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Ecology

Yerevan's Growing Trash Crisis: Nubarashen Landfill Sparks Environmental Alarm

For decades, one of Armenia's most persistent social and environmental challenges has been the existence of the Nubarashen landfill — a vast dumping ground situated just 10 kilometers southeast of central Yerevan. Established in the 1950s, the site spans over 50 hectares and receives more than 400,000 tons of waste annually, according to various estimates.

But the problem is not just about space. Fires periodically break out at the landfill — a recurring hazard that puts both the environment and public health at risk. In the early hours of August 8, another major fire erupted, leading to a dangerous increase in sulfur dioxide levels in the capital's air.

Environmental experts blame poor waste management practices for these incidents. The accumulation of decades-old refuse, combined with summer heat and strong winds, create ideal conditions for fires to ignite and spread rapidly. In 2020, a fire at Nubarashen burned for nearly 20 days; in 2023, for 10.





City officials have long acknowledged the problem, but efforts to resolve it have largely stalled. Yerevan Mayor's advisor, Kamo Areyan, recently underscored the urgent need for a waste processing plant, calling for cooperation between the national government, municipal authorities, and the private sector.

Despite repeated promises from successive city administrations since 2014 to close the Nubarashen landfill and build a new facility that meets European standards, progress has been minimal. In 2015, Armenia secured two loans — €8 million from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development at a 1% interest

rate, and another €8 million from the European Investment Bank at 0.34%. Additionally, €10 million in grants were provided by European institutions to support the project.

Yet, a decade later, the landfill still operates — and still burns.

In 2023, Yerevan Mayor Tigran Avinyan publicly addressed the issue, unveiling a plan to fully decommission the Nubarashen site over a four-year period and build a modern waste-processing plant in its place. But to date, there has been little visible progress beyond public statements.

According to preliminary estimates, the cost of conserving the existing landfill and constructing a new waste disposal site is expected to exceed \$30 million — a price tag Armenia has yet to commit to meaningfully.



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\$54.5M Pan-Armenian Games Sports Town to Be Built on the Outskirts of Yerevan

The Government of Armenia has granted the “World Committee of the Pan-Armenian Games” a 23.3-hectare plot in the northeastern suburb of Yerevan for the development of a large-scale sports town. The land has been allocated for a 50-year term with full construction rights.

The initiative, valued at 20.9 billion drams, is expected to be implemented over 13 years and financed entirely by the Committee’s investment resources.

The project envisions the planting of nearly 20,000 trees and the creation of more than 1,200 new jobs. Beyond its core function as a sports hub, the complex will serve as a venue for youth gatherings, events with diaspora representatives, and a multifunctional resort facility.

Once completed, the new sports town is expected to become a significant social and cultural asset for Armenia—hosting large-scale events,

promoting healthy lifestyles, particularly among young people, strengthening sports culture, and enhancing community engagement. In addition, it will contribute to the improvement of social infrastructure in surrounding residential areas, making them more livable and attractive.



am.sputniknews.ru



Unfit and Drafted: Armenia's Troubled Conscription System Under Fire



Armenian human rights advocates are raising alarms over a deeply troubling trend in the country's military: a dramatic rise in non-combat deaths among soldiers, now reportedly accounting for as much as 90% of military losses.

Repeated incidents within the Armenian armed forces continue to reinforce these concerns. In one particularly disturbing case, the health of 18-year-old Avetik Matevosyan — who suffers from cardiovascular and neurological conditions — deteriorated just one day after he was drafted into the army.

The case has drawn attention from Armenia's Human Rights Defender Anahit Manasyan, who stated that there are problems within the country's military legislation, particularly the law "On Military Service and the Status of Servicemen."

Manasyan noted that her office had submitted multiple recommendations to the Ministry of Defense aimed at amending and improving the law.

The controversy deepened in April 2024 when the Armenian government officially narrowed the list of medical conditions that exempt individuals from mandatory military service. Defense Minister Suren Papikyan defended the policy shift, saying it was aimed at reclassifying several illnesses — including certain cysts, urological and neurological disorders, mild intellectual disabilities, and nocturnal enuresis — as compatible with limited-duty service.

Previously, such diagnoses were grounds for exemption.

As trust in the system erodes, more young Armenian men are resorting to drastic measures to avoid conscription. Official records reveal that over 10,000 individuals are currently wanted by authorities for evading military service after leaving the country. One increasingly common method of avoiding the draft: renouncing Armenian citizenship.

Between 2020 and 2024, some 8,700 Armenian men gave up their citizenship.

In response, lawmakers are proposing new measures. A bill introduced in May 2025 by Hayk Sargsyan, a member of the ruling Civil Contract party, seeks to raise the maximum conscription age from 27 to 37.

It also proposes a steep 15 million dram (roughly \$40,000) fee for men who changed their citizenship before the age of 18. This will allow men older than 27 to avoid criminal prosecution for draft evasion.

