

Armenia lifts coronavirus-related movement restrictions and re-opens economy



The restrictions on citizens' free movement will be lifted in Armenia starting May 4, but the ban on public transport operation will still remain in force, Deputy minister of economy Varos Simonyan said at a press conference on May 20, presenting the package of new changes which will come into force on May 4.

“In particular, the restrictions on free movement will be lifted, in other words, all citizens will be allowed to move freely across Armenia. But the ban on the operation of public transport will remain in force, because there are some risky approaches connected with the spread of the novel coronavirus”, he said.

According to the package, almost all restrictions are being lifted, only some will remain relating to some types of economic activity. In particular, this relates to the wholesale and retail trade. There almost wouldn't be restrictions in retail and wholesale trade, only the restriction in trade centers will be maintained. This means that the shopping malls, department stores will still remain closed. Only the groceries, pharmacies existing in their territory, as well as the agricultural markets will operate.

The processing industry will start operation with all activity types. Those restaurants, cafes and bars, which will have an outdoor space, will operate. Botanical gardens, zoos and specially protected areas, as well as the reservoirs will also open.

The operation of sports facilities will be allowed only with the participation of professional athletes for holding sports events, as well as the operation of sport clubs. Personal services, including washing, cleaning and

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PM Nikol Pashinyan holds phone talk with IRI President Hassan Rouhani

French President Emmanuel Macron has sPrime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had a telephone conversation with President Hassan Rouhani of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Nikol Pashinyan first congratulated President Rouhani and the Iranian nation on the occasion of Ramadan. The interlocutors exchanged information on the epidemiological situation in their respective countries and the steps to fight COVID-19. Both sides expressed con-



dolences to the victims of the epidemic. They stressed the need for joint international efforts and bilateral cooperation to defy the major challenge facing mankind.

The parties expressed satisfaction that despite the standing logistics-related restrictions, Armenia and Iran continue their economic and trade cooperation. Both sides highlighted the implementation of further steps in this direction.

Nikol Pashinyan and Hassan Rouhani reaffirmed their readiness to take appropriate measures with a view to restoring the pre-crisis level of trade and economic cooperation, while maintaining the restrictions imposed due to the global pandemic.

Armenian President, PM congratulate Israeli leaders on National Day

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has sent a congratulatory message to the Prime Minister of the State of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu on the occasion of Independence Day.

“We appreciate the positive dynamics of the development of the Armenian-Israeli relations, we always emphasize the possibility of deepening the cooperation with Israel in various spheres and raising the quality to a new level,” PM Pashinyan said in a message.

“The beginning of the year was marked by the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Tel Aviv, which once again “proves that our government is



ready to make joint efforts to develop and strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation for the benefit of our countries and peoples,” he added.

The Prime Minister voiced confidence that the tangible results of the Embas-

sy’s activities will become visible in the near future, which will further strengthen the friendship between the two countries.

In a letter to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin President Armen Sarkissian attached importance to the direct dialogue between Armenia and Israel and continued cooperation even under the conditions of crisis, as the humanity is trying to overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

“I am confident that the subsequent implementation of the agreements reached will give a new quality to the Armenian-Israeli partnership for the benefit of our peoples,” the President said.

Armenian, Italian FMs discuss anti-Covid-19 measures, bilateral relations

On April 29, Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan had a telephone conversation with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio on the initiative of the Armenian side.

On behalf of the Armenian people and the Government of the Republic of Armenia, the Armenian Foreign Minister expressed support to the friendly people of Italy in effectively addressing the challenges caused by the pandemic and overcoming it as soon as possible.

Minister Mnatsakanyan briefed his Italian counterpart on the steps taken by the



Government of the Republic of Armenia to prevent the new type of coronavirus, to mitigate the socio-economic consequences of the latter.

In the context of the fight against the virus and the elimination of its consequences, the Foreign Ministers exchanged views on new

initiatives for international cooperation.

Touching upon the issues on bilateral agenda, Minister Mnatsakanyan emphasized that Armenia attaches special importance to the development of relations based on the common Armenian-Italian civilizational values.

In this context, the Foreign Ministers hailed the high level of the existing political dialogue between Armenia and Italy.

During the telephone conversation, reference was made to a wide range of international and regional security issues.

Pashinyan urges end to unregistered labor

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on May 1 urged Armenians working off the books to press their employers to register their jobs with tax authorities, saying that this is essential for protecting their labor rights.

In a May Day statement, Pashinyan also argued that his government finds it difficult to help unregistered workers hit hard by the economic shutdown resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

“Our anti-crisis programs first of all target those people and companies that have complied with the Labor Code and the Tax Code of the Republic of Armenia,” he said. “We have thereby not only honored our working citizens but also taken advantage of the fact that it is easier to identify registered workers if they lose their jobs and need assistance during the crisis.”

“Having a registered job is an important guarantee for the protection of worker’s rights, and I call on all employed citizens to demand that their employers register their jobs and support the government in protecting their own labor rights,” added Pashinyan.

Many people have for decades been involved in the informal sector of Armenia’s sector. Employers had not registered those workers in order to avoid paying their income and pension taxes.

Official statistics suggest that the number of such workers has fallen significantly since Pashinyan came to power and pledged a tough crackdown on tax evasion two years ago. According the

State Revenue Committee (SRC), private entities have reported more than 87,000 new jobs to the tax service from May 2018 through December 2019. Most of these jobs are believed to have been created before that period.

