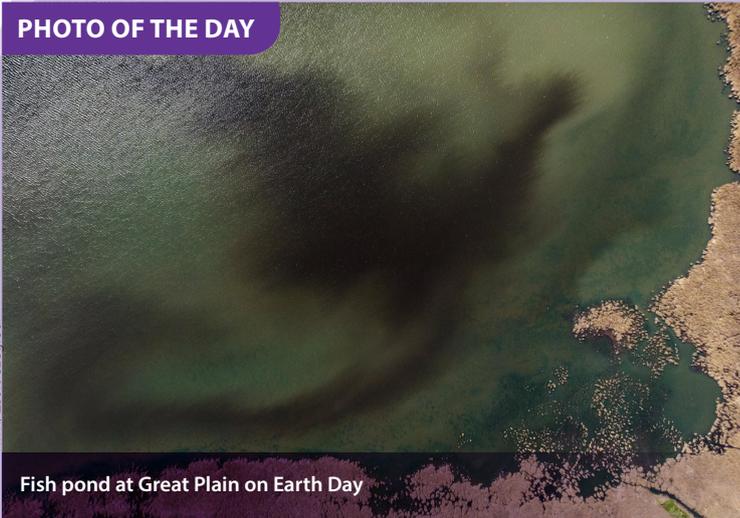


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

Fish pond at Great Plain on Earth Day

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU summit

Government info

Coronavirus updates

Hungary, Serbia foreign ministers meet at border

TOP STORY

MINISTRY SEEKS DONORS AMONG RECOVERED PATIENTS FOR SERUM

The ministry of innovation and technology is seeking blood plasma donors among people who have recovered from the novel coronavirus epidemic for a therapy, currently in an experimental phase, which aims to alleviate patients' symptoms.

A team of researchers working on the project is ready to administer the serum this week, the ministry said. Medical tests and scientific research have shown that the Cytokine storm, an overreaction of the immune system, could be hindered by injecting healthy serum, the statement said. If the serum originates from a donor who has recovered from the infection, the high level of antibodies in their blood could make the treatment more effective, it added.

The project supported by the ministry is managed by deputy rector for research at the University of Physical Education, Zsombor Lacza, who is also the CEO of the company OrthoSera, specialised in developing serum-based technologies for orthopaedic, dental or sports surgery. Support from the ministry has enabled the company to devote its capacities to serum therapy, the statement said.

The most important element of the new therapy is to find people who have recovered from the disease and built up immunity against the virus.

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.

All rights reserved. Enquiries should be made to the English Help Desk at +361 441 9340
For MTI's real time coverage please visit <http://english.mti.hu>, <http://econews.hu>



**12 NEW FATALITIES,
NUMBER OF REGISTERED
CASES RISES TO 2,168**

Another 12 elderly patients suffering from chronic diseases have died in Hungary and the number of registered novel coronavirus infections has risen by 70 to 2,168, koronavirus.gov.hu said. So far, there have been 225 fatalities and 295 people have left hospital after recovery. There are 825 people in hospital, 63 of whom are treated on ventilators. Fully 11,049 people are in home quarantine. So far, 52,702 coronavirus tests have been conducted at accredited laboratories. Budapest has the highest number of infections (1,113), followed by Pest County (305) and Fejér county (181).

**ORBÁN HIGHLIGHTS
IMPORTANCE OF V4 UNITY**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with European Council President Charles Michel in preparation for the forthcoming EU summit, his press chief said.

Subsequently, Orbán held another videoconference with his Visegrad Four counterparts, both talks focusing on challenges facing Europe amid the coronavirus pandemic, as well as its economic ramification.

At his talks, Orbán stressed the importance of united action by the Visegrad countries.

**JUSTICE MINISTER
ATTENDS GAC MEETING
ON PANDEMIC RESPONSE**

Hungarian Justice Minister Judit Varga attended a videoconference of the European Council’s General Affairs Council (GAC), which reviewed national and EU responses to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Vera Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission, said the body was working on a report concerning each member state’s measures introduced against the epidemic, Varga told MTI after the meeting. They have so far found “no reason to worry” about Hungary, Varga said, noting that the report is yet to be published.

Hungary wants the debate to be based on facts and legal arguments, she said, noting that the country has sent its own assessment of the member states’ actions to the commission. Hungary’s report contains a comparison of all member states’ actions and their constitutional background, she said.

