

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamas Soki

Sample tested for coronavirus in Pécs, S Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parliament meets

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

JUSTICE MINISTER SLAMS EP 'DOUBLE STANDARDS'

Justice Minister Judit Varga slammed what she called “double standards” in the European Parliament against Hungary’s law which enhances government powers to tackle the novel coronavirus epidemic after the body adopted a resolution criticising the law.

“Rather than attacking Hungary’s constitutionality ... and urging the European Commission to launch another Article 7 procedure, the European Parliament should be focusing on tackling the epidemic,” Varga told MTI.

She called the resolution’s “allegations” questioning the state of fundamental rights in Hungary “baseless”, saying that the epidemic response law met all criteria concerning the rule of law. She said the coronavirus law would only remain in effect until the end of the state of emergency, adding that under the law, the government could only pass decrees that concern the fight against the virus. “Moreover, parliament can withdraw the authority granted to the government at any time,” the minister said, arguing that the EP resolution was therefore incorrect in saying that Hungary had declared a state of emergency indefinitely. “And all this is coming from the EP, whose operations have recently resembled chaos more than anything,” the minister said. “It’s sad that certain political forces have the time during a pandemic to continue their smear campaigns against Hungary.”

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EC VICE-PRESIDENT: HUNGARIAN MEASURES IN LINE WITH EU REGULATIONS

Hungary's laws passed in connection with the novel coronavirus epidemic have not "so far" violated European Union regulations, European Commission Vice-President Vera Jourová told Czech public television. Answering a question, Jourová said she had met Hungarian Justice Minister Judit Varga and discussed the Hungarian measures in detail with her. "I am not worried yet," Jourová said. The EC is reviewing whether member states' regulations passed as part of the fight against the epidemic harm the rule of law, she said. "We will monitor how [Hungary's] recently accepted laws are implemented."

Alexander Vondra, an MEP of the opposition Civic Democrats (ODS) party, said the "attacks" against Hungary had been launched "without a knowledge of Hungarian decisions and laws". Jourová and Vondra agreed on the need to monitor the implementation of member states' epidemic laws, and to ensure that those measures will be scrapped after the epidemic.

17 NEW CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, NUMBER OF REGISTERED CASES RISES TO 1,916

Another 17 patients, mostly elderly people suffering from chronic diseases, have died in Hungary and the number of registered novel coronavirus infections

has risen by 82 to 1,916, coronavirus.gov.hu said on Sunday morning. So far, there have been 189 fatalities and 250 people have left hospital after recovery. There are 784 patients in hospital and nearly 12,000 in home quarantine, 61 are treated on ventilators. So far, 46,353 coronavirus tests have been conducted at accredited laboratories. Budapest has the highest number of infections (971), followed by Pest County (278) and Fejér county (146).

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: EPIDEMIC IN HUNGARY YET TO PEAK

The Covid-19 epidemic's figures are still increasing in Hungary, Cecília Müller, the chief medical officer, has said, but noted that 80% of those infected will have "very mild symptoms only". "There is no reason for those contracting the virus to despair," she said. A spokesman for the operative board coordinating national efforts against the epidemic said that people tended to violate curfew rules more at weekends than on weekdays. Tibor Lakatos said that the police had fined 496 violators and initiated legal proceedings in 425 cases during the past 24 hours. "People go out more easily, breaking the rules, at weekends," he said.

ORBÁN VIEWS HUNGARIAN VENTILATOR PROTOTYPE, INSPECTS CORONAVIRUS HOSPITAL

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Friday visited Budapest's University of

Technology to be briefed about the possibilities of manufacturing pulmonary ventilators in Hungary, and to see a prototype of the device in question. Professors of the university briefed the prime minister, Interior Minister Sándor Pintér and other officials on the concept and development of the device. Mass production is soon to start, he said.

On Sunday, Orbán inspected the Magyar Imre Hospital in Ajka, central Hungary, designated to treat patients infected with the novel coronavirus. The hospital has been upgraded to receive up to 86 patients in need of intensive care, from the original 6 ICU beds. In a video the prime minister posted on his Facebook page, Orbán noted that one-seventh of all confirmed coronavirus patients have been recorded in a care home run by the Budapest municipality. Hungary has 1,100 homes for the elderly nationwide, and the country will have to prepare for the disease emerging in all of them, Orbán said. He called a recent government order to free 60% of beds in every hospital a "dress rehearsal for the worst-case scenario", adding that hospitals have to be prepared to receive all Covid-19 patients even if "bad comes to worst". "Everybody can rest assured that all who become ill will have a bed in a hospital," Orbán said.

FINANCE MINISTER: JOB PRESERVATION, RESTARTING ECONOMY A PRIORITY

During the novel coronavirus epidemic, preserving jobs and

restarting the economy has to take precedence over a “rigid insistence” to keep the budget deficit below 3%, Finance Minister Mihály Varga has told public Kossuth Rádió. The Hungarian economy is likely to shrink in 2020, Varga said. “At the moment”, the recession is estimated to be around 3%, he said. At the same time, the International Monetary Fund has pronounced Hungary to be in a much more “crisis resistant” state than during the last crisis in 2008, and so it is likely to survive the epidemic with relatively mild damages, Varga noted. To preserve jobs, the government is supporting companies with a variety of financial tools, Varga said. A development of a credit package is also in the last phases, he said.

