Tel.: +1 (818) 646 10 72

Հասցե՝ Իսահակյան 28, Երևան, ՀՀ, 0009