

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addresses the nation



Armenia -- Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan makes a televised address to the nation, Yerevan, April 17, 2020.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan reaffirmed on April 17 his government's plans to gradually reopen more sectors of Armenia's economy, again insisting that the coronavirus epidemic in the country is "manageable."

Pashinyan cautioned, however, that the "return to normal life" will be conditional on employers and other Armenians taking necessary precautions against the highly contagious virus.

"As long as a vaccine has not been developed, coronavirus will not disappear and we will have infected people," he said in a televised address to the nation. "Accordingly, our strategic objective is as follows: to make sure that the number of infected people is as small as possible and bearable for the healthcare system."

"On the other hand, we cannot be endlessly locked down and live in an endless quarantine or state of emergency," he went on. "Therefore, our strategic objective is to live parallel to coronavirus or alongside it, if necessary. We need to use the upcoming period of emergency rule for acquiring necessary skills to do just that."

"What does this mean in practice? We are step by step allowing the resumption of economic activity in various spheres but expect special responsibility from employers, who must put in place special conditions for coronavirus safety in factories, workshops and construction sites. Or else, we will have to toughen restrictions."

For their part, workers and other citizens must strictly follow social distancing rules, avoid touching their faces with unwashed hands and use only clean tableware, added Pashinyan.

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Azerbaijan tries to involve international community in its campaign against human rights in Artsakh

Azerbaijan tries to involve the international community in its campaign against human rights in Artsakh, Spokesperson for the Armenian Foreign Ministry Anna Naghdalyan said in a statement.

“Azerbaijan never refrains from strictly selective and distorted presentation of international reactions to these elections,” she added.

The comments come in the wake of negative reaction from Azerbaijan to the parliamentary and presidential elections held in Artsakh.

“It is obvious that in a country where the power has never been transferred through democratic process, the formation of new authorities in Artsakh through competitive and democratic elections should have triggered a nervous reaction,” Naghdalyan



stated.

Second, she said, Azerbaijan tries to involve the international community in its campaign against human rights in Artsakh. “To that end, Azerbaijan doesn’t refrain from strictly selective and distorted presentation of international reactions to these elections.”

“Azerbaijan attempts to ignore the key messages of the same reactions, which refer to the role of the people of Artsakh in determining their future, and the importance of elections from the perspective of organizing public life in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Meanwhile, these messages are crucial for creating an environment conducive to advancement of the peace process,” Anna Naghdalyan stated.

“In our region, the formation of authorities who received the vote of the people, who express the will of people and who are accountable before those people, is extremely important in terms of the transformation of conflict and the reconciliation of peoples. The people of Artsakh took another important step in this direction on March 31 and April 14,” the Spokesperson concluded.

Armenia reiterates adherence to UN chief’s call for global ceasefire



Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan has addressed a letter to the UN Secretary General António Guterres, reiterating Armenia’s adherence to his call for global ceasefire.

Underscoring the importance of joint actions in the fight against COVID-19, the Minister noted that “international assistance is equally important to people made vulnerable as a result of conflicts.”

“The assistance and access of the United Nations specialized agencies including and especially of the World Health Organization to the people residing in the conflict-affected areas is essential in this regard. Armenia is ready to provide all necessary conditions for unimpeded work of

the relevant UN bodies in a status neutral manner,” Zohrab Mnatsakanyan added.

“This pandemic is an overwhelming challenge to humanity, while joint efforts to overcome the virus can serve as a new beginning for reinvigorating multilateralism and collective endeavor for a world without wars, hostility and exclusion,” the Foreign Minister said.

“Confidence-building measures aimed at preventing, mitigating and managing disasters should be viewed as an opportunity in these challenging times for all people without exception, including parties to the conflict,” he added.

Presidents of Armenia, Georgia discuss anti-coronavirus measures

In a video conversation the Presidents of Armenia and Georgia Armen Sarkissian and Salome Zurbisvili discussed the anti-coronavirus measures in the two countries.

The interlocutors hailed the close cooperation and constant contacts between the two neighboring and friendly countries at all levels in the current difficult situation, emphasizing that the implementation of coordinated measures and joint efforts are more important than ever during times of



crisis.

The Presidents of Armenia and Georgia expressed confidence that the joint efforts would definitely help overcome the current

situation and its aftermath, and in the future the whole potential of cooperation between the two countries will be directed at ensuring economic revival and welfare of the two peoples.

President Sarkissian said that the issue of food security remains relevant, especially in the current situation. In this context, the interlocutors touched upon food security in the interconnected world and the region, and a number of other issues.

New Artsakh Leader elected

(RFE/RL) - Arayik Harutyunyan, a businessman and former prime minister, cruised to a comfortable victory in the second round of Artsakh's presidential election held on April 14 amid concerns about the spread of coronavirus in the Armenian-populated territory.

Official election results released on April 15 showed Harutyunyan winning 88 percent of the vote. His challenger and Artsakh's outgoing foreign minister, Masis Mayilyan, got 12 percent.

Harutyunyan, 46, served as Artsakh's prime minister from 2007-2017. He has extensive business interests in the region which had broken away from Azerbaijan in 1991.

The outcome of the runoff became a forgone conclusion after Mayilyan urged supporters on April 5 to boycott it because of the coronavirus pandemic. Citing serious health risks, he earlier called for the vote to be postponed or cancelled altogether.

Mayilyan "took note" of the official vote results but said they "have no significance whatsoever for our political team" because he did not campaign for the runoff. He also wished Harutyunyan "success," citing the "foreign policy-related importance" of the polls denounced by Azerbaijan.

The coronavirus-related concerns were apparently the main reason why only 45 percent of Artsakh's 104,000 eligible voters cast their ballots on Tuesday. Turnout stood at 73 in the first round of voting held on March 31.

Artsakh people also elected their new parliament on that day. Harutyunyan's Free Fatherland party won 16 of the 33 parliament seats. Four other political groups will also be represented in the local legislature.

Speaking after the announcement of his victory, Harutyunyan said the economic fallout from coronavirus will be his administration's first major challenge.

"We must unite not only in Artsakh but also ... rally around Armenia's authorities as they now bear the main burden of responsibility



for addressing that problem," he told reporters. "Schadenfreude and political disagreements are our main enemy on this front."

