

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Attila Balázs

Four-day-old zebra foal in the Nyíregyháza zoo

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARY TO MAINTAIN WORK-BASED ECONOMY

Hungary will resist falling into the trap of introducing blanket welfare measures during the novel coronavirus epidemic, the prime minister said.

The government will soon unveil the “biggest economic stimulus plan in the country’s history”, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public Kossuth Radio on Friday morning. Key elements of the stimulus package are job preservation and job creation, he added. Orbán insisted that the government would not give up its fundamental approach of nurturing a work-based economy, and he dismissed returning to a welfare-based economy, explaining that would require the country to borrow, probably from abroad, and get backed into a place “where the IMF and financial speculators of the like of George Soros are waiting for us”.

“Let’s not give up our goals, let’s not give up what we have achieved, let’s not give up Hungary’s independence, let’s not give up the work-based economy and let’s not give up the chance to live proudly either,” he said. “We have to fight this crisis without giving up our dreams,” the prime minister said.

ORBÁN ANNOUNCES BONUS FOR HEALTH-CARE WORKERS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said the government's reallocation plan for how to redeploy health-care staff when the coronavirus becomes widespread was Hungary's most important document. As part of the plan, health-care staff will receive a 500,000 forint (EUR 1,380) bonus this year.

It is compulsory for all health staff to come under central command in a health emergency, he noted. Fully 110 dormitories for 19,820 people and 58 hotels for 5,661 people, as well as 3,543 vehicles, are on hand, he added. The authorities have prepared to feed 203,770 staff, he said. "This is a military plan of command for a mass epidemic," Orbán said.

Praising health-care workers and others on the frontline of the efforts to contain the virus, Orbán said an epidemic fund disbursing the bonus, other resources and containing further measures will be announced on Wednesday. A decision on curfew restrictions introduced last week to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus epidemic is also planned to be revealed on Wednesday. The restrictions are in force until next Saturday, and a decision will be needed as to whether to extend them or not. "We will do so if we have to," he added.

Orbán called on people to "resist" celebrating Easter with loved ones. "Easter may also be the right time to consider the ways to reorganise our

lives until the vaccine for the virus is at hand," he said.

ORBÁN REACTS TO EU CRITICISM

Regarding the European Union's criticism of the government's epidemic response bill which the parliament passed on Monday, Orbán said Brussels "is preoccupied with us instead of the virus". "We cannot have anything more important to do than saving lives. That requires cooperation and unity," he said.

"They are sitting in a bubble in Brussels and telling us what to do instead of saving lives," Orbán said. What's most important, he said, was "not to rise to the provocation".

Hungary's parliament is working at full force and the state of emergency powers granted to the government and the prime minister are about the same as the powers of the French president in peacetime, Orbán said. He said "a political attack" was under way because "some people would like to rob this country and acquire its resources". "This network is headed by George Soros and his people ... in Brussels from where criticism comes," he added. Hungary, he said, has received practical help from member states of the Turkic Council and China, he said.

CONFIRMED CASES IN HUNGARY RISE TO 623, FIVE MORE DEATHS

The number of patients confirmed to have contracted the new coronavirus

in Hungary was 623 on Friday, with five more deaths, all of them elderly patients suffering from chronic diseases, the government information website for the epidemic said. So far, 26 people have died and 43 recovered from Covid-19, koronavirus.gov.hu said. Currently, a total of 10,668 people are in hospital and home quarantine and the authorities have taken 17,769 samples. The website said that Hungary was in the phase of group infections when the virus spreads in communities, through personal contacts. The number of people carrying and communicating the virus may be significantly higher than the number of confirmed cases, it added. The largest number of cases have been reported from Budapest (261) and Pest county in central Hungary (124). The smallest number has been reported from Heves county in the north (3).

ORBÁN SENDS LETTER TO EPP SECT-GEN

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has addressed a letter to Antonio Lopez-Isturiz White, secretary-general of the European People's Party (EPP). "Our world is definitely upside down. We, prime ministers and party leaders all around the world are concentrating our energy on making effective and timely decisions in order to save the lives and protect the health and security of our citizens," Orbán said in his letter. "I can hardly imagine any of us having time for fantasies about the

intentions of other countries. This seems to me a costly luxury these days," the prime minister went on to say, adding that "with all due respect, I have no time for this!" Orbán said he would be open to discussing any issue once the epidemic was over, but till then, he would use all his time to take measures aimed at protecting lives and saving the economy. "I suggest we all do the same in our respective countries," Orbán concluded his letter. The letter was shared by State Secretary Katalin Novák on Twitter.

On Thursday, 13 members of the EPP criticised Hungary's recent coronavirus law and called on the group to exclude Orbán's ruling Fidesz.

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: MASS SPREAD OF INFECTION HARD TO AVOID

The mass spread of novel coronavirus infections will be hard to avoid but currently the epidemic is still only spreading in groups, Cecília Müller, the chief medical officer, said. It remains important to avoid any chance for the virus to spread further, which is why people should stay at home and vulnerable groups must be especially protected, she told an online press conference. The aim of current efforts is still to flatten the curve of the epidemic, she said, adding that whereas doing so would prolong it, the health-care system would be less burdened as a result.

