

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zsolt Czeglédi

Preparations for the exhibition of Paris-based digital artist Vera Molnar in Debrecen, E Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

Stats office releases May industrial output figures

Foreign Minister Szijjártó meets Czech, Slovak, Slovenian, Austrian counterparts

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

FM: EU SHOULD BEEF UP BORDER PROTECTION

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó called for strengthening the protection of the European Union's external borders, arguing that the novel coronavirus pandemic may lead to new waves of migration.

Szijjártó said after a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels that the bloc should work to eliminate all "external factors contributing to migration" and to "focus on the real problems of Europeans rather than encourage migration". Concerning the EU's relationship with Turkey, Szijjártó called for a strategic approach within the EU, noting that the bloc's 2016 migration agreement "has put the EU's security into Turkish hands". The EU has yet to fully pay the 6 billion euros it had agreed to pay to Turkey, he noted. Unless that happens shortly, Turkey may again open its borders towards Europe to the 4 million migrants currently on its territory, he warned. The meeting also touched on the issue of the EU's 2000 migration agreement with 79 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, Szijjártó said. Noting that the agreement was expiring this year, he called on the bloc to "rethink" prolonging it. The agreement focuses on regulating employment for people arriving in the EU, he noted. However, millions of Europeans had lost their jobs during the pandemic, he said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY SUPPORTS US PEACE PLAN IN MIDDLE EAST

Hungary supports the United States' peace plan for the Middle East, Foreign Minister Péter Sziijártó said after a meeting with his European Union counterparts in Brussels, saying that the plan was the "best starting point for talks and the one with the best chance of being implemented". Sziijártó said that the EU's attempts to broker peace in the Middle East, a focal point of the meeting, had failed so far. Hungary opposes all EU declarations "that would reduce the chances of implementing the US plan, all overhasty judgements leading to a setback in the peace talks and all declarations condemning Israel for alleged or real intentions," he said.

OVER 900 INFECTIONS, 140 DEATHS AMONG ELDERLY CARE HOME RESIDENTS IN HUNGARY

Over 900 residents of elderly care homes in Hungary have so far contracted the novel coronavirus, and 140 of them have died, the koronavirus.gov.hu website said. The virus has been identified in 13 Budapest and 20 countryside care homes since its emergence in March. The elderly care home with the most infections is in Budapest's 17th district, on Pesti Road. Of the 312 residents and 26 employees diagnosed with the disease, 55 have

died and 267 recovered so far, the website said. The operative board responsible for coordinating the virus response and Hungary's epidemiology authority are monitoring homes for the elderly continually, the website said. Data so far show that the number of infections is stagnating. Should the numbers spike again, the authorities will take immediate action, it said.

THIRTEEN NEW CORONAVIRUS CASES, NO DEATHS IN HUNGARY

Thirteen coronavirus infections have been registered in Hungary over the past 24 hours, bringing the total number to 4,247, koronavirus.gov.hu said. The number of deaths was unchanged at 595, while 3,073 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections stands at 579. Fully 127 coronavirus patients are in hospital, five on ventilators. Budapest is the location of 38% of active infections, 60% of fatalities and 46% of recoveries. Currently 2,453 people are under official house quarantine and 295,561 tests have been carried out. The threat of an epidemic is still present, so epidemiological preparedness and basic protection measures are still needed, the website said. Wearing a face mask is still compulsory in shops and on public transport. As the number of infections is on the rise in neighbouring countries, the government has decided to tighten border regulations, the portal said. Budapest has the most infections

(1,993), followed by and Pest County (6341) and the counties of Fejér (379), Komárom-Esztergom (308) and Zala (262). Tolna County has the fewest (13).

PASSENGER RAIL TRAVEL SUSPENDED BETWEEN SERBIA, HUNGARY

Passenger rail services between Serbia and Hungary will be suspended indefinitely from Tuesday due to the novel coronavirus epidemic, railway traffic information service Mávinform has said. Serbia's railway company is suspending rail services at the Kelebia border crossing from July 14 due to the status of the epidemic in the country, Mávinform said. The Ivo Andric international high-speed trains running on the Budapest-Belgrade line will now only run between Budapest and Kelebia, it added. MAV-Start is offering a total refund for international tickets, the statement said.