Armenia's President Armen Sarkissian congratulated Harutyunyan on his victory even before the announcement of the official results.

For his part, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan congratulated Artsakh people on "completing the elections." "They mandated authorities to further strengthen the security of Artsakh and represent it in the peace process," Pashinyan tweeted on Wednesday. "We continue our close cooperation with Artsakh to reach our common goals."

Azerbaijan strongly condemned the Karabakh polls late last month, saying that they run counter to Azerbaijani and international law. It also said that Karabakh is governed by an "illegal regime installed by Armenia."

U.S., Russian and French diplomats co-heading the OSCE Minsk Group stressed, for their part, that Karabakh is not recognized as an independent state by the international community and that "the so-called general elections" cannot predetermine the outcome of Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks mediated by them.

The second plane transported medical supplies and equipment to Armenia

On April 15, another batch of medical supplies and equipment required to fight coronavirus was transferred from China to Armenia by a special flight.

The batch was purchased by Eduard Eurnekian's companies:

- Converse Bank CJSC,
- Armenia International Airports CJSC,
- Karas Wines,
- As well as with financial resources provided by other donors.



The following medical instruments were transported to Armenia.

- ✓ More than 87,000 protective medical

clothing,

- ✓ 24,000 medical masks,
- ✓ 20,000 protective masks KN95,
- ✓ 101 touchless thermometers,
- ✓ Medical instruments,
- ✓ Biochemical raw material for coronavirus diagnostic tests.

Also, medical supplies and equipment purchased at the expense of the RA state funds, as well as donated by Chinese benefactors were transported by the airplane.

Serzh Sargsyan testifies before lawmakers

(RFE/RL -Yerevan) - Former President Serzh Sargsyan testified on April 16 before an Armenian parliamentary commission investigating the April 2016 hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan initiated the inquiry last year with the stated aim of assessing the Sargsyan administration's preparedness for the four-day fighting which nearly escalated into an all-out Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

The ad hoc commission conducting it is headed by Andranik Kocharyan, a senior lawmaker representing Pashinyan's My Step bloc. It has questioned dozens of current and former military officials.

Sargsyan, who ruled Armenia from 2008-2018, agreed to answer questions from members of the panel after it promised earlier this month to provide him with a copy of his videotaped testimony not subject to publication.

"The meeting took place in very normal conditions and I am very glad that I could give additional information about the April



hostilities," Sargsyan told reporters after the four-hour hearing held behind the closed doors.

"My goal is very clear: to give the public real, credible information about the hostilities during which we -- I mean the armed forces, the civil society and the public in general -- won and won not only on the battlefield but also diplomatically," he said.

Sargsyan refused to give any details of his testimony, saying that he will hold an extensive news conference after the coronavirus-related state of emergency in Armenia ends on May 14.

"Mr. Sargsyan recalled many things," Kocharyan said for his part. He said the ex-president acknowledged the Armenian side's "shortcomings" during the four-day heavy fighting which left about 80 Armenian soldiers dead.

The fighting broke out early on April 2, 2016 with an Azerbaijani offensive launched at several sections of the "line of contact" around Karabakh. It was halted by a Russian-mediated agreement four days later.

Some of Sargsyan's opponents, including Pashinyan, blamed the former Armenian leadership for modest territorial gains made by Azerbaijani troops and said the Armenian military should have anticipated the offensive involving tanks and heavy artillery.

Serzh Sargsyan and other former Armenian leaders maintain that the Azerbaijani army failed to achieve any major objectives and suffered disproportionate casualties. Sargsyan's allies have also accused Pashinyan of trying to exploit the issue for political aims.

Armenia names new Central Bank chief

The National Assembly elected on Friday the next governor of the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) nominated by the ruling My Step alliance.

The 41-year-old Martin Galstyan will replace the CBA's outgoing governor, Artur Javadyan, in June. Javadyan has run the bank since 2008.

According to his official biography, Galstyan joined the CBA even before graduating from the Economics Department of Yerevan State University in 2002. He also studied public administration at a Harvard University graduate school in 2009-2010.

Galstyan has held various positions in the CBA for two decades. He was appointed to the bank's governing board in September 2018.

Galstyan was the only candidate nominated for the top CBA post. The Armenian parliament elected him for a six-year term by 104 votes to 15. With My Step holding



88 parliament seats, this means that he was also backed by 16 opposition lawmakers.

Galstyan answered questions from dozens of deputies during Thursday's parliament debate on his candidacy. Most of the questions related to the economic fallout from the coronavirus epidemic.

"People must be certain that in any case macroeconomic stability will be maintained, prices will remain stable and the financial system will function without disruptions," he said.

He stressed that the CBA has eased some

of its monetary regulations to help Armenian commercial banks suspend loan repayments of as many as 380,000 citizens hit hard by economic disruptions. Also, he said, it has already distributed 12 billion drams (\$25 million) in government subsidies to the banks that will provide more than 1,000 low-interest loans to businesses and individual entrepreneurs.

Galstyan spoke at the same of a "great uncertainty" about the epidemic's impact on the Armenian economy. "Will there be only one wave [of infections?]" he asked. "Will it subside now but come back in the autumn? In that case, what will we do in the autumn if we take all possible [economic] measures now?"

In a recent report, the Central Bank forecast that economic growth in Armenia will practically grind to a halt this year. Government officials agreed with this projection.

Artsakh hopes for WHO assistance in fighting COVID-19

Artsakh hopes for assistance from specialized international organizations, in particular the World Health Organization, in support of anti-coronavirus efforts.

“United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres’ appeal for an immediate global cease-fire in all corners of the world to allow humanity to unite against a common enemy, the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, has been an important, necessary and timely initiative. The faithful implementation of this call will be an important contribution to the collective efforts of the international community to effectively counter this new threat to the whole humankind,” the Foreign Ministry of the Artsakh Republic said in a statement.

“We are convinced that during this critical period, any attempts to take advantage of the situation caused by the pandemic

to achieve narrow political goals, pose a threat to the entire international community and deserve the strongest condemnation. And, on the contrary, unity and solidarity of all mankind in the face of a common and merciless enemy will allow to not only win this battle, but also strengthen the spirit of co-operation, that can make this world safer and more prosperous,” the Ministry said.

The Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh Republic) immediately responded to the initiative of the Secretary-General and on 24 March confirmed its commitment to strictly observe the cease-fire in the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict zone, the statement noted.

“We share your view of the UN Secretary-General that the life of every person should be at the center of the collective

efforts of the international community in combatting the novel Coronavirus pandemic. Only guided by the principle of “no one is left behind” will humanity be able to withstand this test with dignity. For the Republic of Artsakh, which has been in conflict with Azerbaijan for three decades, the fight against the novel Coronavirus pandemic is becoming particularly acute given the fact that, due to the conflict, the people of Artsakh are deprived of international assistance,” the Ministry stated.

“In this regard, we hope that specialized international organizations, in particular the World Health Organization, will provide assistance to Artsakh in the fight against coronavirus, which will contribute to the overall efforts to overcome this global challenge,” the Foreign Ministry concluded.

Coronavirus doubling rate in Armenia slows down to 17 days

The doubling rate of COVID-19 cases in Armenia has slowed down to 17 days, Health Minister Arsen Torosyan informs.

“If the pace is maintained, we’ll have 2,500 cases on May 4 and 5,000 cases on May 21,” the Minister said in a Facebook post.

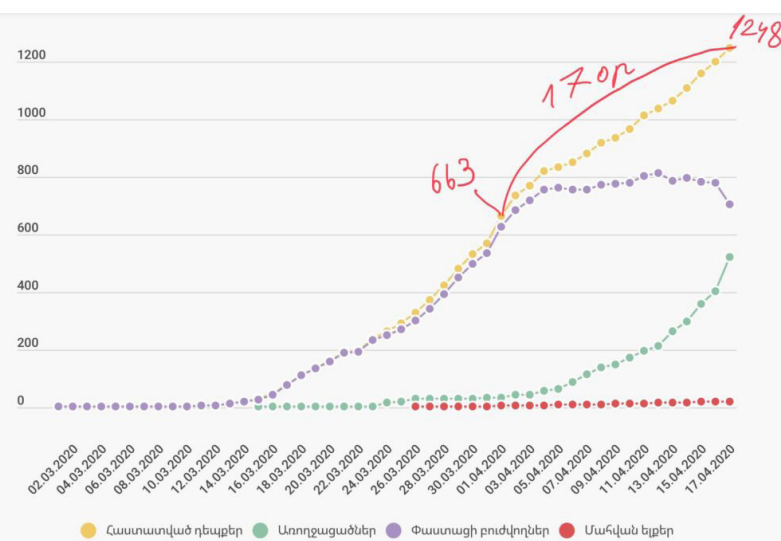
“And the task for all of us remains the same: to break the pace of spread and the circles of spread of the disease. Therefore, it is necessary to exclude the transmission of the disease from person to person by keeping a social distance everywhere, changing the behavior of close contact with each other to long-distance communication, as well as frequent hand washing and

disinfection and avoiding touching the face as much as possible,” Arsen Torosyan said.

complex and multi-component process, and never before had so many PCR tests been performed in the country.

“This complex process includes five main components: specialists, equipment, biosecurity, logistics, electronic system, the proper provision of each of which has required great efforts from our specialists. Such capacities will always be needed for our

country to face such challenges in the future,” the Health Minister said.



He noted that increasing the testing capacity to 1,000 tests per day has been a

U.S. Boosts Coronavirus Aid to Armenia

The United States announced on Friday \$600,000 in additional assistance to Armenia aimed at combatting the coronavirus epidemic.

“These funds will build on the \$1.1 million in support announced last week that will help: prepare laboratory systems, activate case-finding and event-based surveillance, support technical experts for response and preparedness and bolster risk communication,” the U.S. Agency for International Development said in a statement.

The \$1.1 million allocation was part of \$274 million in emergency funding for “64 of the world’s most at-risk countries” selected by the U.S. State Department. The U.S. Embassy in Yerevan said afterwards



that the aid will be delivered to Armenia through international organizations.

The European Union announced on April 8 a much heavier coronavirus-related aid package for Armenia worth 92 million euros (\$100 million).

“The funds will be directed towards supplying medical devices and equipment, training for medical and laboratory staff,

support to [small and medium-sized enterprises] and business community, as well as social and humanitarian assistance to those affected by the coronavirus outbreak,” said the EU Delegation in Yerevan.

The Armenian authorities are also due to receive \$3 million from the World Bank to acquire medical equipment and supplies needed for containing the spread of coronavirus in the country. They have already received medical supplies from Russia and China.

As of Friday morning, the authorities reported 1,201 coronavirus cases and 19 deaths resulting from them. According to them, 42 of those cases were registered in the past 24 hours.

EU to provide 456,500 EUR to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus on Armenia’s agricultural sector

The European Union stands by Armenian farmers during COVID19 crisis. The European Union will provide 456,500 EUR assistance to Armenia to mitigate the negative impact of the coronavirus crisis in the agricultural sector.

It will be allocated from the budget of the EU Green Agriculture Initiative (EU-GAIA) in Armenia project, funded by the European Union and co-funded by Austrian Development Cooperation.

This was announced at the meeting of the first Advisory Board of the EU-GAIA project, during which the plan of immediate measures to support farmers and producers at the outbreak of COVID19 was approved.

The list of specific activities offered by the project includes provision of two-wheeled tractors and seedlings, capacity building of government staff, provision of inputs, small agricultural equipment and tools, support to the post-harvest facilities, publishing booklets about existing programs of the Ministry of Economy, awareness of the safety rules of the virus during production, technical assistance (consulting with the help of remote professionals and the development of business models) to Agri producers – potential recipients of Government’s financial support with special focus on vulnerable groups.

According to the RA Deputy Minister of Economy Arman Khojoyan, the proposed actions are in line with the goals of the Sus-



tainable Agriculture Development Strategy of the Government in a crisis situation; that is, to make Armenia’s agriculture more efficient and resilient in the context of green economy development.

The presented short-term and medium-term measures will be financed within the framework of the EU-GAIA project current intervention logic and budget. The measures are aimed especially at the most socio-economically vulnerable groups in the current situation in the target regions of the project. The events were proposed and will be implemented by the Austrian Development Agency and the United Nations Development Programme in Armenia.