OPERATIVE BOARD: PROTECTIVE GEAR TO BE DELIVERED TO 31 HOSPITALS

Protective gear will be delivered to 31 hospitals and to the police on Friday, a member of the operative board responsible for the response to the novel coronavirus outbreak has said. Róbert Kiss of the operative board's emergency centre said consignments of equipment are expected to land at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc international airport on Friday and Saturday. Regarding the organisation of hospitals, Kiss said the designated hospitals were prepared to handle mass infections.

The command plans have been updated to order all health-care workers to work if necessary, he said. Police continue to monitor compliance with the restrictions and home quarantine measures, Kiss said. So far, they have issued some 600 warnings, fines or filed complaints against people flouting home quarantine. Experience shows that the number of people violating the regulations tends to grow as the quarantine situation drags on, Kiss said.

The police have also taken action in connection with breaches of the new epidemic response law, which made spreading fake news regarding the epidemic punishable by law. They filed complaints regarding 36 cases of spreading fake news, 22 of endangering the public, 33 of fraud and 10 cases of violating epidemic regulations.

HUNGARY RETAIL SALES UP 10.9% IN FEB YR/YR

Retail sales in Hungary increased by an annual 10.9% in February, up from a 7.6% increase in January, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Retail sales rose by 11.3% when adjusted for calendar year effects. Adjusted food sales were up by 10.7%, non-food sales by 11.4% and vehicle fuel sales increased by 1.8%. In the non-food segment, adjusted retail sales of non-specialised stores climbed by 24%, sales at chemists were up by 16%, and sales of clothing retailers rose by 7.0%. Online and mail order sales jumped by 33% and accounted for around 6.7% of total retail sales.

Commenting on the data, the innovation and technology ministry said at least half of the increase in retail sales was due to bulk buying and stockpiling triggered by the novel coronavirus outbreak. State Secretary Péter Cseresnyés noted that webshops' share of the market has expanded to 7%. This is expected to grow further as the opening times of shops are curtailed, he said. The effects of the epidemic are expected to be more pronounced in March, when sales may fall due to the baseline of goods stockpiled earlier. Stores selling non-essential goods may see falling numbers due to shorter opening hours, he said. Cseresnyés noted that retail supplies are secure in Hungary, and all everyday goods are constantly available. There is no need for stockpiling, he said.

**ORBÁN: HELMUT KOHL
SEEN AS SPIRITUAL
MENTOR OF GERMAN-
HUNGARIAN FRIENDSHIP**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has written a letter to Maike Kohl-Richter, widow of “the Germans’ great chancellor” Helmut Kohl, who was born 90 years ago and died three years ago, Orbán’s press chief said. Orbán said in his letter that he considered Kohl as a master at building European unity and a Europe of nation states, as well as making Christian Democratic ideas the basis of government. Orbán added that Kohl remained the mentor-in-spirit of German-Hungarian friendship, and his memory was a source of strength when facing the challenges of the present.

**JOBBIK: CAR
MANUFACTURERS SHOULD
MAKE VENTILATORS**

The opposition Jobbik party has called on the government to start talks with car manufacturers on producing ventilators as part of efforts to combat the novel coronavirus epidemic. Tibor Nunkovics, the party’s deputy group leader said the change would spare the

car plants from shutting down entirely. Their product would be “guaranteed to be bought by the Hungarian state”, and the transition would preserve jobs and serve the health-care system simultaneously, Nunkovics said. He noted that the measure had already been employed abroad, adding that it would mitigate the effects of the epidemic and the subsequent crisis.

**VOJVODINA HUNGARIANS
LEADER HITS BACK AT EPP
CHIEF’S WARNING**

István Pásztor, head of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (VMSZ), has hit back at comments by European People’s Party (EPP) leader Donald Tusk on the dangers of declaring a permanent state of emergency in response to the novel coronavirus epidemic, saying that his remarks “divert energy” from efforts to save lives. Tusk on Wednesday said that governments using the coronavirus crisis to declare a permanent state of emergency would be “politically dangerous and morally unacceptable”. Pásztor, whose party is a member of the EPP, said any “political attack against responsible governments working to curb the epidemic weakens

our chances of overcoming the virus”. He called on Tusk to support the governments and politicians working to save lives during the epidemic.

**SZIJJÁRTÓ: WIZZ AIR
AIRCRAFT DELIVERING
MILLIONS OF MASKS
TO BUDAPEST**

Six Wizz Air aircraft have landed in Beijing and will deliver more than four million face masks and hundreds of thousands of items of protective clothing to Budapest on Saturday, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Facebook. The low-cost airline is playing “a key role” in supplying protective equipment to Hungary as well as in repatriating Hungarians stranded abroad, Szijjártó noted.

The minister also met leaders of Chinese technology company Huawei. He called Huawei “one of the most important companies in terms of the digital transformation of the world economy”. The company is heavily investing in Hungary and employs over 2,000 people, he added. Huawei is also donating 50,000 face masks to Hungary, among other items, and these are scheduled to arrive in Budapest on Friday morning, he said.