FINANCE MINISTER, BANKING ASSOC LEADERS DISCUSS LENDING INCENTIVES

Finance Minister Mihály Varga has met with the heads of the Hungarian Banking Association to discuss guarantee programmes and lending incentives, the finance ministry said. The sides also discussed the operation of bank branches, streamlining administrative procedures and the opportunities offered by digitalisation, Varga said in the statement. The minister said that the banking sector is well prepared to share some of the burden presented by the pandemic, considering its robust state and that 2019 was one of the sector’s best years ever. The sector

will also play a significant role in helping the economy recover when the crisis is over, he added.

BUDAPEST CLOSES DOWN RESORTS FOR WEEKEND

The municipality of Budapest and district governments decided to close down Margaret and Óbudai islands and the Római promenade along the river Danube for the weekend, Mayor Gergely Karácsony said. The popular resorts were closed for the public between 9am and 8pm, similarly to last weekend, in light of the coronavirus epidemic. Karácsony also announced that passengers using public transport would be obliged to wear masks or cover their face with a scarf, starting on April 27. He noted that the city passed this latter decision following the example of Vienna.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY COOPERATION WITH SLOVAK MINISTER

Slovakia is Hungary’s most important economic partner, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks on the phone with Slovak Economy Minister Richard Sulík on common infrastructure and energy projects. Hungary’s longest border is with Slovakia, and it works on the largest number of joint infrastructure projects with its northern neighbour, he added.

Construction of a new bridge over the Danube between Komárom in

northern Hungary and Komárno in southern Slovakia is “going well”, he said, adding that a joint ministerial visit to the site is being planned.

Another project is to expand the capacity of the interconnector between the two countries’ liquid natural gas (LNG) pipelines. Hungary will be able to procure large amounts of gas via Serbia from next year, he said, so its role as a transit country will grow, he said. Capacity towards Slovakia is being raised to 5.2 billion cubic meters from 1.75 billion annually, Szijjártó said. Capacity will be increased towards Hungary too.

DK: AUDIT OFFICE ‘THREATENS’ TO STRIP PARTY OF FUNDING

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) on Saturday said that the National Audit Office (ÁSZ) was “threatening” to strip the party of its funding, “possibly for years”. László Sebián-Petrovszki, the party’s director, told an online press conference that ÁSZ was requesting documents which had been destroyed in a fire at the party headquarters in 2018, papers of which said the body already had copies. Sebián-Petrovszki noted that the government had cut all parties’ funding by half citing the novel coronavirus epidemic. ÁSZ is now “doubling the punishment”, he said. Sebián-Petrovszki insisted that the government was using the epidemic as a pretext to strip the largest opposition party of its funding. In response, ÁSZ said that the review of DK’s financial

activities in 2017-2018 was in line with all regulations. The party director's statement is "additional proof that the rule of law is functional" in Hungary, the statement said.

LMP PROPOSES BOOSTING LOCAL GOVT SUPPORT

The opposition LMP party has called on the government to boost the financial support of local governments in view of the economic and social crisis expected in the wake of the novel coronavirus epidemic. Máté Kanász-Nagy, the party board's secretary, said the epidemic "throws municipal budgets off course". Localities are losing large amounts of tax revenue, "in part due to the government's cuts", while facing extra expenses in procuring protective gear and other protection measures, he said. LMP is calling for boosting the fostered work scheme and support for families, along with the establishment of an aid fund, to mitigate the impact of the crisis in disadvantaged localities, Kanász-Nagy said.

SOCIALISTS: GOVT TO LOSE CREDIBILITY OVER 'OBSTRUCTING PROTECTION EFFORTS'

The Socialist party has said the Hungarian government was "on the verge of completely losing voters' trust" because it was "playing dirty" and obstructing the fight against the novel coronavirus epidemic.

Lawmaker Ildikó Borbély Bangó told an online press conference that people could only be expected to adhere to restrictions during the state of emergency if the government provided "fast, credible and full" information. She insisted that the government did not conduct mass testing for the virus "to keep the real number of those infected a secret". The government's decision to have sixty percent of hospital beds freed for potential coronavirus patients means that more people could die due to lack of other treatments than because of Covid-19, Bangó insisted. In response, ruling

Fidesz called on the Socialists to "at least stop obstructing protection efforts if they can't lend a hand". The party called Bangó's remarks "outrageous", adding that the epidemic warranted joint efforts rather than political disputes.

DAILY PASSENGER NUMBER BELOW 300 AT BUDAPEST AIRPORT

Passenger numbers at Liszt Ferenc International Airport have fallen by around 99.3 percent because of the coronavirus outbreak, practically leading to a halt in air travel, airport operator Budapest Airport has said. The average daily number of takeoffs and landings has fallen from 320 to 35 aircraft with most being freight flights. Average daily passenger number in April has reached 275 so far, down from a 44,000 daily average in April 2019. Budapest Airport meanwhile completed some renovation works and brought others forward to take advantage of the traffic-free period.