The meeting of the EU-GAIA Advisory Board was chaired by Gonzalo Serrano De La Rosa, Head of the EU Delegation Cooperation Section, and Andrea Baggioli, International Aid / Cooperation Officer of the EU Delegation in Armenia. The meeting was attended by the RA Deputy Minister of Economy Arman Khojoyan, the RA Deputy Minister of Environment

Vardan Melikyan, Governor of Tavush Hayk Chobanyan, Governor of Shirak Tigran Petrosyan, Head of the Department of Agriculture and Nature Protection of Lori Marzpetaran Artyom Shahverdyan, Head of the Austrian Development Cooperation’s office in Yerevan Gerhard Schaumberger, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in Armenia Dmitry Mariyasyn, Project Manager Pascal Bokkers, UNDP Project Coordinator Karen Harutyunyan and other representatives.

To summarize the results of the Advisory Board meeting, Andrea Baggioli recalled how the EU-GAIA intervention also considers climate change mitigation and adaptation measures: introduction of climate resilient seeds, sustainable management of natural resources and protection of biodiversity, promotion of resource-efficient (energy-efficient) technologies and renewable energy.

To this respect, the Deputy Minister Melikyan’s proposal could well fit into a comprehensive assistance to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the agricultural and environment sector in Armenia: to launch the discussion on using large-scale tree planting in riparian zones and windbreaks, as a means of immediate socio-economic assistance to vulnerable groups; and to create synergies between the agricultural interventions and the water treatment plan in Sevan Lake region.

Armenia imports raw materials to start production of COVID-19 test kits



A second charter flight from China organized by the Commandant's Office has transported a new batch of medical supplies and equipment needed in the fight against the coronavirus.

The cargo includes more than 87,000 protective medical gowns, 24,000 medical masks, 20,000 KN95 protective mask, 101

remote thermometers, medical instruments and biochemical raw material necessary for production of COVID-19 testing kits.

Most supplies have been purchased on funds provided by the World Food Programme (WFP), Argentine-Armenian businessman Eduardo Eurnekian, My Step Foundation, the Izmirlian Foundation, the

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the St. Sarkis Humanitarian Foundation, the Armenian General Benevolent Union and other donors.

The plane has also transported medical supplies and instruments bought on government funds and donated by Chinese philanthropists.

Commandant Tigran Avinyan has expressed gratitude to all agencies involved, as well as the Chinese government for helping organize the flight.

The government has allocated \$550,000 to the Institute of Molecular Biology to organize the production of tests locally.

"Experts assure that this initiative is feasible and we will be able to organize the production of tests at the institute," Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a live Q&A on Facebook,

Armenian scientists create sanitizing device

Armenian scientists have created a sanitizing device. In a piece published on the website of the American University of America, co-creator Hayk Tamazyan says the concept came about in a discussion with Vardan Hayrapetyan, his chemistry lab lecturer at AUA

Hayk quickly moved on to realizing the concept with Vachik Khachatryan

(a nuclear physics researcher at Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory), and with technical assistance from Gevorg Hovhannisyan, an electrical engineer.

"The current pandemic crisis was, I thought, the opportune time to utilize my knowledge and experience to start a project that could positively impact the wellbeing of the world's



and Armenia's population," Tamazyan says.

The device consists of a 2m×60cm×50cm box, the inside of which is lined with ultraviolet (UV) lamps. UV rays sterilize the surfaces they reach through ultraviolet germicidal irradiation. Masks, medical attire, or any other materials that need to be sanitized regularly are placed inside the machine.

Also, considering that exposure to UV rays

is harmful to human health, we have incorporated a mechanism within the device that switches off the UV rays when the box door opens. Furthermore, it is inexpensive to produce this sanitizing device, it is quieter, and also more efficient than currently existing alternatives.

Typically, the process of creating such a device would require much more time.

"Given the urgency of the situation, we wanted to deliver the product as quickly as possible. From start to finish, the entire development took us an arduous, nonstop 48 hours. The Ministry of Health met with us and recognized the potential of using our device. They are now discussing the manufacture of a portable version," Hayk Tamazyan notes.

Armenian PM says COVID-19 crisis not overcome, but the spread controllable

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressed the nation on April 17.

Noyan Tapan presents the PM's address:

"Dear people,
Proud citizens of the Republic of Armenia,

Since March 16, 2020, a state of emergency has been declared in the Republic of Armenia in connection with a new type of coronavirus. The state of emergency expired on April 14, but we had to extend it for another month, because, unfortunately, the crisis has not been overcome not only in Armenia, but all over the world.

The global indicators of the epidemic are as follows: at the moment 2 million 181 thousand 508 cases of coronavirus infection have been confirmed in the world. 147 thousand 337 people died from coronavirus; 552 thousand 264 people have recovered.

The situation in the Republic of Armenia is as follows: we have 1201 confirmed cases, 402 people have recovered and, unfortunately, 19 people have died. The average age of our compatriots who died from coronavirus is 73.8 years. All deceased patients had severe concomitant diseases, including cancer, hypertension, diabetes, coronary heart disease and so on. As of April 17, 780 people are undergoing treatment for coronavirus in our hospitals, about 1,700 people remain in isolation; 2,647 people are self-isolated.

Despite this alarming statistic, I consider it necessary to emphasize that owing to the efforts exerted by our healthcare and public administration systems, the spread of infection is under control. Nearly half the make-shift wards in hospitals went vacant during this period. This is one of the most important indicators in the fight against the epidemic, as in many developed countries there have been cases where hospitals have not been able to accommodate infected and untreated citizens. At least so far, we have defied the epidemic with dignity, and I want to thank once again our doctors, all health workers who are at the forefront of the fight against the epidemic. Thank you, dear healthcare workers, you are well worth applause.

Also, I consider it worth noting that from the very outset decent conditions were created for our isolated citizens. They are provided with hotel rooms, meal and the



necessary medical supervision. Armenia's experience in many countries of the world is given as an example of how to treat their citizens during a crisis.

During this period, thousands of Armenian citizens were repatriated from around the globe through state budget funding and with the support of local and Diaspora-based organizations.

I wish to thank all those organizations and individuals who helped the Commandant's Office to import a number of necessary goods into Armenia.