The number of unregistered workers -- and day laborers in particular -- apparently remains high as evidenced by public reactions to recent government decisions to compensate people who have temporarily or permanently lost their jobs due to the coronavirus lockdown. The government has faced many complaints about compensating only officially registered workers.

Heriknaz Tigranyan, a parliament deputy from the ruling My Step bloc, acknowledged on Friday the broader protection of labor rights in Armenia is still weak. She singled out the arbitrary dismissal of workers, saying that it remains widespread.

Tigranyan criticized the former Armenian government for dissolving the State Labor Inspectorate, which was supposed to ensure such protection, in 2013. She said that decision should be offset by amendments to the Labor Code passed by the Armenian parliament late last year.

The amendments expanded the powers of another, existing government agency, the Health and Labor Inspectorate. Starting from July 2021, it will be tasked with not only ensuring the physical safety of workers but also protecting their social rights.

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dry-cleaning services, hairdressing and beauty salons will also start operating from May 4.

“This can be regarded as a sort of test,” Simonyan said of the government’s decision to largely end the lockdown. “While we are easing the restrictions everyone, both citizens and businesses, must display a strong discipline and consciousness.”

“Depending on that, we will decide whether to maintain the mild restrictions regime or to revert to tougher restrictions,” he told a joint news conference with Deputy Health Minister Lena Nanushyan.

Nanushyan said, for her part, that the Ministry of Health has set specific coronavirus-related safety rules for companies and other entities resuming their work. “The requirements are pretty much the same [for everyone]: to ensure a physical distance of one or two meters between employees



and customers and to take various hygiene measures, including disinfection and ventilation [of premises,]” she said.

During a live discussion streamed on Facebook on May 3, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan and Health Minister Arsen Torosyan discussed the situation created by the coronavirus, the easing of restrictions and further steps.

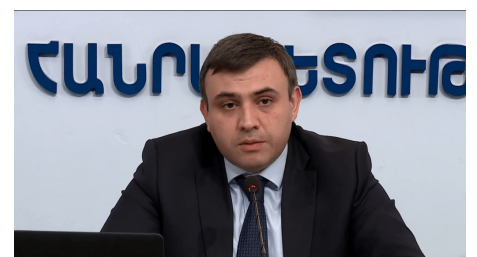
Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said “we have to be able to co-exist with the coronavirus,” since analysis shows that the cases could still be reported until next spring and until a vaccine is found.

“Every citizen of the Republic of Armenia takes his share of responsibility to fight Covid-19. First of all, it’s necessary to try not to get infected and not to infect others,” he said.

According to Health Minister Arsen Torosyan, the number of patients in serious condition has increased. Sixty-five are now in serious condition, 35 are in critical condition, eight people are on ventilation.

The health system can still manage 3-4 thousand cases, and the task is not to exceed the maximum, he said.

“We do not want to reach the day, when we will have to treat only people in serious conditions at hospitals,” the Minister said.



Armenian vice-speaker, anti-government activist investigated after brawl

Law-enforcement authorities on April 30 pledged to investigate a violent clash between a deputy speaker of Armenia's parliament and an outspoken anti-government activist which raised eyebrows in the country.

The influential vice-speaker, Alen Simonyan, and Artur Danielyan, the leader of the nationalist Adevavad movement highly critical of the Armenian government, came to blows after crossing paths in downtown Yerevan on Wednesday.

They blamed each other for the brawl, with Danielyan posting a picture of his bloody nose on social media. Simonyan also appeared to have suffered an injury. Both men received medical assistance at different hospitals.



Simonyan said later on Wednesday that he head-butted Danielyan after the latter swore badly at him. The vice-speaker defended his actions, saying that they amounted to self-defense.

"I am prepared for any decision that will be taken by law-enforcement bodies," he said in a video message streamed live on

Facebook.

Danielyan and his supporters portrayed this statement as proof that Simonyan was the first to resort to violence. The activist's lawyer, Tigran Atanesyan, said law-enforcement authorities have sufficient grounds to prosecute the close political associate of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Prosecutors said on Wednesday that the incident will be investigated by Armenia's Special Investigate Service, a law-enforcement body which normally deals with criminal offenses allegedly committed by state officials.

Commenting to the incident, the parliamentary leader of the ruling Civil Contract party, Lilit Makunts, said that any form of violence is unacceptable to Armenia's political leadership.

Pashinyan in fresh war of words with former security chief

(RFE/RL- Yerevan)- Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has launched fresh scathing attacks on Artur Vanetsyan, prompting angry rebuttals from the former head of Armenia's National Security Service (NSS).

Vanetsyan was one of the most influential members of Pashinyan's entourage until being unexpectedly relieved of his duties in September last year. He criticized Pashinyan's "impulsive" leadership style following his dismissal, triggering a bitter war of words with the premier.

The public feud between the two men was reignited in January by Pashinyan's "Haykakan Zhamanak" newspaper. In an extensive article, it charged that Vanetsyan is behind a smear campaign against the prime minister's family waged by anti-government media.

The former NSS chief strongly denied the allegations before filing a defamation suit against the paper in February.

Earlier this week, Pashinyan's spokeswoman, Mane Gevorgyan, accused Vanetsyan of cutting shady business deals with Mikael Minasyan, a once influential son-in-law of former President Serzh Sargsyan



Gevorgyan said that "according to the government's information" he abused his NSS position to buy Minasyan's minority stake in Armenia's largest mining company.