Factual debate is especially important when it comes to arguments about the rule of law, Varga said, rejecting what she called “unfounded accusations from certain members” even before the report was published. Common values should not be used to foment division among member states, she said.

Hungary believes in EU solidarity, both within and outside the bloc’s borders, Varga said, adding that

Hungary has sent protective gear to Western Balkan countries, which are hoping to become EU members. “Hungary believes in solidarity, true action, aid and rejects double standards, lecturing and politically motivated mud-slinging.”

Varga noted that the GAC meeting will be followed by an EU summit on Thursday. It is still unclear how EU institutions are planning to handle the long-term economic effects of the crisis, she said.

Hungary accepts that the EU needs “desperate measures in desperate times,” but stands by maintaining fundamental EU values like solidarity, equal treatment and the rejection of double standards, Varga said.

The situation warrants a better European response rather than “more Europe”, she said.

Varga noted that the EU’s budget for the 2021-2027 financial cycle was being discussed before the pandemic, but “talks reached a virtual impasse in February”. The pandemic has “opened up a new dimension” in that regard too, Varga said. However, a seven-year financial plan should be discussed based on its long-established principles, she said. Cohesion policy has always been an important part of that foundation, she said.

Hungary is ready to support any solution to the present crisis while taking into consideration the interests of all member states, she said. But cohesion policy must not be compromised, she added.



KOVÁCS TO BBC: HUNGARY BEING 'LYNCHED'

Hungary is being subjected to "political lynching" because its government is "walking its own way, trying to select the most effective way of handling the coronavirus epidemic", State Secretary Zoltán Kovács said in an interview to the BBC.

In his interview, Kovács argued that Hungary's recent coronavirus law was necessary to facilitate "rapid and firm measures" to fight "an unknown enemy". Answering a question, he said that parliament could withdraw the government's special authorisations any time when the deputies deem the crisis to be over. He also noted that the governments of four other European countries have been granted similar authorisations without a time limit.

Kovács said that "protecting the health, security and interests of the whole Hungarian population" was a top priority for the government. He insisted that the Hungarian government had managed to avoid "problems that the UK, Italy or Spain could not" because their governments "failed to take firm action when it was necessary".

SZIJJÁRTÓ: V4 SUPPORTS LIBYA'S ANTI-PANDEMIC EFFORTS

The Visegrad Group will provide 35 million euros to Libya, part of

which will be directed to help that country's efforts to contain the coronavirus epidemic, the foreign minister said after a video conference of the EU's foreign affairs council.

The V4 Hungary forms with the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia earlier agreed to allocate the aid to help Libya's border protection operations, Péter Szijjártó told an online press conference.

At today's meeting, however, they agreed on a separate allocation to help prevent the pandemic from triggering a new wave of illegal migration, he said, adding that in instable regions hundreds of thousands of people are considering to head for Europe.

The participants agreed, he said, that Europe could not be safe until the situation caused by the virus remains serious in the regions surrounding the European Union. This is why the situation in Africa and the western Balkans was also addressed, he said.

Hungary has so far provided support to six countries in the western Balkans, including consignments of face masks and protective clothing to boost their defence capabilities against a new wave of illegal migration, Szijjártó said. He noted that Hungary has so far received more than 80 million face masks from China. "Hungary took appropriate anti-coronavirus measures early enough to become one of the most successful countries

in Europe to slow down the spread of the virus," he said.

Szijjártó said Ukraine was another issue on the council's agenda. He reiterated

Hungary's position that Ukraine should adhere to basic EU values that include the protection of minorities and their rights if it seeks to intensify cooperation with the EU. Talks with the Ukrainian partners were encouraging, Szijjártó said, adding hope that "action would follow words". He noted Hungary's support for the refurbishment of a health-care institution in eastern Ukraine and the donation of 100,000 face masks and other protective gear to the western Transcarpathia region.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: OVER 3 MILLION MASKS, 164 VENTILATORS DELIVERED TO HUNGARY

A plane and two lorries delivered over 3 million face masks, 2 million gloves and 164 ventilators to Hungary, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told MTI. All shipments arrived from China, some via airports in neighbouring countries, Szijjártó noted. The equipment will be distributed to hospitals, clinics and other health-care institutions as part of efforts to prepare Hungary for long-term measures to handle the novel coronavirus epidemic, Szijjártó said. Deliveries will continue to flow in every day this week, he added.