Sargsyan argues the initiative will increase the number of eligible conscripts and discourage mass renunciations of Armenian citizenship.

But critics say the policy sidesteps the real issue: a broken system that continues to draft individuals who are medically unfit to serve. As the case of Avetik Matevosyan illustrates, tightening legal loopholes may do little to address the deeper ethical and human rights concerns haunting Armenia's military.



Promise Unfulfilled: Armenia's Assyrian Minority Left Behind in Language Education



Armenia's approach to minority language education reveals a gap between policy and practice – with Assyrians caught in the middle.

The village of Dimitrov is officially recognized as an Assyrian settlement. But today, Assyrians account for just 14.6% of

its 1,380 residents – the overwhelming majority, over 1,100 people, are Armenian.

At the village's sole secondary school, which serves 293 students, instruction is split between two sectors: Armenian and Russian. The Armenian sector enrolls 246 students;

the Russian sector, just 47. Yet, according to school director Kristine Harutyunyan, most students in both sectors are ethnic Armenians.

By law, Armenian citizens are permitted to study in the Russian sector only if they hold Russian citizenship or have received

five years of uninterrupted education in Russian. Assyrian students, however, are exempt from this requirement – they may choose Russian-language instruction freely. Despite this, many Assyrian families opt to place their children in the Armenian sector.

This is while the Assyrian language classes are offered only in the Russian sector. As a result, Assyrian students enrolled in the Armenian sector are left with no formal opportunity to study their native tongue.

Harutyunyan justifies the policy by arguing that globally, Assyrians predominantly use Russian in communication, not their ancestral language. “That’s why,” she says, “Dimitrov chose to emphasize Russian instruction.”

In practice, this leaves the preservation of the Assyrian language to the family home. But even there, challenges persist. The school suffers from two major obstacles in supporting the language:

a shortage of qualified instructors and a lack of up-to-date textbooks. Armenia’s Ministry of Education provides only outdated materials; newer editions are sourced irregularly through the local Assyrian community. No institution in Armenia offers higher education in Assyrian language studies, making it nearly impossible to train new teachers.

In the nearby village of Nor Artagers, where another Assyrian community resides, the situation is even more precarious. The local school offers only Armenian-language instruction. Assyrian is taught as an extracurricular subject – one hour a week, typically ending at the alphabet.

In 2002, Armenia ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, pledging to protect and promote languages such as Yezidi, Kurdish, Russian, Assyrian, and Greek.

The charter commits signatories to ensuring meaningful educational opportunities for minority languages.

But on the ground, the charter appears to exist only on paper. For Armenia’s Assyrians, meaningful access to education in their native language remains more an aspiration than a reality – one steadily slipping away with each new generation.



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Azerbaijan

Media

A Message to the World from the Mountains of Shusha: Azerbaijan's Media at 150

This year, Azerbaijan celebrated the 150th anniversary of its press with wide-ranging events across the country. One of the most significant was the III Shusha Global Media Forum, now an established tradition. The conference, held under the theme “Digital Pathways: Strengthening Information and Media Resilience in the Age of AI,” was highlighted by a meeting between President Ilham Aliyev and the forum’s participants, during which he answered numerous questions.

The forum drew nearly 140 foreign guests from 52 countries, representing over 30 news agencies, 7 international organizations, and nearly 80 media outlets.

During the Q&A session, President Aliyev outlined several conceptual directions for the future.



A Green Agenda

Azerbaijan has set its sights on becoming a “green energy” exporter and is actively working on establishing “green energy corridors” to achieve this goal.

Information Warfare

Global events like the Shusha Forum greatly enhance mutual understanding. Azerbaijani media is read and analyzed in many countries, reflecting significant development over the years.

The Recipe for Success

Responding to foreign journalists, President Aliyev credited his political and diplomatic success to one unwavering principle: always telling the truth. The Azerbaijani leader said he never lies to his people or foreign colleagues.

One of his most resonant remarks was advice to a Ukrainian journalist: “Never accept occupation.” He noted that Azerbaijan’s own experience—never reconciling with occupation—is proof that this approach is the right one. The fact that these words were spoken in Khankendi carried special significance.

Relations with Russia

Journalists were keen to hear about Azerbaijan–Russia relations. Mr. Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan remains committed to justice regarding the downed plane tragedy, criticizing Russia’s prolonged investigation as irresponsible and noting that this tragedy cannot be forgotten this way. But justice must be achieved, the Azerbaijani leader said, adding that the current state is not helpful for bilateral relations between Russia and Azerbaijan.

Relations with the United States

On ties with the United States, Aliyev praised President Donald Trump, highlighting shared fundamental values, including family values. He noted Trump's unique record as the only U.S. president who did not start new wars, emphasizing that despite focusing on global security, Trump maintains close attention on the South Caucasus and helps facilitate peace efforts between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Notably, after the Shusha Forum, Trump shared Ilham Aliyev's speech on his personal social media account — a rare gesture underscoring the high level of Azerbaijan-U.S. relations and the forum's growing global influence.