Vanetsyan strongly denied the claim on Wednesday. "There is a lie, a great lie and a Pashinyan lie," he said in a statement.

He insisted that Pashinyan knew beforehand that Minasyan's stake in the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine will be sold to individuals unrelated to Vanetsyan in 2018.

Pashinyan's brother-in-law, Hrachya Hakobyan, added to the latest attacks on Vanetsyan by suggesting that the latter may have worked for a foreign intelligence service.

"Will it turn out one day that Vanetsyan was sacked as NSS director because of

having been recruited by foreign intelligence services?" Hakobyan wrote on Facebook on Wednesday night. He wondered if Vanetsyan has not been prosecuted for espionage because the Armenian government does not want to "spoil relations with the recruiting country."

Hakobyan clarified on Thursday that he has no evidence of such espionage and simply "raised questions." "I don't have such information but suspect that maybe his resignation occurred in those circumstances," he told RFE/RL's Armenian service.

"We see no need to comment on yet another unserious and irresponsible statement," said Kristine Melkonyan, a spokeswoman for Vanetsyan. "Our lawyers will deal with that."

Hakobyan, who is also a parliament deputy representing Pashinyan's My Step bloc, already alleged in January that Vanetsyan was sacked because he was plotting a coup. The NSS said at the time it is not aware of any coup attempts and will not look into Hakobyan's claims.

Armenia retains 61st position in World Press Freedom Index

Armenia has retained the 61st position in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders on May 3.

Georgia is placed just ahead of Armenia at 60th, Russia is 149th, Turkey and Azerbaijan are ranked 154th and 168th respectively. Armenia’s southern neighbor Iran is 173rd on the list.

Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands are ranked as the countries with the highest degree of freedom for journalists.

The report says media diversity has blossomed in Armenia, but the government that emerged from the velvet revolution in



the spring of 2018 has failed to reduce the media’s polarization. The editorial policies of the main TV channels coincide with the interests of their owners.

“Journalistic independence and transparent media ownership are still far from being

achieved. There is concern about the volume of judicial proceedings against journalists and about excesses in the fight against fake news,” the report notes.

“The involvement of the security services in combatting disinformation, followed by arrests of social media users, and attempts to legislate without prior discussion with civil society and journalists are alarming.

However, investigative journalism is flourishing online and is well placed to play a major role in a national offensive against corruption,” Reporters Without Borders said.

320 health workers have contracted Covid-19 in Armenia



Armenia’s Health Minister informs that 320 health workers have contracted the coronavirus. This makes 13.4% of the 2,386 total cases reported so far.

“This is very painful, but also inevitable,” Arsen Torosyan said in a Facebook post.

“You can probably imagine how difficult it is for the healthcare system to treat or isolate a person who has to treat patients with coronavirus disease. And given the length of the disease, health care workers are unable to work for a very long time,” Torosyan added.

Fortunately, he said, no deaths have been reported among health workers, also thanks to the Ministry’s recommendation

that those over the age of 60 with chronic diseases stay at home as much as possible.

“Of course, this further complicates the situation, as many health care providers are unable to help their younger and healthier colleagues fight for the lives of patients, increasing their workload and the risk in which they work,” the Minister said.

Armenia has so far confirmed 2,386 cases of Covid-19, 1,035 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospital, 35 deaths have been reported.

Azerbaijan uses mortars in the direction of Armenian defense positions

The Azerbaijani side used 60 mm mortars in the direction of the Armenian troops stationed in the eastern (Martuni) direction of the line of contact at about 3 pm and 5:25 pm today, the Artsakh Defense Ministry reports.

The Defense Army units did not suffer any casualties as a result of the incident, the Ministry said.

The rival’s activity was suppressed after

retaliatory actions taken by the Armenian side.

This is the first time since June that the Azerbaijani armed forces have used mortars.

Ceasefire violations from different types of firearms have also been registered throughout the day.

The situation on the front line is calm at the moment, and Defense Army units con-

tinue to confidently carry out their military



task, the Defense Ministry said.

EEC Minister sure ban on export of some goods from EAEU will be lifted in late June

The ban on export of a group of products from the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to other countries is temporary and will be probably lifted after June 30, Artak Kamalyan - Minister in charge of Industry and Agriculture at the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), said at a Yerevan-Moscow-Minsk video conference on April 30.

He firstly presented the reason of such restrictions. "Today's existing not so major restrictions have been applied not because that we are afraid that food within the Union will not be enough, but because that it's an ade-



quate reaction to the changes that are taking place over the possible rise in the demand and prices of certain products", he said.

The EEC Minister noted that when there is an urgent demand for any good, the demand of that business is expanding, and the price starts growing. Therefore, to avoid such speculations, these restrictions have been applied. But the Minister said these are temporary restrictions. "The list of restrictions, which is not so big, will be lifted, I am sure, until June 30. We are already lifting the restrictions on some goods", he added.

Earlier the EEC made a decision to ban the export of some food essentials from the Union due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Iran-Armenia power transmission project underway despite pandemic – Ambassador

Armenia's Ambassador to Tehran has said that the power transmission project between Iran and Armenia was in the process despite the coronavirus pandemic, IRNA reports.

Armenia's ambassador to Iran Artashes Toumanyan said in an online meeting on April 27 that the coronavirus outbreak had no effect on the joint projects of Iran and Armenia.