FINANCE MINISTER: HUNGARY TO RECEIVE EU TRANSFERS OF HUF 100 BN IN NEXT FEW WEEKS

Hungary expects the European Union to transfer 100 billion forints (EUR 285m) in funding for development projects in the next few weeks, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. The projects have been already paid for from the Hungarian budget so the amount to be received from the EU will boost budget revenues, he said in a video message on Facebook. This year, EU resources for Hungary could total 1,300 billion forints, he added. Varga said the EU had not sent any money specifically for Hungarian measures in connection with the novel coronavirus epidemic, but the country had been implementing "significant operative developments" for which 300 billion forints of EU funding has been received so far, and an additional 100 billion forints is expected in the upcoming period, he said. "The goal continues to be to secure the necessary resources for protective measures against the epidemic, to relaunch the economy and to carry out developments," he said. "The financial operative group is working on these," he added.

HUNGARIAN ORGS IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES THANK GOVT FOR AID

Hungarian organisations in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and Serbia have thanked the Hungarian government

for its help in connection with the novel coronavirus epidemic. In an interview to public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, Hunor Kelemen, the leader of Romania's party for ethnic Hungarians (RMDSZ), condemned remarks by the opposition Párbeszéd party's co-leader Tímea Szabó, who on Monday slammed the government for sending protective gear to Hungarian communities in Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia and North Macedonia. Szabó insisted that "doctors meeting the prime minister on his victory laps around hospitals lack masks half of the time, or the masks they do have are not up to standard." Kelemen said that condemning the Hungarian government for helping others was "deplorable".

László Brenzovics, head of the Hungarian Cultural Federation in Transcarpathia (KMKSZ), thanked Hungary for helping to resolve "serious shortages in equipment for health-care staff", adding that Szabó's remarks ran afoul of basic European values. István Pásztor, head of the Hungarian association in Novi Sad, Serbia, said the remarks were "unsurprising". "We know the tune and those who play it," he said, adding, however, that "hate-mongering of this sort does not have a ready audience in Hungary".

ARMY STARTS DISINFECTING HUNDREDS OF ELDERLY CARE HOMES

Hungarian army units have started disinfecting several hundred elderly

care homes across the country in a bid to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus, the defence ministry said.

On April 12, the chief medical officer ordered the disinfection of an elderly care home in Budapest's Pesti Road after a surge of infections. The operation was carried out by the Hungarian army's special chemical-warfare units over five days, the ministry said in a statement. The disinfection of homes across the country has started on the basis of an assessment of public health professionals ordered by the operative board coordinating the epidemic response. It is being carried out by a special chemical defence unit together with nearly 700 contract and reserve soldiers trained for the task, the ministry said.

OFFICIAL: GOVT EFFORTS OF CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION UNINTERRUPTED

Despite a state of emergency in light of the coronavirus epidemic, the government continues working to implement goals in its climate and environment protection action plan, a state secretary of the innovation and technology ministry said, marking Earth Day.

Anita Boros said that Hungary, where Earth Day is marked for the 30th time this year, is an active participant in efforts to meet the challenges of a changing climate, with "a number of

initiatives focusing people's attention to opportunities for conscientious and environment friendly ways of life and for joint action to preserve the assets of nature".

Priorities in the government's action plan, adopted in February, include eliminating illegal waste dumps and banning disposable plastics in Hungary, Boros said.

OPPOSITION PARTIES MARK EARTH DAY

Capital-driven globalisation will push the Earth into an abyss, the co-leader of opposition LMP said, marking Earth Day. "We can't continue from where we left off before the pandemic," Erzsébet Schmuck said. LMP proposes that parliament should put on its agenda the main issues for establishing a crisis-resistant economy, Schmuck told an online press conference. She said the government's measures demonstrated that it still hoped to quickly restore an "extremely vulnerable" economy dependent on multinationals, the car industry and external markets. LMP is calling for a paradigm shift to develop an economic structure that is resistant to crisis and includes "less globalisation and much more local economy", which can produce the goods needed for everyday use even during times of crisis. "It is a matter of political will whether we continue rushing towards the abyss or slow down and choose the green way," she said.

Opposition Jobbik said humans must stop wasting resources and

travelling by air so frequently, at an online press conference held to mark Earth Day. A green expert of the conservative party highlighted connection between the coronavirus pandemic, human life-styles, consumption and climate change.