Relations with China

President Ilham Aliyev recalled the signing of the Strategic Partnership Declaration between Azerbaijan and China last year, followed by a Joint Statement on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership this year. These documents reflect strong bilateral ties. The visa regime between the two countries has been abolished and there are ambitious plans to increase bilateral trade.

Artificial Intelligence

Emphasizing the need to keep pace with global trends, Ilham Aliyev announced the development of a National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence. He acknowledged the complexity of AI's societal impact and promised that next year's Shusha Forum would provide a platform for more detailed discussions in this regard.

Earlier this year, Azerbaijan approved its 2025–2028 AI Strategy, designed to accelerate AI development, support digital growth, and boost the country's role in the global AI ecosystem. The strategy includes building high-level computing infrastructure, creating open data repositories, and deploying AI across various sectors.

Supporting academic research and introducing new AI curricula in higher education are priorities, along with expanding international collaboration. The strategy also calls for nurturing a startup ecosystem, attracting local and foreign investment, and providing favorable loans and support to AI-focused businesses.

The Great Return

Turning to the country's liberated territories, more than 50,000 citizens have resettled to date, with 18 villages restored. Over 3,382 kilometers of highways have been constructed or are under construction, including 80 kilometers of tunnels.

Two industrial parks have been established in these territories—one in Aghdam and another in Jabrayil—hosting business projects backed by local and foreign investments.

The ultimate goal of the implemented work is to return internally displaced persons to their native lands and to ensure the economic development of the region.

AZERBAIJAN'S MEDIA AT

150



Azerbaijan's Green Energy Transition: Recent Projects and Achievements



The development of the renewable energy sector has long been one of the most prioritized areas in Azerbaijan's economic policy. By doing so, the country aims to ensure a green energy transition, strengthen its energy security, and protect the environment.

At the same time, these steps will facilitate Azerbaijan's fulfillment of its commitment under the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

In recent years, the growth of the renewable energy sector has entered a new phase — both in terms of increasing domestic production capacity and advancing regional energy integration.

Key initiatives such as the declaration of liberated territories as “Green Energy Zones,” large-scale solar and wind projects, and the “Green Energy Corridor” project extending from the Caspian to Europe via the Black Sea demonstrate this transformation. The government has set a clear target: by 2030, renewable energy sources should account for at least 30% of total electricity production.

Institutional Framework

To facilitate the development of renewable energy, a robust legal framework has been established. In recent years, the government has adopted multiple official documents and strategies to support the green transition. One of the five core goals outlined in the 2021 policy document “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development” is “a clean environment and green growth.”

This was followed in 2022 by the adoption of the 2022–2026 Socio-Economic Development Strategy, which emphasizes accelerating the green energy transition, fostering innovation, and enhancing competitiveness.

The Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources in Electricity Generation, adopted in 2021, defines the legal framework for renewable energy projects, procedures for competitive

auctions and grid connection principles.

A notable legal act supporting the green transition is the Presidential Decree issued in 2021 on establishing “Green Energy Zones” in the liberated territories. This decree aims not only to ensure energy supply but also to promote ecologically sustainable recovery, economic diversification, and Azerbaijan’s emergence as a regional leader in green energy production.

Ongoing Projects

With this institutional framework in place, the implementation of various renewable energy projects is now underway.

On October 26, 2023, the Qaradagh Solar Power Plant (230 MW) was officially inaugurated. This project is the first utility-scale renewable energy project in Azerbaijan built by a foreign investor through a public-private partnership (PPP) model. Developed by Masdar, a UAE-based company, the plant marks a turning point in Azerbaijan’s renewable energy production both in terms of technical capacity and as a model of attracted funds. It is expected to produce 500 million kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, saving 110 million cubic meters of natural gas, and cutting carbon emissions by 200,000 tons per year.

In 2022, the foundation was laid for the Khizi–Absheron Wind Power Plant (240 MW), developed by ACWA Power of Saudi Arabia. It is projected to generate 1 billion kilowatt-hours annually, save 220 million cubic meters of natural gas, and reduce carbon emissions by 400,000 tons. The plant is scheduled to become operational in 2025.

The Eastern Zangezur and Karabakh economic regions — some of Azerbaijan’s most energy-rich areas — have seen the launch of several strategic projects. One of the key projects is the Shafag–Jabrayil Solar Power Plant in Jabrayil, implemented under an Executive Agreement signed on June 3, 2021, between the Ministry of Energy and BP. The plant will have a capacity of 240 MW and is expected to generate approximately 500 million kilowatt-hours of electricity annually. Developed in partnership with Masdar, the project reflects the expansion of Azerbaijan’s energy cooperation with foreign investors. The plant will save 120–150 million cubic meters of natural gas and cut 260,000–330,000 tons of carbon emissions per year.