He underlined that his country continued to prepare for welcoming 60 technicians for the construction of the third line of power transmission project from Iran to Armenia.

Iran and Armenia have been cooperating



for years in gas and electricity swap, and two-way economic and political ties have grown in tandem with an increase in trade.

Back in July 2019, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding

(MOU) in Tehran to expand economic cooperation, especially in the field of energy.

The MOU was signed by Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian and Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan at the end of the 16th Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee meeting.

Based on the MOU, the two sides agreed to complete the construction of Iran's third electricity transmission line to Armenia by 2020 in order to increase the country's electricity exports to Armenia to over 1000 megawatts (MW).

MoU signed between Armenia and World Food Programme

On April 30, a Memorandum of Understanding on the Armenia Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024) of the World Food Programme (WFP) was signed between the Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Ms. Jelena Milosevic, the WFP Representative and Country Director in Armenia.

The Memorandum is an important tool for the Government of Armenia and WFP in the capacity building process aimed at ensuring food security in the country by 2030.

Within the five-year Country Strategic Plan (CSP), the WFP will adopt a transformative development approach for Armenia



and its population, and through its investments will support the efforts of the Government for cost-effective, sustainable and inclusive programs of Armenia's development agenda.

Activities under the CSP will support the

most vulnerable while also promoting their integration in economic activities aimed at stimulating sustainable growth in Armenia.

Specifically, the WFP will support Government's efforts to create income-generating job opportunities; contribute to quality education; support modern and renewable energy sources; contribute to the green modernization of agribusinesses; promote climate-sensitive investments; and implement programs on eradication of food insecurity and malnutrition, also supporting Human Capital development, improving the health of the population.

IMF Plans \$280 Million In Emergency Funding for Armenia

The International Monetary Fund will likely disburse next month \$280 million in emergency loans designed to help Armenia fight the coronavirus outbreak and mitigate its economic consequences, a senior IMF official said over the weekend.

Yulia Ustyugova, the fund's resident representative in Yerevan, told RFE/RL's

Armenian service that the IMF is also planning \$140 million in additional funding to Armenia.

The Armenian government announced last week plans to borrow around \$540 million for cushioning the impact of an unfolding economic recession in the country. Finance Minister Atom Janjughazyan said the government needs to offset a major shortfall in its tax revenues and to continue financing coronavirus relief measures.

Ustyugova said that IMF officials have recommended the \$280 million disbursement to the fund's executive board, which should approve it in the second half of May. She said the sum includes a \$248 million "stand-by arrangement" which was allocated to Armenia in May 2019 and has not been used by the latter until now.

"Also, the [Armenian] authorities have requested additional financial help from the



IMF to help pay for the economic support program and necessary healthcare expenditures in the current environment," said Ustyugova.

"So, \$280 million will be available in the second half of May. The program itself will last until May 2022, and about \$140 million will additionally be available after May 2020," added the IMF official.

She insisted that the emergency borrowing is justified even though it will lead to a sizable increase in Armenia's foreign debt. "The measures that need to be taken right now will help to avoid more painful and prolonged socioeconomic damage in the future," she said.

The Armenian government has promised a wide range of coronavirus-related compensatory measures, including cash payments to a large part of the population, financial assistance to businesses and loan subsidies for farmers. According to Janjughazyan, it

plans to spend \$150 billion drams (\$315 million) for this purpose this year.

Ustyugova praised the government's "swift" response to the economic fallout from the global health crisis. "We welcome the package of economic policy measures that was announced by the authorities," she said.

In its World Economic Outlook released earlier this month, the IMF forecast that the Armenian economy will shrink by 1.5 percent this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Armenian Ministry of Finance expects a 2 percent drop in GDP.

Ustyugova stood by the IMF projections. "We currently see the pandemic having a very sharp but also very short-lived impact on Armenia," she said. "So we expect the peak of the shock to happen around the second quarter, with some slight recovery starting already in the third quarter [of this year,] and an acceleration of economic activity in the fourth quarter to 2021."

The IMF cautioned at the same time that a prolonged COVID-19 pandemic would lead to a sharper GDP contraction. "There are lots of risks to these projections and the risks, I would say, are tilted to the downside," she said.

Armenian molecular biology institute awaiting material supply to launch coronavirus test production

The Armenian Institute of Molecular Biology is awaiting a second batch of required materials to launch the production of coronavirus test kits, Director of the Institute Dr. Arsen Arakelyan told ARMEN-PRESS. He said they are ready to launch the production the next day after receiving the materials.

Arakelyan said the batch will arrive some-



time within May.

"The production isn't very difficult, the number of involved specialists can vary somewhere between 5 to 20, depending on the required daily amount of production," Arakelyan said.

The government allocated money for the institute to acquire the materials from China.

International recognition of Artsakh will ensure peace and security in the region – MFA

The international recognition of the Republic of Artsakh will become an additional deterrent against Azerbaijan's desire to unleash a new war and will ensure peace and security in the entire region of the South Caucasus, the Artsakh Defense Ministry said in a statement on the 29th anniversary of operation Koltso (Ring).

Twenty-nine years ago, under the direct organization and coordination of the central authorities of the USSR and Azerbaijan, a large-scale operation Koltso (Ring) was carried out to deport the Armenian population of the borderline villages of Artsakh. This bloody operation ultimately transferred the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict to the military plane, initiating the subsequent full-scale aggression of Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh Republic).



