

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Starlink satellites on a long-exposure photo taken in northern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Parliament holds plenary

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: EXIT PLAN OUTLINED MAY 3

Hungary will outline its plan of how to emerge from epidemic-related restrictions on May 3, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has said.

The plan takes into consideration the related experiences of various countries, Orbán said in an interview to Mária Rádió. Hungary will be in "full protection mode" on May 3, he said, adding that from that time onwards the country could gradually return to normal life. "I'll be in a position to talk about this on May 3-4 at the earliest," he said. "By then I hope to be able to present a sober, serious plan to the country." Orbán said the question remained how long it would take for the economy to recover. He added that his view was at the moderate point on the scale, seeing a smaller decline in growth than more pessimistic forecasts but a slower recovery than the most optimistic. In May next year "we'll be able to talk in terms of an economy that can deliver the performance it did two months ago," Orbán said.

He warned there was no guarantee the epidemic would be kept under control. "So the issue is what the country should be prepared for." He said he hoped to get past the current stage of the epidemic with the least losses but, at the same time, he said to be prepared for the worst.

ORBÁN: HUNGARY WILL BE PREPARED BY MAY 3

In the event the spread of the epidemic may not be controlled or eliminated, there will be masses of patients who will need hospital beds, intensive care and a ventilator, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a radio interview, adding that “I live my life everyday doing this work”. Hungary will reach such a level of preparedness by May 3, the prime minister insisted. Orbán told Mária Rádió that from his experiences of meeting many of his compatriots each day during the current crisis, he found that Hungarians “are more open, understanding and helpful”. He said, however, that Hungarians had received “a warning”. Whereas the economy had been booming, wages were rising, everyone had a job, the aim, he said, was not only to prosper but to live a good life. “By all means, take advantage of opportunities, get rich, have a job and buy a new car ... but remember that these things in themselves do not bring about bountiful or beautiful life; you have to make an effort ... and you mustn’t forget about each other.”

POLL: SUPPORT FOR RULING PARTY UP - NÉZŐPONT

Support for Fidesz has increased significantly since January with 55% of decided voters saying they

would vote for the ruling party if elections were held this weekend, the head of the Nézőpont Institute that conducted a poll in mid-April said. Fidesz in January had 50% backing among those with a clear party preference, Ágoston Sámuel Mráz told public news channel M1. Support for the opposition Socialists dropped this month to 3% and for green LMP to 1%, both below the 5% threshold these parties would need to win seats in parliament, Mráz said. The latest figures show the “high level of confidence” Hungarians have in the government and their support for maintaining the state of emergency due to the novel coronavirus epidemic, he said. Fully 64% of the poll’s respondents said Viktor Orbán’s government would give up its emergency powers once the epidemic is over, Mráz said. This same opinion was expressed by 33% of opposition voters and 50% of Budapest residents, he added. “All this means that the opposition has lost the match about whether or not the government has excessive powers,” Mráz said.

SIGNS OF BIOTERRORISM DETECTED, SAYS SECURITY CHIEF

Hungary has received reports from several countries about the limited emergence of bioterrorism, the director-general of the Military National Security Service told a

meeting of parliament’s foreign affairs committee. The Islamic State terrorist group and other organisations have called on their followers to spread coronavirus and the signs of this are prevalent in India, Egypt and the United States, Lieutenant-General János Béres told the body.

Meanwhile, army chief of staff Ferenc Korom told the committee that Hungary is still involved in 11 foreign operations with 1,200 troops. Health services have been boosted in all of those operations, he said. Hungary has evacuated several of its troops from the EUFOR peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina after soldiers in the mission tested positive for the virus, he said, adding that 15 soldiers were also withdrawn from Mali. Around 1,500 samples have been taken within the Armed Forces of Hungary, Korom said, adding that the coronavirus case count was in the single digits so far.

In response to a question by Zsolt Németh, the Fidesz head of the committee, about the role of the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine in handling the pandemic, Korom said the centre headquartered in Hungary was responsible for coordinating information-sharing among NATO member states. Answering a question from conservative Jobbik’s Koloman Brenner, Korom said Hungary had no plans to withdraw its forces from any of the missions they are involved in.