The Shafag–Jabrayil project also serves as a critical component of the “Green Energy Zone” concept in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur.

The plant represents a key component of Azerbaijan’s structural reforms in the energy sector, as well as its policy aimed at ensuring sustainable development and environmental safety. The project is considered a major step towards transforming Azerbaijan into a regional hub for green energy in the future.

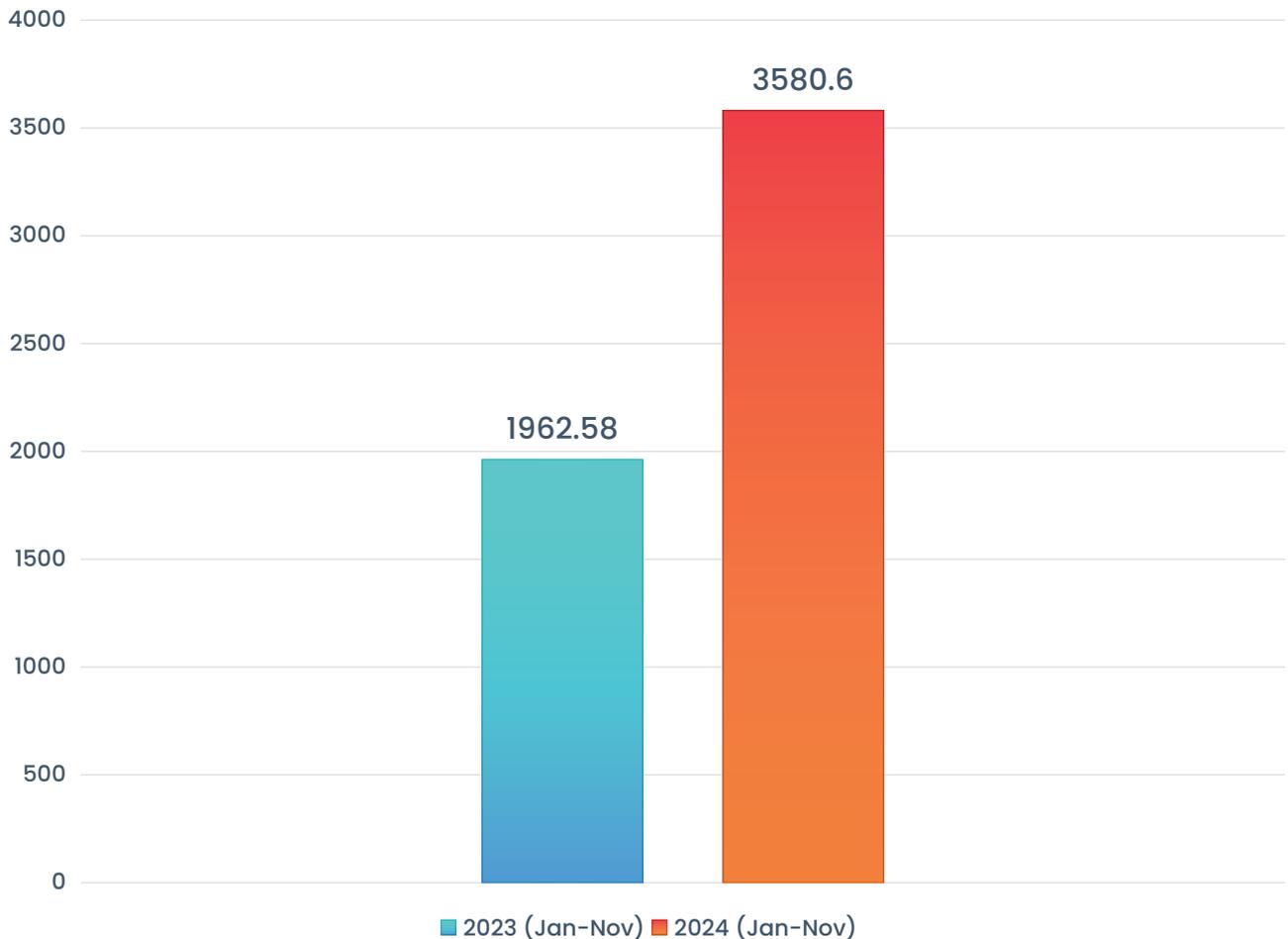
Azerbaijan’s renewable energy strategy extends beyond national borders, encompassing regional and global initiatives.

A flagship project is the Green Energy Corridor, which will enable the export of green energy generated in Azerbaijan to Europe via a 1,000+ kilometer undersea cable through the Black Sea.

As part of this initiative, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary established a joint venture – the Green Energy Corridor Power Company – in 2024. The European Commission has allocated €2.3 billion in funding for the project.

