

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/György Varga

Frosty flower at dawn in western Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Stats office releases Feb construction data

TOP STORY

EXPELLED IRANIANS TO LEAVE ON THURSDAY

Eleven Iranian citizens who have received deportation orders because they broke rules related to novel coronavirus will leave Hungary on Thursday, an official said.

Róbert Kiss, a spokesman of the operative board that coordinates Hungary's response to the novel coronavirus epidemic, said eight of them will leave voluntarily while three will be accompanied by law enforcement officials. A further three will leave the country at a later time. He noted that the Iranians in question had breached epidemiological quarantine regulations in hospital.

Meanwhile, Kiss also noted that on Tuesday police took action against a Hungarian citizen at Liszt Ferenc International Airport. The person had been placed under official quarantine at home but tried to leave the country, and the individual has been ordered back into home quarantine.

Across the country, the authorities have so far ordered 13,360 people into home quarantine, and checked on those people 206,458 times. On Tuesday, the police issued warnings in connection with 231 violators of curfew rules in Budapest, and fined 75 and launched proceedings against 79 others. Altogether 219 criminal complaints have been filed, Kiss said.

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CORONAVIRUS - 12 NEW FATALITIES, NUMBER OF REGISTERED CASES RISES TO 1,579

Another 12 patients have died in Hungary and the number of registered novel coronavirus infections has risen by 67 to 1,579 in a single day, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday morning. So far, there have been 134 fatalities and 192 people have left hospital after recovery. There are 13,360 people in hospital or home quarantine, and 37,326 coronavirus tests have been conducted at accredited laboratories. The epidemic is now at the stage of being spread through communities, and the virus could be present anywhere and infect anyone, the website said, warning that the actual number of people carrying the virus is much higher than the number of registered carriers. The elderly, students and people returning from abroad must stay at home, it said. Everyone must observe the curfew restrictions which the government has extended indefinitely, it added. Budapest has the highest number of infections (770), followed by Pest County (234) and Fejér county (114).

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TAKES DELIVERY OF 10.7 M MASKS IN 24 HOURS

Hungary has taken delivery of 10.7 million masks in the past 24 hours,

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. Doctors and nurses need a sufficient quantity and quality of special protective equipment, Szijjártó noted. Over an "air bridge" between China and Hungary, the country has received several tens of millions of items of special protective gear, he added. As well as the delivery of masks on three aircraft over the past day, Hungary has also received 900 litres of disinfectant and 24,600 protective gowns for doctors and nurses, he said. Over the next few days, five more air deliveries from China are expected on Thursday, he said, adding that these aircraft are already waiting to be loaded on the tarmac of Chinese airports.

Meanwhile, eight crossings are currently open for commuters on the Hungary-Romania border, Szijjártó said. Both the Hungarian and Romanian governments have imposed restrictions on passenger traffic in an effort to slow down the spread of the novel coronavirus epidemic, Szijjártó said on Facebook. But these restrictions have complicated life for people who work or have land on the either side of the border, he added. An earlier agreement with the Romanian government to keep three border crossings open for such people has been expanded to eight crossings, based on positive experiences so far, he said. Since Easter, the border crossings at Csengersima, Vállaj, Létavértes, Ártánd, Méhkerék, Gyula, Nagylak and Kiszombor have been open to commuters, he added.

HEALTH AUTHORITIES BEGIN INSPECTING ELDERLY CARE HOMES

Hungary's health authorities have started inspecting the country's 1,579 elderly care homes, concentrating on larger facilities where there is a higher risk of transmission of the new coronavirus, the chief medical officer told an online press briefing. Cecília Müller said that an investigation was still under way at a home on Pesti Road, in Budapest's eastern suburbs, in which 10 seniors recently died after having tested positive for Covid-19. Overall, 200 elderly residents have tested positive. The inspectors will check if the homes have implemented coronavirus-related measures, if they have a doctor, staff and members have been informed, if they have sufficient personnel and supplies, and if the relevant protocols are in place, she said. She noted that the infection has been reported from several such institutions both in Budapest and the provinces.

Müller warned that the country must prepare for a massive increase in case numbers, adding that this is why hospital capacities are being expanded. She said Covid-19 patients that require hospitalisation should have "beds, personnel and ventilators" to avoid "patients lying on hospital corridors as in some EU countries". Müller insisted that "not all patients are sent home from hospital", adding that patients are released based on a decision by their doctors as well as on

the basis of health protocols. "Nobody can be sent home with the prospect of damage to their health". At present, only those patients are being admitted to hospital "whose symptoms are so serious that they cannot stay at home", Müller said. Otherwise, life-saving operations and urgent procedures will not be cancelled, she added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EUR 50 M HUNGARY-KYRGYZSTAN INVESTMENT FUND SLATED

A 50 million euro Hungary-Kyrgyzstan fund will be set up to aid investments by Hungarian companies in central Asia, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. He said on Facebook that he had held talks with Kyrgyz counterpart Chingiz Aidarbekov by phone. Cooperation between the two countries is increasingly close as a result of the work they share in the Turkic Council, he added. Aidarbekov was scheduled to visit Budapest in late April but the visit has been postponed to the second half of the year, Szijjártó said. He added that they had agreed to finalise four documents by the time of the meeting. European Union approval has been received for signing an investment protection agreement, and three rounds of talks have been completed on a deal to avoid double taxation, he said. There are not outstanding issues concerning a statement to be made on the strategic partnership and it has been agreed that a 50 million euro Hungary-

Kyrgyzstan investment fund will be set up to aid investments by Hungarian companies in central Asia, Szijjártó said.