On the subject of organised crime rings, Béres said the criminal groups were becoming increasingly active in several countries, noting activities by the Italian mafia and similar activities in Nigeria and in the Balkans. Cybercrime is also on the rise, Béres said, citing the example of the spreading of fake news.

The national security service's main task at present is to monitor the global Covid-19 situation and identify potential future clusters, he said. The service is also monitoring the virus's effect on the international security environment, Béres said. The virus has so far resulted in a decrease in the intensity of conflicts in crisis zones like Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, he said, adding, at the same time, that the situation was expected to re-escalate once the outbreak subsides. Europe, he said, also had to be prepared for a potential rise in migration pressure from the Middle East and Africa as a result of measures taken in the countries of those regions.

Several countries have also altered their military operations due to the virus, he said. Many of them have pulled their forces from Iraq after training missions were suspended there. The virus has also speeded up the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and many soldiers in Mali have become infected with the virus, Béres said. Many defence contractors have also suspended their operations or have transitioned to producing protective equipment

against the virus, he said, adding that several manufacturers were gearing up for a resumption of their activities after the pandemic.

He noted that several countries have involved their armed forces in their epidemic response efforts, with Hungary having involved its own military in almost all areas. The Military National Security Service's most important future task will be to monitor how the armed forces of neighbouring and other European countries return to their regular operations, Béres said.

MATOLCSY: HUNGARY CAN REPLICATE SINGAPORE'S SUCCESS AFTER CRISIS

György Matolcsy, the governor of the National Bank of Hungary, has said Hungary should look to Singapore as an example for achieving economic success. By setting out a new vision for the period after the crisis caused by the novel coronavirus outbreak, Hungary will have a chance to replicate Singapore's success in Europe, Matolcsy said in an op-ed piece published on the website Novekedes.hu. One conclusion that can already be drawn from the ongoing pandemic and national responses to it is that "East Asia has performed better than the advanced Western countries", and the European Union's northern and eastern member states have done a better job of managing the health, social and economic crisis than the southern ones have, Matolcsy said.

Hungary's goal of catching up with the West can now also be furthered with the adoption of political, social and economic solutions coming from Asia, he said. Matolcsy, however, believes it would be wrong for Hungary to follow the examples set by China, Japan and South Korea, arguing that "what works on a large scale may not necessarily work on a smaller one." "So why couldn't the most successful Asian Tiger, Singapore, serve as Hungary's new vision for the future?" the governor added. But instead of simply adopting Singapore's societal model, Hungary would have to understand and "reconstruct" the essence of the city state's economic success, Matolcsy said. Because of its strategic geographical location, Singapore has succeeded in establishing itself as a global logistics hub, becoming more and more attractive to investors until it became a crucial player, he said. "The secret of secrets was that although Singapore got caught up in crises, it never changed the recipe of its model," Matolcsy said. "It was improved, but not replaced every 4, 8 or 10 years." Hungary should follow a European, and specifically central European version of that model, he added.

Matolcsy said Hungary and the rest of the Visegrád Group could become "one of Europe's most attractive capital, technology, trade, financial and quality-of-life magnets". But in order to fully adopt Singapore's recipe for success,



Hungary would need a new health-care model, way of life, financial system, education system, business sector and state operations, the governor said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY RECEIVES 22.5 MILLION MASKS, 220 VENTILATORS

Hungary took delivery last week of 20.6 million surgical masks and 1.85 million face masks, which will provide a higher degree of protection against the novel virus, the foreign minister told lawmakers at the start of the parliamentary plenary. The shipments were transported in 21 planes and three lorries, Péter Szijjártó said, noting that since the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, a total of 72,954,890 have been received, around half of the supplies ordered under contract. A delivery of another 75,852,550 masks is expected soon, he said.

As regards other shipments, Szijjártó noted the delivery of 220 ventilators in addition to the 318 received earlier. Hungary also received 50,000 virus tests last week, bringing the total number of imported tests to 402,000, he said, adding that an additional 2.95 million are scheduled to be delivered under contract. He further noted the delivery of more than 10.6 million items of protective clothing last week in addition to the 32.5 million items imported earlier. Hungary has contracts to receive a further 27 million items, he said.