With this, Azerbaijan has entered history as a country to establish the first platform for green energy exports to Europe, thereby contributing significantly to the EU’s energy diversification strategy. It is expected that this project will help Azerbaijan reach its 2030 targets ahead of schedule.

Chart 1. Renewable energy generation



Achievements to Date

The renewable energy projects launched in recent years are already producing tangible results. Between January and November 2024, green electricity generation increased by 80% compared to the same period in the previous year (Chart 1).

By 2027, Azerbaijan plans to implement eight industrial-scale solar and wind power plants with a total capacity of 2 GW, supported by approximately \$2.8 billion in foreign and domestic investment. As a result, the share of renewable energy in total electricity generation is projected to reach 33%, exceeding the 2030 target of 30% ahead of schedule.

The wind and solar power plants to be commissioned by 2027 are expected to generate 5.3 billion kWh of electricity annually, freeing up 1.2 billion cubic meters of natural gas and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by up to 2.5 million tons.

Azerbaijan's Emerging Leadership in Renewable Energy Across the Region

Azerbaijan is rapidly establishing itself as a regional leader in renewable energy production, driven by the implementation of projects.

A key factor behind this leadership is the country's success in attracting foreign investment and adopting the modern Independent Power Producer (IPP) model. The broad portfolio of projects signed with reputable global energy companies — many of which are already underway — reflects not only the scale of Azerbaijan's energy potential but also the successful execution of long-term power purchase agreements and public-private partnership mechanisms. This demonstrates the institutional strength of Azerbaijan's energy sector and its status as a trusted partner for investors.

At the same time, the rapid growth in the country's green energy production, along with well-defined targets for the near future, further strengthens Azerbaijan's leadership role in the South Caucasus. This momentum not only enhances domestic energy security, but also opens up broader export opportunities, positioning Azerbaijan as a strategic player on the global energy map.

Moreover, the establishment of "green energy zones" and the launch of export-oriented projects — such as the energy corridor across the Black Sea to Europe — continue to reinforce Azerbaijan's leadership in the region. These initiatives provide the country with additional advantages through the adoption of advanced technologies and deeper international energy integration.

Conclusion

Azerbaijan's recent efforts in renewable energy – from policy reform to project execution – demonstrate significant progress in both institutional development and practical implementation. Strengthening the legal framework, creating Green Energy Zones, and adopting strategic roadmaps have made the country's energy transition more sustainable and resilient.

The construction of large-scale solar and wind power plants, attraction of foreign investment, and use of PPP mechanisms have transformed Azerbaijan into

a reliable destination for green energy investment. Projects like Qaradağ, Khizi–Absheron, and Shafag–Jabrayil are key examples of how diversification of the energy mix supports environmental safety and long-term economic stability.

On a regional scale, Azerbaijan's leadership is built on strong growth, international cooperation, and export-oriented strategies. In particular, the Green Energy Corridor project to Europe via the Black Sea elevates Azerbaijan to the status of a strategic global energy actor.

Ultimately, large-scale projects, institutional reforms, and international partnerships are solidifying Azerbaijan's leadership in renewable energy in the South Caucasus – and enabling the country to achieve its 2030 goals ahead of schedule.



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Baku Energy Week Marks 30 Years of Shaping the Global Energy Agenda



This year, Baku Energy Week celebrated its 30th anniversary, underscoring three decades in which the Azerbaijani capital has served as a platform for discussions on the energy sector's most pressing challenges, opportunities and solutions.

Since its inception in 1994, the forum has brought together more than 9,000 companies and over 170,000 participants from some 80 countries. When the first oil and gas exhibition opened in Baku, the landmark "Contract of the Century" had yet to be signed, gunfire in the

country had only recently ceased, and foreign investors were still hesitant about committing to Azerbaijani oil. But the ideas and insights voiced at the event gradually reshaped the region's energy landscape.

This year's gathering welcomed representatives of 267 companies from 39 nations. Major achievements often begin as concepts; Baku Energy Week serves as the soil where such "seeds of ideas" take root, fostering business partnerships. Many of the discussions this year reflected a global trend toward a "green" energy future and a balanced transition to it.

Today, the global energy sector is in the midst of complex, often contradictory developments. On one hand, European countries have pledged to triple renewable energy output by 2030, cut carbon emissions by 85 percent by 2035, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. On the other hand, hydrocarbons still account for about 80 percent of the world's energy mix, and demand remains strong, making an abrupt halt to oil and gas production unrealistic. While renewables must expand and the shift toward clean energy accelerate, traditional resources remain vital to sustaining demand and supporting economic growth.

Electricity from renewable sources can meet current needs, freeing surplus oil and gas volumes for alternative uses — including the production of "green" hydrogen, regarded as one of the fuels of the future.