"We must change our life-style in order to slow down global warming and discontinue to exploit our planet," Tibor Nunkovics said, adding that the coronavirus "was not the last pandemic for humankind to survive".

GOVT ISSUES TAX RELIEF DECREE FOR STATE OF EMERGENCY

Hungary's government has issued a decree on tax relief which will leave over 200 billion forints (EUR 564.7m) with businesses and households, the finance ministry said. The decree was issued under a state of emergency declared to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. The decree lowers the payroll tax rate by two percentage points to 15.5% from July, saving companies 160 billion forints in the second half of the year, the finance ministry said in a statement. The reduction is part of an agreement reached late in 2016 between the government, employers and unions pairing minimum wage rises with payroll tax cuts.

The rate of the Small Business Tax (KIVA) is being reduced from 12% to 11% from next year, a measure expected to save some 51,000 businesses a combined 10 billion

forints, the ministry said. Spring deadlines for filing annual reports as well as tax returns for corporate tax, KIVA and Local Business Tax (HIPA) have been pushed back to September 30 for some 600,000 companies. Listed companies, banks, insurers and investment companies will still be required to file annual reports by the spring deadline but will not have to file tax returns, or pay taxes, until Sept. 30. The decree allows companies whose businesses have been negatively affected by the pandemic to apply for tax deferrals or tax holidays up to 5 million forints.

In a bid to support the hard-hit tourism industry, the decree exempted commercial accommodations from tourism tax until the end of 2020 while reducing the tax rate employers pay on benefit-in-kind SZÉP voucher card top-ups from 32.5% to 15%. Thresholds on top-ups of the card, which may be used to pay for catering, commercial accommodations and recreation, have also been raised. The decree ensures that employees who are on unpaid leave maintain their access to health-care services by requiring their employers to pay a monthly 7,710 forints health-care contribution.

HUNGARIAN-DEVELOPED VENTILATOR BEING REGISTERED FOR PATENT

A portable ventilator specifically for treating breathing problems caused by novel coronavirus has been developed in Hungary. It is in the process of being

registered for a patent by its lead developer Femtonics Kft.

The device is simple to operate and also filters outgoing air in order to protect health workers, Balázs Rózsa, a physicist and doctor, told public broadcaster M1.

After observing the situation in Italy, the developers set out to make a device that can be used in emergency situations and in locations where conventional ventilators are not available in sufficient numbers, he added.

Imre Székely, an engineer who conceived the project, said that planning was carried out with the involvement of the ICU specialists of Semmelweis University medical school in Budapest, which helped speed up its development. The University of Sciences in Pécs also aided the project in addition to a team of engineers. Businesspeople are in the process of organising its manufacture. Special attention was paid to ensure that doctors less experienced in ventilation should also be able to operate it safely and easily, Rózsa said, adding

that the price of the ventilator will be much lower than most similar devices currently available in Hungary.

OFFICIAL: SAMSUNG PLANT IN GÖD TO CREATE 2,700 JOBS

A Samsung plant in the town of Göd, near Budapest, is creating 2,700 jobs, increasing headcount from 1,600 to 4,300, state secretary Bence Tuzson said. The plant will switch to making batteries for electric cars. In line with a government decree which has designated the locality as Hungary's first special economic zone, tax revenues from local businesses will be primarily spent on the local region, Tuzson told public Kossuth Rádió. Hopefully, more special economic zones will be established in the foreseeable future, he added.

Because thousands of people are losing their jobs in Hungary due to the epidemic, the government is strengthening localities where new jobs are being created, he said, noting the government's economic protection

plan in which 18-20% of GDP is being reallocated. The Samsung plant development is costing 400-500 billion forints (EUR 1.14-1.43bn), making it one of the largest developments in Hungary, he said. The town is currently contending with "political chaos" as the opposition mayor had filed reports against two of his deputies accusing them of corruption and the deputies have accused him of the same. Tuzson said individual political interests should not override the importance of job creation, adding that such a situation could threaten the livelihoods of 4,600 people.

SUZUKI PLANT IN HUNGARY TO RESUME PRODUCTION

Suzuki will reopen its car plant in Esztergom, northern Hungary, on April 29, the company said. The plant was closed on March 23 as a measure to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus epidemic. It will reopen with a single shift, and production has been reorganised to enable social distancing, the company said.