ÁDER, ORBÁN CONGRATULATE DUDA ON RE-ELECTION

President János Áder and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán congratulated Polish President Andrzej Duda on his re-election on Sunday. Áder wrote in a letter that "the states of central Europe play a significant and constructive role in enhancing the effectiveness, competitiveness and security of the European Union." Áder also welcomed that over the coming years he and Duda would

have the opportunity to continue to enrich their countries' relationship which he said was founded on a close friendship. The president added that he and Duda were in agreement on most of the issues affecting their countries. He said the Visegrad Group comprising Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia had become an important element in protecting the shared interests of the four countries. Áder said he was looking forward to the meeting of V4 heads of state set for October during which he said the presidents will also cover the social challenges caused by the novel coronavirus epidemic. Orbán called Hungarian-Polish friendship "an engine of central European cooperation and a key factor in European politics". Duda's win in Sunday's election was "of critical importance" to strengthening central Europe, Orbán said. The prime minister pledged to continue deepening the friendship between the two countries and wished Duda success and good health for his next term as president and to Poland's Visegrad Group presidency.

BUDAPEST-BELGRADE RAIL-LINE UPGRADE GETS UNDER WAY

The upgrade of the Hungarian section of the Budapest-Belgrade rail line got under way after the contract for the project's implementation entered into effect, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology said. Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics

told the companies in charge of the project that preparations for the project were going according to plan and that the upgrade was expected to be completed by 2025. The upgraded rail line will put Hungary in a position to become part of the fastest route for goods transported between Greece and western Europe, the minister said. Additionally, the rail link will reduce travel time between Budapest and Belgrade from 8 hours to less than half that duration, Palkovics said.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Hungary's national rail operator MAV, RM International, China Tiejiju Engineering and Construction, the Hungarian unit of the China Railway Electrification Engineering Group, international real estate developer FÖBER, Hungary's Transport Sciences Institute (KTI), the Chinese-Hungarian joint venture set up to coordinate the project and Duan Jielong, China's ambassador to Hungary.

ÁDER SIGNS SMALL BUSINESS TAX CHANGES INTO LAW

President János Áder signed the law establishing the state budget that also amends the rules governing the Itemised Tax for Small Businesses (KATA) in a bid to crack down on small business tax abusers. Under the new rules governing the tax, KATA taxpayers who invoice a single company will have to pay a 40% tax on income above 3 million forints (EUR 8,500). The flat

monthly 50,000 forint payment will still apply to those who invoice multiple entities as long as annual income does not exceed 12 million forints. Áder said he had received calls from three professional organisations over the past several days to send the bill back to parliament on the ground that the changes made to the KATA tax were too harsh. The amendments made to the tax will close certain loopholes without affecting the more than 300,000 KATA taxpayers, Áder said, insisting that they would not have to pay higher taxes.

JUSTICE MINISTER: GOVT AIMS TO ELIMINATE PRISON OVERCROWDING BY SEPT 30

The government aims to eliminate prison overcrowding by September 30 and create nearly 3,000 new places in order to put an end to the "prison business" compensation claims, the justice minister said. Compensation payments to prisoners and their legal representatives totalling billions of forints on grounds of insufficient prison conditions rightfully hurt a sense of justice by many members of society, Judit Varga said at an event in Veszprém in western Hungary marking the opening of ten new prison extensions. The government will resolve this by eliminating the legal grounds for such compensation payments, she added. The national prison service said new prison facilities in Állampuszta, Pálhalma,

Sopronkőhida, Szeged, Tokol, Baracska, Veszprém, Kiskunhalas, Tiszalök and Miskolc have a total capacity of 2,750.

PALKOVICS: BUDGET HAS ROOM FOR SECOND WAVE OF EPIDEMIC

Hungary's economic protection measures introduced so far have been sufficient and proportionate, and there is room for further intervention in the budget if a second wave of the novel coronavirus epidemic makes it necessary, daily Világgazdaság said, citing the innovation and technology minister. László Palkovics said facilities have now been prepared not only for health but also economic protection. Commenting on the energy strategy, Palkovics said nuclear energy played a vital role in achieving carbon neutrality and "in the area of renewable energy we have dedicated ourselves to solar power instead of wind energy".

"We will need to spend between 600 billion forints (EUR 1.7bn) and 1,500 billion forints to fulfil all tasks but European Union funding could also help," he added. "It is a realistic target" that 50 billion euros should be available during the 2021-2027 EU budget period as against 32 billion euros in 2014-2020, he said.