An important feature of the epidemic in Armenia is that we never faced the phenomenon of empty showcases in our country, which unfortunately was the case in many countries. In this regard, I would like once again to thank our businessmen, as well as our partners from Georgia, Russia, Iran, who spared no effort to ensure uninterrupted cargo transportation.

I also thank all countries and international organizations, which have assisted Armenia in its fight against coronavirus.

Dear compatriots,

The coronavirus epidemic gave rise to many social and economic problems, and the government took 13 measures to help the economy and citizens overcome the crisis. As part of the first anti-crisis action, the Government encouraged the provision of interest-free preferential loans to business entities. Co-financed by the Government, zero interest rate loans are disbursed to pay salaries and meet tax liabilities. Soft loans are provided for the purchase of raw materials and equipment, payment of utility bills and food imports. 229 business entities have so far benefited from the program; the amount of lending is AMD 10,900 mil-

lion drams. The program is still on.

The second anti-crisis action targets agriculture. The government has nullified interest rates on loans provided under state programs, as well as on a number of agricultural loans to stimulate agricultural activity in general. 1307 entities have already availed themselves of the program; the loan amount is AMD 2,960 million drams, and we are taking measures to make the program more intensive.

Within the framework of the third anti-crisis measure, we will support law-abiding small and medium enterprises, which pay taxes in good faith, depending on their turnover, by providing collateral-free loans at the rate of 2 to 50 million drams for three years. At the same time, during the first six months they do not have to make any repayment; zero interest rate is charged for the first two years. The program continues to be implemented, and 230 economic entities have so far benefited from it, the loan amount is 2,470 million drams, and we are taking measures to make the program more intensive.

Under the fifth anti-crisis activity, we provide grants to companies with 2 to 50 employees that have retained their standing jobs and payroll during the crisis. The Government pays the salary of every fifth employee of these companies. 8340 business entities have already taken advantage of this program; the amount allocated is 1,300 million drams.

These are our economic programs adopted at this stage. Consultations are underway, and we will soon adopt other economic programs. Now, let me introduce our social assistance programs.

Within the framework of the fourth anti-crisis measure, we provide one-time support to the parents of children under 14 who lost their jobs from March 13 to March 25, and we provide 100 thousand drams for each child. So far, we have identified 964 such parents and paid out about AMD 100 million.

As part of the sixth anti-crisis program, we provide lump-sum assistance to those citizens who had a registered job and lost it during March 13-30, and their salary did not exceed AMD 500 thousand in January-February.

Such citizens

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are supported at the rate of the minimum wage. We have already assisted some 6,723 citizens, with the total amount of support standing at 457 million drams.

As part of the seventh anti-crisis activity, we provide lump-sum assistance at the rate of 100 thousand drams to pregnant women who are unemployed and whose spouses were dismissed from work from March 13 to 30. 702 million drams have been made available to 7026 pregnant women.

As part of the eighth anti-crisis action, we provide one-time assistance to those engaged in the hardest-hit sectors and self-employed persons. The amount of support depends on the size of the registered salary or turnover. 63 thousand 014 people have already been supported under this program; the total amount of payments is 4,615 million drams.

As part of the ninth anti-crisis program, we provide one-time assistance to unemployed parents. We pay such parents 26 thousand 500 drams for each child. We have so far provided assistance for 19,457 such children to a total amount of 515 million drams. The program continues to be implemented. As part of the tenth activity, we provide one-time assistance to micro businesses operating in crisis-affected sectors to the amount of ten percent of the turnover of the first quarter of 2020, but not more than twice the minimum wage and at least 10 thousand drams. About 6,000 such enterprises have been notified, and the proposed funds shall be made available in the coming week.

Under the eleventh anti-crisis effort, we provide lump-sum assistance to those subscribers to natural gas and electricity supply contracts whose consumer bills did not exceed 10,000 drams for natural gas consumption, 5,000 drams for electricity consumption in February, 2020. There are about 235 thousand such subscribers in the Republic of Armenia, and the Government reimburses 50% of their expenses. Those customers in this group who have already paid for utilities receive support as a prepayment to their subscriber accounts. The Government has already paid out AMD 786 million under this program.

Within the framework of the twelfth anti-crisis program, we provide one-time assistance to those subscribers to natural gas and electricity supply contracts whose consumer bills amounted to AMD 10 001 - 30 000 for natural gas, and AMD 5 001 - 10 000 for electricity in February, 2020. There are about 280 thousand such subscribers nationwide, and the Government will reimburse 30% of their bills for February. 1,842 million drams have already been paid out

under this program.

As part of the thirteenth activity, we support family allowance beneficiaries at the rate of half their monthly benefit. At the same time, 70% of the support will be provided in the form of cash payments and 30% will go to refund electricity bills. About 85 thousand families will become beneficiaries of this program, the total amount of support will make about AMD 1.2 billion. The target households will get these funds together with the monthly allowance for April.

It is also important to state that ever since the coronavirus outbreak, Armenian banks and credit organizations have granted a credit holiday to some 11 thousand legal entities in the amount of AMD 35bln. 380 thousand individuals have been granted credit holidays, the total amount of these loans makes about AMD 15bln.

Dear compatriots,

The Government continues to discuss anti-crisis measures and steps, and the necessary decisions will be made to withstand this impending crisis. Our main task is to ensure that the aforementioned 13 anti-crisis activities prove as effective as possible and reach the beneficiaries as soon as possible.

I should admit that we receive a lot of signals which state that people are de facto beneficiaries of this or that event, but their online applications have been declined. We will probe into all these cases again, but it is obvious that in many cases our citizens are refused assistance due to their employers' irresponsibility and even illegal activities. Once again, we will review all such cases and draw appropriate conclusions.

With regard to our strategy for overcoming the coronavirus crisis, we must state that until a vaccine is found, the coronavirus will not disappear and we will have infected citizens. In accordance with this, our strategic objective is to curb the number of infected people as much as possible in order to make it affordable for the healthcare system. On the other hand, we cannot remain in self-isolation indefinitely; we cannot live in quarantine or in a state of emergency infinitely.

Therefore, we should strategically try to co-exist with the coronavirus; we must use this interim period of emergency to acquire the skills necessary for this. What does this mean in practice?