Szjijártó noted the intensive efforts under way in many countries to develop a vaccine and drugs that are effective in treating coronavirus patients. Hungary recently received 400,000 doses of Favipiravir under an agreement with the Chinese government which could be used to treat about 4,000 patients, depending on the dosage, he said, adding that China had allowed the drug to be sold to four countries only. Drug developments are ongoing in Japan, Szijjártó noted, adding that Hungary has agreed to receive 12,500 doses of the drug Avigan, sufficient to treat 100 patients, he said.

NUMBER OF REGISTERED CASES RISES TO 1,984

Another ten elderly patients suffering from chronic diseases have died in Hungary and the number of registered novel coronavirus infections has risen by 68 to 1,984, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday morning. So far, there have been 199 fatalities and 267 people have left hospital after recovering. There are over 11,240 people in hospital or home quarantine, 60 are treated on ventilators. So far, 48,057 coronavirus tests have been conducted at accredited laboratories. Budapest has the highest number of infections (1,002), followed by Pest County (286) and Fejér county (159).

OFFICIAL: VIRUS-HIT BUDAPEST RETIREMENT HOME WAS WITHOUT DOCTORS 'FOR AT LEAST A WEEK'

An elderly care home in Budapest's eastern suburbs that has recently seen a surge of novel coronavirus cases was operating without doctors for at least a week, the chief medical officer has said. Documents handed over to the authorities show that "there were no doctors physically present" in the retirement home on Pesti Road "for at least a week", Cecilia Müller told an online news conference. This means that there was no one at the home to examine the residents, she added. Authorities are currently carrying out an investigation into the spread of the virus inside the home, Müller said. The number of confirmed Covid-19 cases at the home has now reached 223, 19 of whom are staff, she said, adding that 23 people have died. A second round of tests was conducted at the home, with authorities collecting samples from 267 residents and 40 staff members. The samples are expected to be analysed by Tuesday, Müller said.

She noted that the epidemic in Hungary is expected to peak on May 3 and that this was what the health-care sector was preparing for from a technical standpoint as well.

Meanwhile, the head of the Pesti Road home rejected the "false

accusations” regarding the absence of doctors at the institution. The Budapest Mayor’s Office quoted József Skulteti, the head of the retirement home, as saying in an e-mail addressed to the chief municipal clerk that the institution “employed a full-time doctor prior to and during the epidemic”. Medical services have been available at the home the whole time, in line with the existing contract between the institution and the service provider, Skulteti added.

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said in a Facebook post that his office “is again responding to lies with facts and to political smears with documents”. The mayor said it was “rather concerning that the chief medical officer, too, is being forced to play a political role” in connection with the epidemic. Karácsony said that contrary to Müller’s remarks, during the period in question, the general practitioner assigned to the home had been busy testing the home’s residents using test kits provided by the city council. But when the doctor began displaying symptoms of Covid-19, the institution was only notified a week later that the doctor’s first coronavirus test had been botched, he added. “If anything, this is what was irresponsible,” the mayor said. “And what is responsible is that when the doctor was quarantined, we immediately moved to find a replacement.”

OPERATIVE BOARD: CURFEW RESTRICTIONS OBSERVED IN BUDAPEST MORE THAN IN OTHER AREAS

The partial lockdown in Hungary was observed more thoroughly in Budapest than in other parts of the country over the weekend. Police took action in the case of 3,945 violations, with 1,738 of them recorded in the past 24 hours, Róbert Kiss, a spokesman of the operative board that coordinates Hungary’s response to the novel coronavirus epidemic, told an online press conference. A total of 816 warnings were issued, 521 fines were imposed and 401 reports filed, he said. This past weekend there was no need for any police action in Budapest, he added. In the past 24 hours, home quarantine was ordered for entrants at the border in 750 cases, continuing a decreasing trend, Kiss said.

KÁSLER: HUNGARY’S PROTECTIVE MEASURES SUCCESSFUL

Hungary’s protective measures against the novel coronavirus pandemic have been successful and the number of infections and deaths have been “very favourable” compared to other countries, Minister of Human Resources Miklós Kásler said. The government has made preparations for a worst-case scenario in order to prevent the collapse of the

health-care system, he told public Kossuth Rádió.