“On April 30, 1991, the massive shelling of Getashen and Martunashen villages of the Shahumyan region launched the operation ‘Koltso’, in the course of which tanks, combat helicopters, and artillery were employed for the first time against the civilians. Azerbaijani special police units (OMON), with the support of internal troops of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Soviet Army, broke into Armenian villages formally supposedly for “checking the passport regime”, but in fact for killing, robbery, terror against the Ar-

menian population, followed by deportation,” the Foreign Ministry said.

“As a result of the military-police actions, dozens of Armenian villages of Northern Artsakh, as well as the Shahumyan, Hadrut and Shushi regions were destroyed, about ten thousand people were deported, over 100 people were killed, and hundreds of people were taken hostage. The fate of many of them remains unknown so far,” it added.

“The Azerbaijani authorities considered the operation ‘Koltso’ as the beginning of the complete cleansing of Artsakh from the Armenian population. It became another manifestation of the policy of ethnic cleansing conducted by Azerbaijan in 1988-1991 in Sumgait, Baku and other settlements of the Azerbaijani SSR, as well as in the villages of Northern Artsakh,” the statement reads. “The Armenian pogroms carried out

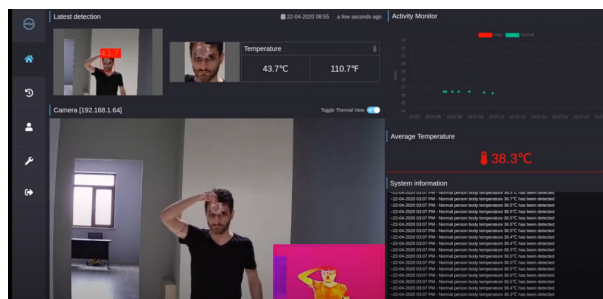
Armenian engineers develop Thermal Scanner in response to Covid-19

Armenian engineers have developed a thermal scanner – an AI solution that can be used for detecting elevated skin temperature in high-traffic public places through quick multiple target screening.

The Scylla Thermal Scanner provides AI-based analytics, which, combined with a state-of-the-art thermal camera, enables continuous contactless and non-invasive accurate temperature monitoring.

It can be used for preliminary screening in border checkpoints, airports, educational and government institutions, manufacturing warehouses, and hospitals.

“Such solutions are very expensive in the world, and the prices hit \$20,000 amid



growing demand due to the coronavirus pandemic,” the company’s technical co-founder and chief data scientist Ara Ghazaryan said in an interview with Public Radio of Armenia.

He added that what they offer is at least three times cheaper.

“We offer different solutions. In one case the camera fixes the temperature when a person walks in front of it. In a second case people need to stand before the camera to

get their temperature measured. The second option is cheaper,” Ghazaryan said.

Ara Ghazaryan says Latin American and Arabic countries are most interested in purchasing the scanners. Columbia has already installed them at the entrances of hospitals.

As for Armenia, he says, the system is still too expensive for the country.

Scylla Thermal Scanner is used for preliminary screening purposes only and cannot be considered as proof or a basis for a medical diagnosis.

Scylla – a company with offices in Armenia and the US – is a leading developer of computer-vision based facial, behavior, and object recognition tools for first responders.

PM: “Capital expenditure efficiency is the key to curbing the crisis”

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan chaired a consultation, which discussed progress in infrastructure and house-building-related capital programs. The Prime Minister stressed that capital programs are of special importance this year, and therefore they need to comply with the government’s target.

“Why do I say that this year is different from the previous ones? Our past experience has shown that capital expenditures used to be under-fulfilled in Armenia. We boasted an unprecedented level of economic activity in 2019 despite the fact that capital expenditures fell far short of the target. Capital expenditure efficiency is the key to curbing the current crisis.

We consider that this year each under-fulfilled capital expenditure means missing jobs, families deprived of legitimate in-



come, businessmen who should have made a profit. This in turn can aggravate the difficult social situation. In this respect, capital expenditures really need special focus and care,” the Premier said, reminding that the bulk of capital expenditure is carried out by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure.

Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan reported that the Ministry has been provided 22,380 mil-

lion drams from the 2020 State budget for capital expenditure purposes, of which 21 billion shall be used in road construction. 250km-long road sections inclusive of 65 km lifeline roads will be rehabilitated nationwide. 90 km roads will undergo capital repairs as part of loan-funded projects. Preparations are underway and the planned work will start this May 5. The Minister also referred to other types of capital expenditures.

Deputy Urban Development Committee Chairman Armen Ghularyan reported progress in the disaster zone house-building program currently being implemented in Spitak, Vanadzor and Gyumri. Prime Minister Pashinyan told those responsible to implement all these programs properly and in a timely manner.

Armenia highly values freedom of speech and unimpeded work of the media – Foreign Minister

Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan has congratulated all media professionals and their vast audience on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day.

“The World Press Freedom Day receives particular significance today as the international community faces global challenges posed by COVID-19. Overcoming these challenges requires civil solidarity, while access to credible and fact-based information is indispensable in this regard,”



the Foreign Minister said in a statement.

“Free and independent media is the driving force for a vibrant democratic society and democratic transformation. Freedom of media and speech is one of the most im-

portant achievements of Armenia, gained by Armenia’s society as a result of its adherence to the values of freedom, democratic choice and the resolve to defend them,” he added.

“Armenia highly values freedom of speech and unimpeded work of the media, access to information, including and in particular in conflict zones. Free media and freedom of expression greatly contribute to the preparation of peoples to peace, the Minister stated.