We are gradually resuming economic activity in various spheres. But we expect special responsibility from employers, who must provide for special safety standards in factories, workshops, construction sites, otherwise we will have to not weaken, but toughen restrictions.

All companies should have plans for protection against COVID-19 for their stores, cafes and restaurants, which will resume operations in the future, and I urge you to use the quarantine period to solve this problem.

The epidemic implies special responsibility for everyone. Each of us should do our best in order, firstly, not to become infected ourselves, and secondly, not to infect others.

I want to offer such a formula, the use of which will give guarantees to us and our relatives. We need to comply with three simplest rules in order to avoid infection: firstly, when communicating with each other, observe a social distance of at least 2 meters; secondly, to touch the face with your hands only after disinfection, that is, washing your hands with soap or treating with an alcohol-based disinfectant. The next condition is to use only clean dishes and disinfected tools in hairdressing salons.

Under these conditions, we will almost be guaranteed against coronavirus infection. Here, in fact, are three simple rules that will solve the problem, but we need special and collective efforts to abide by these rules. I mean our efforts and the efforts of our families, as well as enterprises in the field of catering and beauty salons.

The coronavirus epidemic dictates to all of us new rules of behavior and even new reflexes. In the end, many of the rules of our behavior, many reflexes formed over time, under the influence of various factors, and, perhaps, we are now experiencing such times when the situation will inevitably change our habits, forms of communication, everyday movements.

Dear compatriots,

The Government's anti-epidemic measures have produced preliminary results. However, this should not weaken our vigilance, especially in the coming period of emergency, we must be twice as much vigilant.

If we do so, we will gradually return to normal life from 14 May. If we do not act there, if we do not accept the new rules of coexistence, the infection could spread with renewed vigor and lead us all to a humanitarian disaster. The well-known slogan remains the same: "The future of Armenia depends on one person and you are the one!"

I love you all; I am proud of you all and bow to all of you. Please know that all your pains and sorrows are engraved in my heart, all your needs are in my thoughts, all your dreams are in my soul. Together, we will overcome this crisis and come out of it stronger and more confident.

Four US Congressmen send congratulatory letter to President-elect of Artsakh

Four US Congressmen – Frank Pallone, Adam Schiff, Jackie Speier and Gus Bilirakis, sent a congratulatory letter to the newly-elected President of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan.

The letter says:

“Dear President-Elect Harutyunyan,

As members of the United States Congress and the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, we write to offer our congratulations on Artsakh’s historic election on March 31 and the subsequent presidential run-off election that took place earlier this week.

We are heartened to see the people of Artsakh and the country’s leaders remain dedicated to peaceful democracy during these difficult times. Artsakh has remained committed to a system of democratic gov-



ernance that reflects the will of its citizens, all despite continued violence and threats from its hostile neighbor. And, while we understand there were some complications created by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the relative ease in which voters could cast ballots in these elections without interference clearly represents the strength of the

democratic process in the Republic.

As Co-Chairs of the Congressional Armenian Issues Caucus, we remain committed to promoting and bolstering the democratic independence of Artsakh. We will continue to support the rightful exercise of self-determination which contributes to regional stability and development. Please know that we will also continue to explore ways to strengthen the ties between the United States and Artsakh that includes the formal recognition of its independence.

Once again, please accept our congratulations on an election that was calm, peaceful, and free of corruption or voter intimidation. We look forward to continuing our productive and robust dialogue with your administration moving forward”.

Almost 960 million AMD raised in support of anti-coronavirus measures in Armenia

Almost 960 million AMD has been transferred to the special treasury account set up to support the efforts to fight the coronavirus infection. A total of 3,678 payments have been made, the Ministry of Finance reports.

The Ministry of Finance has created the treasury account for supporting the measures aimed at preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus in the Republic of Armenia.

The money will be allocated to:

Healthcare needs such as:

- ✓ Bonuses for medical staff
- ✓ Medical supplies and equipment
- ✓ Improvement of conditions of medical facilities

Social safety net such as:

- ✓ Food, means of individual protection, and other essentials for

socially vulnerable and risk groups, including those with disabilities

- ✓ Supplies required for the operation of volunteer support groups
- ✓ Transportation

To ensure public accountability and transparency, the public will be regularly informed about the amount of funds received and the areas covered.

While making a transaction, please, indicate the purpose as follows: “Support for the fight against coronavirus disease.” The preferable area may also be indicated.

Recipient: Central Treasury of the Republic of Armenia
Treasury Account Number: 900005001947

US to halt funding to WHO over coronavirus, says Trump



US President Donald Trump says he has instructed his administration to halt funding to the World Health Organization (WHO), the BBC reports.

He said the WHO had “failed in its basic duty” in its response to the coronavirus outbreak.

He accused the UN body of mismanaging and covering up the spread of the virus after it emerged in China, and said it must be held accountable.

Mr Trump has previously accused the WHO of being biased towards China.

The US president has himself come under criticism at home over his handling of the outbreak.

“I am directing my administration to halt funding while a review is conducted to assess the World Health Organization’s role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus,” Mr Trump told a news conference at the White House.

Viva-MTS has Launched 4 Mobile Service Centers for Delivery in Yerevan and 10 More Vehicles in the Regions of Armenia

“Let’s care for each other, and overcome the hardships with dignity...”



unfolding situation as fast as possible to get the most for the subscribers. No matter how many digital platforms there are for Viva-MTS subscribers, people still need delivery service. This is particularly true because of the major growth in the demand for Viva-MTS tariff plans, a result of the increased reliance on distance learning tools and the need to work from home,” Viva-MTS

paid and postpaid tariff plans, as well as “Z” prepaid tariff plan. When using the apps the megabytes of the main Internet package provided within the tariff plans are not consumed, in case the tariff plan is in activate status. For more details please visit the Company’s official webpage at <https://www.mts.am/en/individual-customers/mobile-network/tariffs-and-discounts/x-y-z-tariff-plans/for--prepaid> or call 111.

With the strategic role of the mobile communication in mind Viva-MTS has launched 14 mobile service centers, 4 of which will be operating in Yerevan and another 10 in the regions of Armenia – one vehicle per region. The delivery service is free of charge.