Kyrgyzstan is also battling with the novel coronavirus epidemic, and it has been agreed that the health ministries of the two countries will maintain direct contacts to share experiences, he said.

FIDESZ LAUNCHES ENGLISH-LANGUAGE WEBSITE

Fidesz has launched an English-language website, www.fidesz.hu/int, with a view to providing credible information about its decision-making, the ruling party's deputy leader, Katalin Novák, told MTI. The website seeks to act as a corrective to "the mass production of fake news", she said. Fidesz, she added, is one of Europe's and the European People's Party's most successful parties. Since 2010, Fidesz has worked to strengthen the Hungarian people and families to increase the success of the country from year to year, Novák said. The party's work attracts great interest internationally but its decision-making comes under dispute due to the media spreading "one-sided, fake news" about Fidesz-related matters, she added. To counteract this, Fidesz is sending out a monthly newsletter covering current Hungarian political affairs and news about Fidesz. The website also provides regular news concerning events and affairs that arouse great international interest, she

said. Governments around the world, she added, are battling the novel coronavirus epidemic, and "now is not the time" for party political fights.

JOBBIK: LIMITLESS POWER COMES WITH FULL RESPONSIBILITY

Alongside limitless power comes unlimited responsibility, György Szilágyi, the deputy leader of the opposition Jobbik party, said in an online press conference. Referring to recent legislation that awards the government the power to rule by decree, he said Viktor Orbán and his government bore full responsibility for whatever happened in the country. He said the government was responsible for having to fight the epidemic with a health-care service whose "immune system is failing". And it was responsible for helping Hungarians by guaranteeing their livelihood during and after the epidemic, he added.

Szilágyi said the prime minister "should surely be aware of the deplorable state of Hungarian health care and hospitals", referring to obsolete equipment, a labour shortage, and 30,000 deaths each year due to inadequate care. Saving such people outranks the priority of building stadiums, he added.

Szilágyi insisted that it was "common knowledge" that Hungary's health-care system lacked adequate protective equipment and that many ordinary Hungarians were unable to buy face

masks because there were not enough to go round.

GOVT TO LAUNCH NEW EXPORT SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT PROMOTION SCHEME

Hungary's government will introduce a new export support and investment promotion programme, the foreign affairs and trade minister said after a cabinet meeting. The scheme will see Hungary's Eximbank launch three new products for businesses, Péter Sziijártó told MTI.

Preferential loans will be available to companies for investments. The bank will also offer working capital loans, Sziijártó said, adding that the interest rate on the loan will be 0.1% for small businesses that apply for it within a year. In addition, Eximbank will launch a guarantee and insurance scheme that will enable businesses to maintain their commercial bank loans and shield them from the negative effects of late payments in export markets.

Also, the European Union has allowed governments to provide up to 800,000 euros in liquidity to

businesses hit by the coronavirus crisis, the minister said. The government has therefore approved a scheme to support the investments of exporting companies operating in Hungary with grants worth up to 800,000 euros, he said, adding that the grant may cover up to 50% of the total investment value.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 4.1% YY IN FEB

Industrial output grew by an annual 4.1% in February, according to a second reading of data the Central Statistical Office (KSH) released on Wednesday. Output of Hungary's automotive sector grew by an annual 5% in the same month, slowing from 10.6% in January. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment sector went up by 14.6% year on year in February. Food, drink and tobacco output rose by 10.6%.

ARTS ACADEMY HEAD FEKETE DIES AGED 87

György Fekete, the former head of the Hungarian Arts Academy

(MMA), died on Wednesday, at the age of 87, the academy said. Fekete, an interior designer and artist, entered politics in Hungary's first post-transition government of József Antall (1990-1993) and set up the National Cultural Fund as the cultural ministry's deputy state secretary. He established the Hungarian Arts Academy, regarded as "Hungary's most significant cultural institution", under Viktor Orbán's government in 2011. Fekete served as the head of MMA between 2011 and 2017 and as its honorary president since then. He received Hungary's highest state award, the Kossuth Prize, in 2012.

"György Fekete, the former President of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, has left us. May God rest his soul in peace!" Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on his Facebook page. Presenting to Fekete the Grand Cross Order of Merit of Hungary in October 2017, Orbán praised him for his work dedicated to art and cultural policy with which he "has worked to uphold the spirit of Hungarian culture".