29 April is the International Dance Day



This Day has been celebrated around the world since 1982. International Dance Day is called to unite all directions of dance, to become an occasion to honor this art of dance, its ability to overcome all the political, cultural and ethnic boundaries, an opportunity to unite people for the sake of peace and friendship that allows them to speak the language of dance.

Professional ballet art developed in Armenia during the Soviet years. In 1920s, a number of Armenian ballet dancers, educated in the studios of M. Perini and Mikhail Mordkin of Tiflis (Georgia) and M. Khorkov in Baku, became soloists of the Opera and Ballet Theater: **Sergey Sergeev (Vardanbabov), S. Gorski, (Ter-Ghevondyan), G. Barkhudarov, Dmitry Shikanyan, L. Bektabekova, K. Ejubova, L. Leonov, H. Apresov** and others. **Ilya Arbatov (Yeghia Yagubyan)**, one of the founders of the Armenian National

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Ballet, has also worked outside of Armenia at the Tbilisi, Baku, Tashkent, Kazan and other opera houses. **Vahram Aristakesyan, N. Lisitsyan, Maria Lisitsyan, T. Lisitsyan, A. Akhsharumyan** performed in the concert programs. **N. Safaryan (Safarova)** in Baku, **S. Lisitsyan, T. Adamyan, G. Barkhudarov** in Tbilisi (Georgia), **N. Lisitsyan** and **V. Aristakesyan** staged dance scenes in Yerevan.

On the occasion of the Intl Dance Day General and Artistic Director of the Al. Spendiaryan Natl Academic Opera and Ballet Theater, Honored Artist of the Russian Federation **Constantine G. Orbelian** addressed with the following:



*“I would like to congratulate all the ballet artists, tutors, and personally the Head Balletmaster of the Theater **Vilen Galstyan**.*

Dear ballet dancers, your work is honest, eternal and infinitely beautiful.

Be healthy and continue to give

our audience pleasant moments!

Cordially yours, Constantine Orbelian”

30 April is celebrated as International Jazz Day

For all jazz lovers, on April 30, at 19:00 the recording of concert “Ella Fitzgerald 100” held at Yerevan Opera House on May 24, 2017 was presented to jazz lovers.

The evening was initiated by “Constantine Orbelian” Foundation, famous jazz artist **Vahagn Hayrapetyan** and Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theatre. Special guest of the concert was the famous American jazz singer **Marjorie Barnes** who performed with Vahagn Hayrapetyan, St.Petersburg’s jazz quartet and Symphony



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Orchestra of Yerevan Opera House.

Conductor: General and Artistic Director of Yerevan Opera House, Honored Artist of RF **Constantine G. Orbelian**

Viva-MTS: Confirming Status of the Corporate Social Responsibility Founding Leader - #wecare

500 smartphones for distance education



Viva-MTS has reviewed the list of social programs and made a decision taking into account the current situation. The company has donated 500 smartphones to the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, as part of coordinated actions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and within the framework of the program for making distance learning accessible also to school-age students of the most vulnerable groups in society.

As part of its cooperation with the Ministry, Viva-MTS has made available a wide range of tools, including online educational platforms and mobile applications. The company now supports another program, which aims to provide technical devices. The process of the smartphones distribution has already begun and Shirak region received the first batch. The program includes all the regions. Smartphones and web platforms with flexible solutions as well as access to applications have become an important tool for the learning process. "Owing to the situation, distance learning has become a pressing issue. We are living in a time when everyone is required to make quick decisions, find situational solutions, work in coordination and cooperation with the aim of making distance learning acces-

sible to all, preventing the interruption of education, supporting the specialists in the field of education as much as possible. With this program as well as a number of other ones, we reaffirm our company's responsible approach adopted over the years. We strive to be where there is a need and opportunity for our help. I am confident that together we will overcome this challenge and return to normal life," said Viva-MTS Founding General Manager **Ralph C. Yirikian**.



"From the first days of the organization of distance learning, through our work with the regions, we were able to quickly collect the data of children who do not have the technical means to participate in the courses. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport called partner organizations for cooperation. Viva-MTS was one of the first to respond to the ministry and provided 500 new smartphones. We have adopted the following principle of providing devices: to provide, first of all, to the schoolchildren of socially vulnerable and large families. The first 50 phones were provided to the students of Shirak region. We are grateful to Viva-MTS for its quick response and contribution to the organization of education," said **Ashot Arshakyan**, Head of the General Education Department of the RA Ministry of Education and Science. It should be reminded that according to the data received from the regions, the Ministry of Education and Science had announced about the need for 24,000 de-

vices in the schools of the republic regions for the purpose of providing distance education. Various companies have been involved in the process of replenishment. The necessary steps are being taken to be useful to everyone at the earliest.

Viva-MTS has reopened several service centers across Yerevan and all marzes

Upon the Commandant decision, Viva-MTS has resumed operation of its several service centers.

In total, 20 Viva-MTS service centers are operational now, out of which 10 in Yerevan and 10 in marzes.

The whole range of services is made available in service centers except for the opportunity of buying mobile devices on installment.

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

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

The service centers are operational Monday through Friday, from 11:00 to 15:00, in the following locations:

Yerevan

- 33/7 Abovyan St.
- 58/2 Komitas Ave.
- 18 Erebuni St.
- 86/1 Malatia St.