GOVT OFFICIAL: PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES NEARING 400,000

So far some 396,000 Hungarians have sent back responses to questions

posed in the "National Consultation" public survey launched last month in connection with the novel coronavirus epidemic and rebooting the economy, a government official said. Responding to a question in parliament, Csaba Dömötör, state secretary at the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office, said the survey would give the government a clearer picture of its most popular measures taken in response to the epidemic. At the same time, he accused the opposition parties of repeatedly trying to "torpedo" the survey by taking them out of people's mailboxes or removing people's personal details from the questionnaires. Dömötör also accused the non-parliamentary Momentum Movement of scribbling obscene messages on the questionnaires. He said the government did not understand why the left-wing opposition was "trying to prevent people from expressing their opinions" on the epidemic and the government's related response measures. "If they couldn't contribute anything to the unity that was needed in responding to the epidemic then they should at least not hamper the dialogue," he said.

MVM AND ROSATOM ESTABLISH JOINT VENTURE

State-owned Hungarian Electricity Works (MVM) has formed a joint venture with Rusatom Service, a unit of Russia's Rosatom, named European Power Services (EPS), Rosatom said. The founders have an equal 50%

share in EPS but the company will operate as part of MVM group. MVM said on its website that EPS will primarily provide development and maintenance services for the safe operation of power plant systems and equipment in domestic and other European markets. EPS was established with a 5 million forint (EUR 14,000) share capital and started operation on July 8.

TRAFFIC AT BUDAPEST AIRPORT GROWING FAST

Traffic at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International Airport is still far below its level before the coronavirus pandemic, but flight and passenger numbers are increasing week by week, business daily Világgazdaság said. Average daily passenger numbers reached almost 10,000 by July, a significant increase from June when the total monthly number was 84,400 compared to 1.5 million a year earlier. Monthly passenger numbers were lowest in April at 9,870, with the daily record low registered on April 7 with 167 passengers, airport operator Budapest Airport told the paper. Currently, 479 flights a week are available, with 16 airlines flying to 92 destinations in July. Flights are the most frequent between Budapest and London. According to a recent survey by Budapest Airport, which covered 17,000 interviewees, 81% of respondents said they have plans to travel by air and 67% said they want to book air tickets before the end of

this year. Budapest Airport earlier said it projects annual passenger numbers of 10 million at most this year due to the pandemic compared with 16.2 million in 2019. Freight traffic is also increasing at the airport, with cargo volume up by 18% from the previous month in June.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS UNDER WAY AGAINST FIVE LIGHT PLANES FROM CZECH REP

Local police have launched legal proceedings in a case in which a group of five light planes carrying Czech passengers landed without permission in northern Hungary over the weekend, a spokesman for Nógrád County police said. Local police received information on Saturday morning that several light planes entering Hungarian airspace from the direction of Slovakia had landed on the airfield at 9:35 am at Rétság, Tamás Nágel told MTI. The police established that the planes were en route to Balatonkeresztúr in south-western Hungary but failed to take up radio contact with Hungarian air control and had no flying route protocol, he said.

CDU HEAD TO PAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO BUDAPEST

German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who heads the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), will make an official visit to Budapest on Thursday, the daily Magyar Nemzet said citing diplomatic sources. Kramp-Karrenbauer will meet Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Defence Minister Tibor Benkő during her visit, the daily said. The German defence minister, who succeeded Chancellor Angela Merkel as CDU chairwoman, aims to strengthen cooperation with countries in Central Europe and "correct various political debates that have weighed on German-Hungarian relations in recent years", it said.

NBH FINES HANIFA FOR UNAUTHORISED CURRENCY EXCHANGE ACTIVITY

The National Bank of Hungary has fined Budapest-based financial service provider HANIFA 25 million forints (EUR 70,620) for conducting unauthorised currency exchange

activity and banned the company from continuing the activity with immediate effect. The NBH already issued a warning to consumers concerning the matter last year and also made a criminal complaint. The NBH said HANIFA was earlier licensed as a key intermediary of a cooperative credit institution but its mandate was terminated. Nevertheless, the company continued to exchange money from June 1, 2019, the date of expiration of its license. As part of a joint operation with the Budapest Police Headquarters, employees of the NBH carried out a covert test transaction and conducted an on-site inspection at the company, where nearly thirty currencies worth almost 170 million forints were found, including Malay ringit and Thai baht in addition to the popular currencies. The NBH considered it as an aggravating circumstance that HANIFA, which had previously been on its supervisory register, was aware that the currency exchange activity was subject to a license. At the same time, the central bank considered it as a mitigating circumstance that the company cooperated with the NBH during the proceedings and with its conduct helped to uncover the facts.