The mobile service centers will be delivering orders to Viva-MTS subscribers. The orders include prepaid and postpaid cards, as well as Wi-Fi routers. The Company also accepts orders on replacement of mobile cards. To place an order the subscriber needs to call the Hot Line at 111 or contact the Company’s online shop at 093 298 700. The agents will further contact the subscriber and will guide to the locations where the mobile service centers are expected to arrive to bring the card or the device, or to sign a subscription contract, where necessary. To get the order, subscribers are required to submit an identification document.

“The pandemic makes look for solutions and adjust to the



Attention: Viva-MTS encourages its subscribers to keep the 1.5-2 meter social distancing requirement. It is also recommended to wear face masks for prevention purposes, whenever possible.

Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian** said in an interview.

Since the demand for the “Zoom” and “Skype” apps, used for the distant learning and working purposes, has grown dramatically, Viva-MTS has taken steps to ensure the subscriber schoolchildren, students, educators and everyone who needs distant communication, have an opportunity to use these vital applications without limitations or an extra charge till 31.05.2020, inclusively. The “Zoom” and “Skype” applications are currently available and auto-activated for Viva-MTS’ “X” and “Y” pre-

The working hours of the mobile service centers are from 11:00 till 17:00 (Monday through Saturday).

Despite the current load on the service centers, Viva-MTS delivers the orders in the shortest possible period. Operations are performed both in cash and by cashless transfers. The Company offers its services with exception of mobile phone sales.

The mobile service centers are equipped with preventive means, are regularly disinfected, and the staff is trained for taking the required preventive measures as recommended.

Let’s care for each other, and overcome the hardships with dignity.

Tatev Baroyan: My Main Dream is to Sing at the Yerevan Opera House !

By Gourgen James Khazhakian,
Chief Correspondent



In The Highlights 6 April issue your author put a story on a rising operatic star of America of Armenian origin **Tatev Baroyan**.

Now we publish a recent interview of Tatev with *Sputnik Armenia*.

To note, in a brief telephone chat with this author Tatev said she missed her native Yerevan so much, and a global competition held in New York in 2019 December for young talents from all over the world she participated in gave her hope that perhaps in the near future she would be lucky enough to perform on the stage of the Al.Spendiaryan National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater in Yerevan where her childhood passed. By the way, she told The Highlights Chief Correspondent she was happy to get know that the Theater General and Artistic Director, Honored Artist of Russia **Constantine G. Orbelian** was a member of that competition jury, and that she was happy to attend his master class and to talk with him. And also that his presence in the hall gave her both confidence and, at the same time, double responsibility, because in addition to the competition, it was also audition for young singers, before heads of many world theaters, - there were agents from the Bolshoi as well as from world famous theatres of Europe and the USA.

And now, while the whole world is in

a state of collapse, she wishes all The Highlights readers to have patience, and that caring for the health of family members and others should become the main goal today, and so that we all believe that humanity can overcome these difficulties as well !



“Let’s Know Ours”: Opera Singer Tatev Baroyan Conquers Metropolitan Opera

- Please, tell a bit about your childhood. What was it like to spend time in rehearsals and not in the yard with peers?



- From an early age I attended rehears-

als of the ballet troupe of the Yerevan Opera House. My Mum worked as a concertmaster there, and my Dad was a soloist of the opera company. However, most of my time I was spending not in Opera, but with my grandmother **Almara Konstantinovna Baroyan** who was a teacher both at the Secondary specialized music school named after Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and the Yerevan State Conservatory after Komitas.

-Were there any turning points in your youth that later influenced shaping of your personality?

- In the early 2000s, Mum, upon an invitation from Columbia Artist Entertainment, moved to the United States. I stayed with my grandmother. It was she who decided to send me to a music



school. Initially, everything went to the fact that I would become a pianist. However, my beloved granny died soon, so I had to go to the States to my mother. Unfortunately, there are no professional musical schools for children and teenagers in America. So I had to go to a regular school. When one of the local teachers found out that I could play piano, I was immediately offered a job: to teach local students this difficult skill.

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- *And how did it happen that your voice became your main instrument?*

- To be honest, nothing boded that I would ever become an opera singer. Although, most likely, the reason for this was my transition to the choral department of my school. I decided to take this step 'cause I wanted to continue my musical education. That was the only way out.

- *Do you remember your very first performance as an opera singer?*

- Of course! It was held as part of a Jewish choir, where the solo was to be performed by a teen. I was 14 then.

- *Who are your American mentors?*

- The first vocal teacher was **Deborah Berio** when I was still in high school. Then I was instructed by **Robert Lischetti**, a famous American tenor. Then I began to take everything seriously, I began to practice every day. In addition to Robert, my mother also taught me.

- *Can you single out one favorite concert?*

- Of course, every concert is an event that leaves an indelible mark in memory. For instance, at the Opera House in Sarasota, Florida, I performed in seven different spectacles and performed the part of Papagena in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* nine times in a month and a half and also gave three recitals. However, the most significant thing for me was the concert in my homeland, in the House-Museum of Aram Khachaturian.

...Yes, today I have the honor and the happiness of performing on numerous stages of America, but a concert in Yerevan is a completely different thing. Here you worry much more than usually... The concert was attended by many professors of the Yerevan Conservatory. In addition, I sang in front of my two biggest critics: my teacher **Hasmik Hatsagortsyan** and my mother. The concert was a great success!

I really hope that I will be able to sing again before the Armenian public in the near future.

- *Please tell about your recent achievements.*

- I became the 2019 Florida district Winner of The Metropolitan National Council Competitions which took place in Winter Park, FL in the last October. It is noteworthy that only citizens of the United States and Canada could participate in it. It turned out that foreign singers could not participate. However, despite this, I was openly called a "participant from Armenia". It turned out pretty funny.

In December that contest was followed by another, more global competition, 2019 Premiere Opera Foundation + NYIOP International Vocal Competition (an international event aimed at searching for young talented opera singers). I passed through two rounds and reached the finals, and as a reward I received a master class from opera diva **Erin Morley**.

- *Were there other Armenians at the competition?*

- In the first round there were more than 200 performers from around the world. I met only two compatriots: **Marianna Martirosyan** from Yerevan and **Anush Avetisyan** who, like me, lives and works in the United States. *-What has changed in your life after the contest?*

-The level of responsibility for each appearance on the stage has increased. Many acquaintances and friends in this area have appeared. And, of course, a lot of interesting new offers.