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14/67 Bagratunyats St.
24/4 Azatutyun Ave.
19/3 Margaryan St.
10/6 Gay Ave. (on the left to the monument to Gay)
42/2 Tigran Petrosyan St.
212/3 Khudyakov St. (shop)

Marzes

Syunik
Kapan, 11/38 Shahumyan St.
Aragatsotn
Ashtarak, 41 Norayr Sisakyan St.

Ararat

Artashat, 109/1 23 August St.

Armavir

Armavir, 28 Hanrapetutyun St.

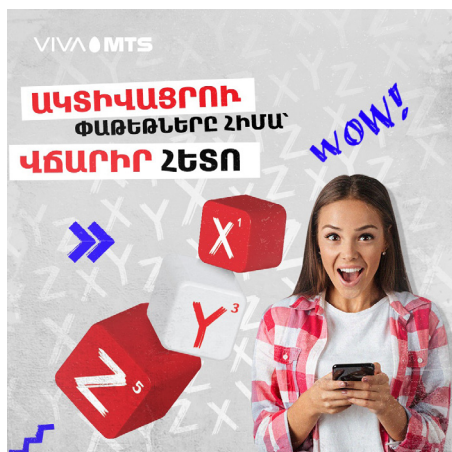
Lori

Vanadzor, 75/1 Tigran Mets Ave.

Kotayk

Hrazdan, 50 23 August St. (shop)

Shirak



Gyumri, 50/4 Gorki St.

Vayots Dzor

Yeghegnadzor, 3/07 Mikoyan St.

Tavush

Ijevan, 22 Yerevanyan St.

Gegharkunik

Gavar, 2 Buniatyan St.

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

The delivery mobile service centers will be delivering orders to Viva-MTS subscribers. To place an order the subscriber needs to contact Company's online shop at 093 298 700 or visit the Company's online shop (<https://shop.mts.am>) and fill in a simplified electronic form. The agents will further contact the subscriber and will guide to the locations where the delivery service centers are expected to arrive to deliver the order.

Activate Viva-MTS "X", "Y", "Z" tariff plan packages, pay later

Viva-MTS informs that from now on it is possible to activate your "X", "Y", "Z" **pre-paid** tariff plan packages, no matter what's the balance on your account.

The sum used for the activation of the packages will be charged from the account balance once you refill it. For example, if



you have AMD 800 on your balance, and you have to reactivate your "Z" tariff plan packages, you dial *208*5#, have your packages reactivated, and the AMD 1000 needed for the reactivation, will be charged, when you refill your account balance.

To use the opportunity, send the command *208*5#.

The service is available also when the "Recharge+" service is activated.

The offer is available till 31.05.2020, inclusively.

Stay home and continue using your tariff plan packages as always.

To remind, 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 schoolchil-

dren, 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" prepaid 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.

Surprise from Viva-MTS: last Sunday Aram Mp3 performed in a live concert

Viva-MTS, the leading telecommunications company and digital services provider in Armenia, made a new surprise.

Armenia's Leading Telecom Operator organized and live-streamed yet another online concert on its Facebook page; this time **Aram Mp3** performed an exclusive live concert in the scope of cooperation with Viva-MTS. The concert is available on Viva-MTS official Facebook page.

The event was streamed on Sunday, May 3, at 20:00 on Viva-MTS official Facebook page at fb.com/MTSArmenia/. Broadcasting was possible via virtual reality at 360 degrees thanks to the "VR Ticket" project. The Project ensured the club atmosphere of the concert.

#StayHome, and the stars will come to visit you!

Ryanair planning to resume flights from July

Irish low-cost carrier Ryanair says it is planning to axe 3,000 pilot and cabin crew jobs, or 15 percent of staff, with air transport paralyzed by coronavirus.

Irish low-cost airline Ryanair is planning to resume flights from July.

Ryanair said in a [press release](#) it believes it will take some time for passenger volumes to return. Consumer confidence will be impacted by public health restrictions, such as temperature checks at airports and face coverings for passengers and staff on board aircraft.

Ryanair is now reviewing its growth plans, and aircraft orders. We are in active negotiations with both Boeing, and Lufthansa's A320 lessors to cut the number of planned aircraft deliveries over the next 24 months, which could reduce our capex



commitments, to more accurately reflect a slower and more distorted EU air travel market in a post Covid-19 world.

As a direct result of the unprecedented Covid-19 crisis, the grounding of all flights from mid-March until at least July, and the distorted State Aid landscape in Europe, Ryanair now expects the recovery of passenger demand and pricing (to 2019 levels) will take at least 2 years, until summer 2022

at the earliest. The Ryanair Airlines will shortly notify their trade unions about its restructuring and job loss program, which will commence from July 2020.

These plans will be subject to consultation but will affect all Ryanair Airlines, and may result in the loss of up to 3,000 mainly pilot and cabin crew jobs, unpaid leave, and pay cuts of up to 20%, and the closure of a number of aircraft bases across Europe until traffic recovers.

Job cuts and pay cuts will also be extended to Head Office and Back Office teams. Group CEO Michael O’Leary, whose pay was cut by 50% for April and May, has now agreed to extend this 50% pay cut for the remainder of the financial year to March 2021.

WCIT 2019 organizers planning second event in Moscow

Organizers of the World Conference on Information Technology in Yerevan (WCIT 2019 Yerevan) are holding discussions with the city of Moscow to arrange the second massive technological conference in the Russian capital.