Commenting on remarks made in an open letter by the Hungarian Doctors’ Chamber, he said all the required information had been communicated to them and daily press conferences have been held. The medical college has prepared professional guidelines and all questions put by hospitals have been answered, he added.

TEACHER UNIONS DEMAND APOLOGY FROM EDUCATION OFFICIAL

Five teacher unions have demanded an apology from the state secretary of public education, Zoltán Maruzsa, for likening, in a television interview, the PDSZ union to the one-time terrorist group, the Red Army Faction. In a joint statement, the unions called his remark “tasteless”. Instead of putting forward reasoned, professional arguments, the government is “yet again resorting to” painting the unions as an enemy, the statement said.

The unions have expressed their dissatisfaction with the government over its decision to hold school graduation exams during the apex of the coronavirus epidemic without consulting with stakeholders. They said student and parent bodies had also spoken out against the government’s plans, decrying the timing of the announcement of the exams as well as their conditions only two and a half weeks before they are scheduled to take place.

RULING PARTIES DRAFT DECLARATION MARKING 1990 RESTORATION OF POPULAR REPRESENTATION

The ruling alliance of Fidesz and the Christian Democrats has submitted to parliament a draft political declaration marking the 30th anniversary of the inauguration of Hungary's first free parliament following the fall of communism. The declaration commemorates the restoration of popular representation with the inauguration of the free parliament on May 2, 1990, the first since Hungary's loss of national sovereignty marked by the Nazi occupation starting on March 19, 1944. It pays tribute to those who fought against the Nazi and Communist dictatorships, with special emphasis on the heroes of Hungary's failed anti-Soviet uprising of 1956, those who spearheaded the transition to democracy, and the now deceased members of the first freely-elected parliament. The declaration makes note of Hungary's establishment of a democratic society, stating that decisions made at the time of the change of regime "were not enough to prevent the disillusionment of a significant portion of society or thwart the renewed aspirations of groups that had maintained the Communist dictatorship".

GOVT FILM COMMISSIONER: FÓT STUDIO EXPANSION TO SERVE FOREIGN, HUNGARIAN PRODUCTIONS

The Mafilm Studio complex in Fót on the outskirts of Budapest will be expanded to cater for foreign and Hungarian productions, the government film commissioner said. Under the project, four new soundstages will be built on 9,600 square metres, boosting total studio capacity fivefold, to 12,200sqm, Csaba Káel told Kossuth Rádió. Implemented under the government's economic protection action plan, the Fót base expansion will be Hungary's largest ever state-funded film studio development project, Káel said. It has Europe's largest outdoor water tank which was used in the shooting of Blade Runner 2049 and Terminator: Dark Fate.

"The Hungarian motion picture industry is a success sector of the Hungarian economy with direct film production spending exceeding 100 billion forints (EUR 283m) every year since 2017. The contribution of the film industry to the country's GDP is outstandingly high by European comparison. Budapest is the second most popular filming location on the continent after London," Káel told the programme. He noted the 30% tax rebate foreign productions

receive in Hungary under a government decree enacted three years ago.

HUNGARIAN CHEESE REGISTERED WITH PROTECTED GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

"Győr-Moson-Sopron megyei Csemege sajt", a traditional, full-fat, salted, porous cheese made from cow's milk in an area in the west of Hungary, has been registered with a Protected Geographical Indication, the Ministry of Agriculture said. The product is the first Hungarian cheese to be registered with a PGI, the ministry noted. The Traditional Hungarian Cheese Association submitted the PGI application for the cheese four years ago, based on tradition, the unique production method, the specific skills required for production, and the reputation of the cheese. The distinctive flavour of Győr-Moson-Sopron megyei Csemege sajt is "pleasantly aromatic and salty, slightly acidic and free of any foreign taste", according to the application. Other Hungarian foods with PGI include Szentes peppers, beef from the Hungarian Grey, Gönc apricots and Gyula salami. A study published by the European Commission on Monday found that the sales value of products with names protected by a Geographical Indication are, on average, double that for similar products without a certification.