- *Can you tell about your plans for the future?*

- I have a lot of them. But, as they say, we will not run ahead of the engine. As I said, so far my main dream is to enter the stage of the Yerevan Opera where my entire childhood has passed!



Marmashen: Ancient Fortress and Many More...

By Gourgen James Khazhakian
Chief Correspondent



One of the oldest settlements in Shirak Region is the Village of Marmashen (Verin Ghanlija) that was located on the left bank of Akhuryan River in historical Shirak and gradually moved to the south-east. The village is located at an altitude of 1600 m above sea level. It was settled at the former place of the village of Tirashen that was destroyed and deserted during the Mongol invasions. **Sargis Jalalyants** mentions in his book "Journey to the Greater Armenia": "At the top of village Vahramashen Fortress was built, on top of a large limestone hill which was demolished by the Hagarites." The village is rich in historical and cultural monuments.

During the Urartian period invasions to the north, a Cyclopiian Fortress that dates back to the 3rd millennium BC was rebuilt and fortified. Various cultural materials related to the III-I millennia BC were discovered from this Castle and nearby mausoleums. Around the top of the hill, north of the canyon edge as well as on the slopes the ruins of both the ancient and built later fortress are clearly visible.

Armenian Army Commander-in-Chief (Sparapet) **Vahram Magistros Pahlavuni** rebuilt this ancient pre-Christian fortress and made it one of the most reliable defensive strongholds (X century). Since then, the Fortress has traditionally been called "Vahramashen" or "Vahramaberd".

The Fortress is bordered on three sides by high, inaccessible cliffs, and on the south side it joins the gorge through a narrow layer. It is surrounded by walls lined with large uncut stones without mortar.

In this connection, the prominent Armenian architect **Toros Toramanyan** writes: "...traces of human handwork of the pre-Christian period are clearly visible on the surrounding areas such as the ruined walls built of large stones, cavities, and grave-like piles of earth mixed with

stones. The entrance to the fortress was located almost on the southern side, there were huge pyramids with a semi-planetary form on both sides of the door, the ruins and foundations of which are visible." To built Vahramashen Fortress they used volcanic red and yellow stones, healed and of moderate size. The Fortress is narrow and long, spread from south to north, in which residential buildings were built. Of these buildings, only the foundations have survived by now.

Most likely, at the top of the Fortress was not only a dynastic castle of the Urartian period, but also a deep cave dug under a fortress-bearing mountain, the door of which was located on the northern side of the Fortress, in a gorge appeared as a result of a flood at the valley.. To the south of the village of Marmashen, on a natural cliff of the gorge, King **Argishti I** left a four-line cuneiform inscription, known in historical literature as the "Manuscript of Ghanlija":

"In the name of Khaldi God Argishti says: I conquered the land of Eriakh tribe I conquered Irdanuni City to Ishkigulu Country"

According to researchers, the mentioned "Land of the Eriakh Tribe" is the Shirak Plain, and "Irdanuni City" is its administrative center.

Underground shelters were opened in 1939 at pemza mines near the village of Marmashen. Similar shelters have been found in the villages of Azatan, Vardaghybur, Chakhmakh, Pokr Sarian and Kefli in the Eastern Shirak. Speaking about Marmashen's underground shelters, **Hovsep Yeghiazaryan** writes: "A large under-



ground apartment with complete plan was found on top of a hill. The entrance to the apartment was from the alley with a mobile ladder. To south-west and north-west directions from that apartment, on the slopes of the hill, the rows of apartments stretched.

Two apartments were completely pre-

served from the first row, and one from the second row. The other apartments are destroyed. The fully preserved apartments were small ones, domed by natural caves. The entrances to all the apartments were opened from their front, in a narrow hall along the entire length of the apartment row.

The layout of one of the well-preserved apartments of the row stretched to south-west was complete, and the other one's was square. Various clay pots, rotten pieces of wooden furniture, a metal rod with staple ends and other items were found in the first apartment. From another apartment pieces of clay pots were found. The large central apartment with the complete layout was richer with the fragments of clay pots, the bones of various animals and birds, and other items."

To the south-east of the Village of Marmashen (2 km), on a triangular cape having low-grade slopes from three sides, the Ti-



rashen Fortress (from the III-II millennium BC to the 10th century) is situated. The walls are built of medium and large rough stones of double masonry. The layout is adapted to the terrain. The entrance is from the west. From the entrance, on both sides of the corridor along the whole castle, there are structures with a rectangular plan.

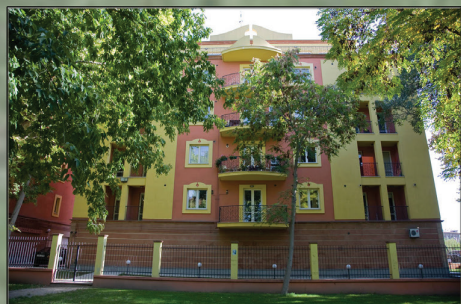
On a plain about 200 m north-west and south of the castle surrounded by a rocky gorge a multi-layered settlement is spread, there are a mausoleum field and a settlement (III-I millennium BC). At a depth of about 1.5-2 m, structures with a rectangular plan (III-II millennium BC) and samples of material culture typical for the ancient era were found.

The "Tirashen" settlement (IV-XI centuries) is preserved near the Castle, with the remains of its cruciform church, a quadrangular monument (VI-VII centuries) and a cemetery (IV-XI centuries).

Apparently, it is the "Tirashen" village mentioned in the inscription on the northern side of the Cathoghikheh Church of Marmashen.

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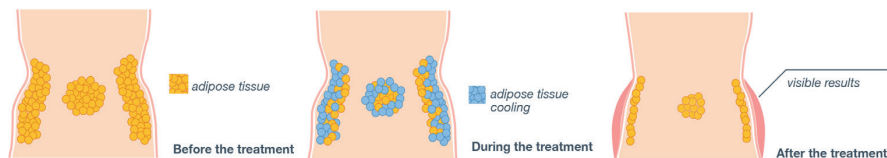
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