WCIT 2019 Yerevan was a special moment for Armenia, an opportunity that focused the world’s attention on the long and enduring tradition of innovation and achievement by Armenia and Armenians everywhere.

“WCIT 2019 Yerevan was a genuinely consequential and memorable technology conference that made a statement with a scope of its intellectual ambition, the qual-



ity of its substance, and mastery of its execution,” organizers said in a statement.

“This became possible with a great team of professionals behind, a true spirit, and a conviction of the mission but most of all, with the enormous efforts and input of Alexander Yesayan, the Chairman of WCIT 2019 Yerevan organizing committee, pres-

ident of the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises of Armenia (UATE) and co-founder of UCom. His vision set a new standard for technology conferences,” the statement reads.

The 23rd World Congress on IT held in Yerevan October 6-9 featured discussions related to the evolution of the Digital Age. It covered topics ranging from artificial intelligence, virtual reality, smart cities to cybersecurity, climate change, and more.

The 2019 World Congress had over 2000 delegates from 70 countries, with over 31 sponsoring organizations.

US authorizes Ebola drug Remdesivir for coronavirus treatment

The US’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized emergency use of the Ebola drug Remdesivir for treating the coronavirus, the BBC reports.

The authorization means the anti-viral drug can now be used on people who are hospitalized with severe Covid-19.

A recent clinical trial showed the drug helped shorten the recovery time for people who were seriously ill.

However, it did not significantly improve survival rates.

Experts have warned the drug – which was originally developed to treat Ebola,

and is produced by Gilead pharmaceutical company in California – should not be seen as a “magic bullet” for coronavirus.

The drug interferes with the virus’s genome, disrupting its ability to replicate.

Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian releases composition on coronavirus in home quarantine



Renowned Iranian Armenian Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian has released a piece on coronavirus that he composed in three movements during the home quarantine, Tehran Times reports.

“These days that the new virus has dominated the world, artists and musicians have

reacted in different ways and for my part, I tried to show my feelings towards this world issue with a new composition,” he told the Persian service of MNA.

The 12-minute composition named “Corona” is composed of three movements named “Assault”, “Death”, and “Life”.

“I have been staying at home these days to protect myself and my other citizens from the new virus, and try to spend time in the best way possible,” he said.

“The first step to fight the coronavirus is to observe all the health tips to get rid of this new disease soon, but as long as this

situation continues we should try to do our best, if we are an artist or a musician, we need to work harder and if not we need to increase our personal information,” he noted.

“I have been working more than before. I watch films and listen to music, because I believe music is one of the best ways to help people in confronting a crisis,” he added.

The composition has been sampled by Ehsan Beiraqdar and mixed by Omid Nikbin, while Yarta Yaran has collaborated as a photographer.

Armenia and its symbol Ararat featured in State Department’s monthly magazine

The State Department’s monthly magazine features a beautiful photo of Ararat, a nice mention of Masis as Armenia’s national symbol.

Author Lia Miller describes Armenia is an ancient country with a rich and fascinating history.

“The country boasts some of the world’s oldest vineyards, vibrant and delicious cuisine, legendary hospitality, a beautiful landscape with world-class hiking, and internationally recognized biodiversity. Consistently included as one of the top travel destinations within popular publications

such as Forbes and Condé Nast Traveler, Armenia was recently featured on the National Geographic’s “The Cool List: Celebrating the reasons to travel in 2020,” due to its accessible routes from major travel hubs,” the article reads.

Located in the middle of the South Caucasus region between Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, Armenia is truly situated at the crossroads where east meets west, which makes for a dynamic, unique, and colorful culture, the magazine writes.

“Mount Ararat—or Masis, as the Armenians affectionately refer to it—is Arme-

nia’s national symbol and is known for the majestic views it offers. The volcanic mountain now lies in modern day Turkey making it difficult to access for Armenians. However, it remains in their hearts as a source of cultural and historic pride,” Lia Miller notes.

The extended article refers to Armenians’ crafting skills, their hospitality and cooking abilities, as well as the game of chess – a national pastime. It also covers the Armenian-American relations.

Captain Tom Moore given colonel title on 100th birthday



Captain Tom Moore, who raised more than £29m for the NHS by walking laps of his garden, has been made an honorary colonel on his 100th birthday, the BBC reports.

The war veteran will mark the occasion with thousands of birthday cards, including

one from the Queen.

He said it was “extraordinary” to be turning 100, especially with “these many well-wishers”.

Head of the Army General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith called Capt Tom “an inspirational role model”.

Capt Tom is due to spend the majority of the day self-isolating with his daughter Hannah Ingram-Moore and her family at his home in Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire.

He said he would also speak to other family members via the in-

ternet.

As well as receiving a personalized card from the Queen, Capt Tom will be made an honorary England cricketer by former captain Michael Vaughan.



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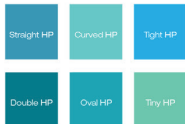
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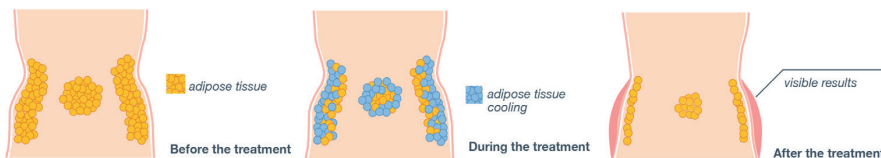
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