By 2030, Azerbaijan aims to generate 6.5 gigawatts of renewable capacity, exceeding 35 percent of its total electricity production. This will save several billion cubic meters of natural gas. The country currently exports gas to 12 countries, is developing distribution networks in Europe, and has boosted its natural gas exports to 25 billion cubic meters, with plans to raise this by another 8 billion cubic meters by the end of the decade.

Participants at this year's Energy Week included major players from both traditional and renewable sectors — from ExxonMobil, bp, Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı, TotalEnergies and Sinopec Petroleum to the UAE's Masdar, Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power, and the U.S. firm Schlumberger.

The event also received a message from U.S. President Donald Trump, who emphasized Washington's determination to continue its partnership with Azerbaijan in promoting energy security and stability.

As Baku Energy Week enters its fourth decade, it stands as a testament to Azerbaijan's role as a bridge between traditional and renewable resources, East and West, past and future. By fostering dialogue and innovation, the forum continues to shape a balanced global energy agenda — one that respects current realities while steering decisively toward a cleaner, more sustainable tomorrow.



Local Talent, Smart Strategy: How Baku Won Minifootball Gold



Hosting international sporting events has become a tradition for Azerbaijan, and in May–June another major competition was added to the list. Baku hosted the 2025 Minifootball World Championship.

The tournament featured 32 teams across eight groups, with Türkiye, Israel, Poland, Slovenia, Uzbekistan, Chad and Mauritania making their debuts on the world stage. The championship mascot – an anthropomorphic deer named “Maralzadə” – is likely to remain long in the

memory of Azerbaijanis, not least because it proved a lucky charm: in the final, the Azerbaijani national team defeated Hungary 4–2, claiming the world title.

The team's success was not only due to home support. The players demonstrated exceptional technical skills and unwavering determination, making clear in every match that they were on the field solely to win.

A key factor in this achievement is the country's strong national minifootball league, where clubs compete in a healthy, highly competitive environment.

This system has nurtured talented athletes, allowing the formation of a powerful national squad.

Notably, Azerbaijan's national minifootball team has no foreign players — the entire roster consists of young athletes born and developed in Azerbaijan.

After the championship, President Ilham Aliyev met with the players to

personally congratulate them and then allocated financial support to the Azerbaijan Minifootball Federation from the President's Reserve Fund to help the team build on its success and aim for new victories.



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Khankandi Becomes Caucasus Stage for ECO's 2035 Strategic Plan



In July, Khankandi hosted the 17th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). As Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan noted, holding the summit in this city inspires confidence that Khankandi will become a new center of development and peace in the Caucasus.

Khankandi is a city in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, recently undergoing large-scale reconstruction and integration projects following the restoration of the country's sovereignty there.

The 17th Summit became an important chapter not only in the history of Khankandi but also in ECO's modern development, as it produced key decisions that will influence the organization's future activities.

At present, the Economic Cooperation Organization unites 10 countries: Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran. Together they cover an area of 8,208,600 square kilometers, have a population of 570 million, and a combined GDP exceeding \$10 trillion.

For reference, in 1964 Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye established an entity called the “Regional Cooperation for Development.” In 1985, its name was changed to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan joined in 1992. That date—November 28—is now celebrated as “ECO Day.” Over time, ECO has grown into one of Asia’s largest economic blocs.

The organization’s mission, as outlined in the Izmir Treaty, includes removing trade barriers, expanding intra-regional and inter-regional commerce, and strengthening economic ties. This involves lowering tariffs, eliminating non-tariff barriers, and improving transport connectivity. The ultimate goal is to create a single market and economic space similar to the European Union.

Azerbaijan has previously hosted ECO Summits in 2006 and 2012. Baku is also home to the organization’s Research Center.

The Khankandi summit marked the first time ECO’s entire institutional family — not only heads of state but also its full structures — gathered together, as described by Secretary-General Asad Majeed Khan. For the first time, an “ECO Week” was held:

Another noteworthy development was the participation of Afghanistan’s interim government in the summit after a long hiatus.

For the first time, ECO’s 2035 strategic goals were drafted with input not only from governments but also from other stakeholders, including women, youth, and the private sector. According to Secretary-General, Azerbaijan set a new benchmark for ECO summits and made an important contribution to fostering an “ECO family spirit.”

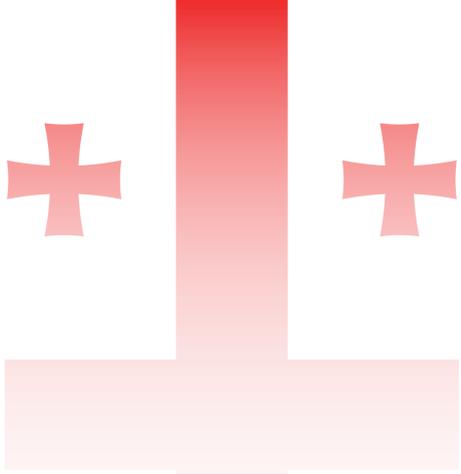
The concept paper discussed in Khankandi — “Strategic Goals of Economic Cooperation - 2035” — is particularly significant. Despite ECO’s considerable potential, its performance in meeting its objectives remains far from satisfactory.

Last year, intra-ECO trade totaled \$95 billion, accounting for just 10 percent of member states’ overall trade turnover. Facilitating trade and establishing “green corridors” for agricultural goods remain priority issues.

Tourism facilitation and increasing visitor flows among ECO countries are also of special importance. Notably, the nearby city of Shusha has been designated as ECO’s Tourism Capital for 2026.

On the sidelines of the summit, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held bilateral meetings with visiting leaders. Together with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov, he visited Khidirli, a village in the Aghdam district that has been rebuilt as part of Azerbaijan’s post-conflict revival. The newly reconstructed secondary school there — a gift from Kyrgyzstan to local students — will accommodate 528 pupils and bear the name of the Kyrgyz epic hero, Ayköl Manas.





Georgia

People

Georgia in the Rhythm of July: Sports, Culture, and Gastronomy

July was a month of vibrant events for Georgia: sports tournaments, music festivals, and gastronomic initiatives highlighted the country's tourism potential and united its regions.

Sports: Handball and Fencing

From July 12 to 20, Telavi hosted the European Women's U19 Handball Championship for the first time under the auspices of the European Handball Federation. The tournament became an important milestone in developing sports infrastructure beyond the capital and attracted attention to the region.

From July 22 to 30, Tbilisi hosted the Fencing World Championships, organized by the International Fencing Federation. Athletes from dozens of countries competed in the tournament.

Cultural Highlights

From July 25 to 27, the Art-Geni Festival took place at the Ethnographic Museum in Tbilisi, celebrating folklore and traditional arts. The program included performances by the "Sukhishvili" ensemble, concerts by Nino Katamadze, artisan workshops, and exhibitions of decorative and applied arts.



From July 23 to 31, Batumi hosted the Batumi Black Sea Music & Art Festival, organized by the “Lira” Foundation under the leadership of pianist Eliso Bolkvadze with support from UNESCO. Since its inception in 2013, the festival has combined classical music concerts, master classes, and competitions for young performers.

Earlier, from July 11 to 13, Batumi held the 18th Black Sea Jazz Festival. Performers included Ledisi, Vincen Garcia & The Next Movement, and the legendary Sister Sledge.

After the main shows, jam sessions took place at Take 5 club. Since 2007, the festival has remained one of the largest summer music events on the Black Sea coast.

Gastronomy and Tourism

On July 19–20, Georgia showcased its cuisine at a gastronomic festival in London, which attracted more than 6,000 visitors. Chefs Guram Bagdoshvili and Vakhtang Gobedjishvili prepared traditional dishes such as khinkali, lobiani, khachapuri, gebjalia, as well as signature creations.

According to Maya Omiadze, head of the National Tourism Administration, participation in such events increases the country’s visibility and stimulates tourism.

She noted that the UK is one of Georgia’s target markets as in the first two quarters, the sales of the country’s tourism products grew by 25%.

Georgia and Central Asia: Transit Ambitions, Tourism Opportunities, and Emerging Strategic Ties



The question of Georgia's role between Central Asia and Europe is gaining prominence amid major geopolitical and economic shifts. Recent high-level meetings and growing transit flows indicate rising interest, but how strong are these ties, and do they have sustainable potential?

From July 8–10, an Uzbek delegation led by Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov visited Tbilisi, meeting with Georgian leaders, including the Prime Minister and the President. Talks centered on deepening cooperation within the Middle (Trans-

Caspian) Transport

Corridor—an emerging trade route linking China and Central Asia to Europe via the South Caucasus.

Uzbekistan’s export volumes through Georgian ports have surged by 72% over the past two years, surpassing 1 million tons annually. An important moment was the June 2025 launch of a multimodal terminal in Poti—spanning 9 hectares, equipped with automated cranes and rail access for 120 wagons, and capable of handling 80,000 TEU and 120,000 tons of cargo per year. This project, backed by investments from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Türkiye, underscores the regional push to make the corridor a reliable alternative to traditional northern routes.

However, Georgia’s logistical capacity faces constraints: limited port throughput, outdated infrastructure, and the urgent need for digitalized customs systems. Despite these challenges, strong political will, growing cargo flows, and international backing position Georgia as a stable partner in regional supply chains.

Azerbaijan remains the indispensable link in this chain, as key corridors rely on Azerbaijani infrastructure, including the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars line and Caspian–Black Sea connectivity. Given the centuries–old cooperation and friendship between Azerbaijan and Georgia, Tbilisi will benefit from the implementation of the Middle Corridor project.

Tourism: A Window of Opportunity

Alongside transit, tourism represents a promising avenue of engagement. Rising incomes in Central Asia are fueling outbound travel, and Georgia’s landscapes, cuisine, and affordability offer strong appeal. While Uzbekistan is working to establish itself as a tourism hub through initiatives like a potential “Central Asian Schengen” visa, Georgia’s inclusion in broader regional tourism frameworks could further enhance people-to-people links.

Education and Economic Exchange: Still Limited

Educational cooperation remains modest, as many Central Asian students continue to prefer Russian or local institutions. Meanwhile, Georgia’s English- and Georgian-language programs are less accessible for applicants from the region. On the economic front, Central Asian outward investment remains limited, with few companies active beyond their home markets.

Looking Ahead

Future cooperation is likely to concentrate on harmonized customs systems, expanded rail capacity, and new logistics hubs. With support from regional partners and international financial institutions, these steps could solidify Georgia’s role as a stable and reliable link between Central Asia and Europe.



Georgia Takes Steps Toward Green Energy Integration Amid Growing Electricity Demand

Georgia is making its first significant move toward integrating solar power into its national grid. According to the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, five small solar power plants with a combined capacity of 10 MW will soon be connected to the country's unified energy system. This marks a notable shift for Georgia, where the energy mix has so far relied heavily on hydropower, thermal power stations, and a single wind farm.

The state-owned Georgian State Electrosystem has completed installation of new 6/10 kV switchgear at five substations in the Kakheti region, preparing them for solar input. While the country's renewable sector has long focused on hydropower, this is one of the first steps in diversifying that portfolio.

Ongoing global energy challenges have reinforced the importance of energy self-sufficiency and independence. Still, Georgia's transition to renewables remains a work in progress, driven by both environmental goals and

growing domestic energy needs.

Current construction includes wind farms totaling 125 MW with \$195 million in investment, and feasibility studies have been completed for additional wind and solar projects totaling approximately 350 MW. These are expected to gradually move into the construction phase. A notable portion of solar development—10 MW of capacity supported by \$4.75 million in local bank financing—is now nearing completion.

Electricity consumption in Georgia is rising steadily. In 2024, the country used 14.4 billion kWh, up 5.1% from the previous year, while generation slightly declined by 1.1% to 14.2 billion kWh. Projections suggest that by 2030, demand could reach 22 billion kWh—a 73% increase—which may leave the country facing an energy deficit if local generation capacity is not significantly expanded.

To address these risks, Georgian authorities are also emphasizing regional connectivity. The planned Black Sea energy cable is expected to link Georgia's power grid to European markets, enabling green energy exports and boosting integration with the EU's energy system.

In summary, while Georgia's efforts in renewable energy integration are gaining momentum, they are still in the early stages. The gradual diversification of its energy mix signals a long-term strategy to reduce dependency on imports and improve sustainability, but real energy independence will require sustained investment and accelerated implementation.



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Deer breeding center opens in Georgia to preserve endangered Caucasian red deer

A significant new step in biodiversity conservation has been taken in Georgia with the opening of a deer breeding center. Located within the Algeti National Park in eastern Georgia, the facility spans 60 hectares and is dedicated to the protection and recovery of the Caucasian red deer — a unique subspecies of the noble deer endemic to the Eurasian continent and currently facing the threat of extinction.

The Caucasian red deer population has sharply declined over recent decades, primarily due to rampant poaching. The new breeding center aims to reverse this trend by providing a controlled, secure environment where the deer can breed and adapt, eventually supporting the restoration of stable populations in the wild.

David Songulashvili, Georgia's Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, described the initiative as "a historic step" in safeguarding the country's biodiversity. He emphasized that the long-term goal of the program is to establish viable,

self-sustaining populations of the noble deer across Georgia.

The breeding center is fully enclosed and equipped with advanced monitoring technologies, including camera traps and satellite tracking collars, enabling continuous observation of the animals' behavior and health. This technology will also support research on the social dynamics and adaptation stages of the deer in a semi-natural environment.

Revas Bejashvili, head of the National Agency of Wildlife, highlighted the importance of these conditions, stating, "The specially prepared environment allows us to study deer behavior in detail and understand the phases of adaptation. This knowledge is critical for successful reintroduction of the species into the wild."

The program has already seen the release of seven deer — five females and two males — into the protected forested area of Algeti National Park. These individuals were bred in the Tbilisi Zoo, and their

number is planned to increase to 15 in the initial phase of the project.

Currently, the Caucasian red deer can be found only in a few isolated protected regions within Georgia, including Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, Lagodekhi Reserve, and the Gardabani Bio-Reserve. These areas are separated by hundreds of kilometers, underscoring the importance of establishing connected and viable populations through such conservation programs.

This pioneering effort in Georgia not only contributes to the conservation of an endangered species but also reinforces the ecological integrity of the Caucasus region, a global biodiversity hotspot.



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