

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV / Zoltán Balogh

New Ethnography Museum emerges from the ground in City Park

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases 2nd reading of July industrial output

ChristDem presser on Miskolc Y bridge renovation

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: NO NEED FOR SPECIAL BUDAPEST MEASURES

The operative board coordinating Hungary's response to the novel coronavirus epidemic sees no reason to introduce any special rules in Budapest beyond those that apply in the country as whole, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said.

Responding to a letter from Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, Orbán said the government would not discuss such a proposal without involving the mayor.

The prime minister noted that all information about the virus relayed to the government since the start of the epidemic passed through the operative board headed by Interior Minister Sándor Pintér. The board's job is to submit proposals regarding the handling of the epidemic to the government, he added. "Anyone can access the results of the work carried out by the operative board, including the metropolitan council and the mayor," the prime minister wrote. Orbán recommended that Karácsony "establish a proper working relationship with the government's operative board".

"Hungary won the battle against the first wave of the epidemic," he wrote. "We gained a lot of experience and tested many methods for defence against the virus." These are the experiences on which Hungary has built its response to the second wave of the epidemic, Orbán added.

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KARÁCSONY PROPOSES EXPANDING FREE TESTING

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony proposed expanding the scope of free testing for the coronavirus, in an open letter addressed to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In the letter published on his Facebook page, Karácsony asked Orbán about the government's plans to "expand testing and to make free testing accessible" for everyone needing it. "We clearly agree that no Hungarian citizen should lose their job, and no child should stay out of school because they cannot afford adhering to the state-approved protocol," Karácsony said. In view of the virus spreading among young people and in schools, teachers' testing for free should be a priority, the letter said.

The Budapest municipality has already taken steps to have all those using public transport wear masks and protects social care institutions especially carefully, Karácsony said. However, Karácsony said government sources still failed to inform local authorities on the protection efforts "as they did during the first wave ... despite the important role [local councils] played in curbing the spread of the virus." The mayor called for "speedy, unequivocal" statements on the government's stance on free testing and on the danger of elderly people contracting the virus.

Meanwhile, the opposition Democratic Coalition said "faulty government measures" could lead to the mass closure of schools. The government has failed to introduce "enforceable" protocols in schools; neither has it provided face masks or disinfectants in sufficient quantities, Gergely Arató, the party's deputy group leader, told an online press conference on Thursday.

Moreover, the government has not made arrangements for the timely testing of teachers with Covid-19 symptoms or their contracts, he said, adding that several teachers had been forced to isolate themselves due to a lack of timely testing. This, together with the government's blithe attitude to testing and contact tracing, could lead to school shut-downs, he insisted.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH BANGLADESHI COUNTERPART

The Hungarian minister of foreign affairs met AK Abdul Momen, the Bangladeshi foreign minister, to discuss forging economic ties between their countries. One of the fastest growing economies in the world, Bangladesh offers opportunities for Hungarian businesses to enter a new market, Péter Szijjártó told MTI. In a post-pandemic world economy, "there will be a bitter competition between countries and companies for better positions,"

Szijjártó said. Hungarian companies have a vested interest in being present in its huge market, while Bangladesh will benefit from the technological solutions Hungary offers, he said.

The ministers agreed to build cooperation in training and education in connection with nuclear energy, Szijjártó said. Bangladesh is currently building its first nuclear plant which is scheduled to start operations in 2024-2025, he added. Hungary is raising the grants offered for Bangladeshi university students by 30 to 130, Szijjártó said. Another important field of cooperation will be health-care technology, Szijjártó said, noting the work of a Hungarian team who successfully separated a pair of Bangladeshi Siamese twins conjoined at the head. Water management will be another important area as Bangladesh is often hit by floods, and irrigation of farmlands is a key issue for the country, he said.

Szijjártó praised Bangladesh for its role in the fight against terrorism and extremism. He called on the European Union to bolster cooperation in that area with Bangladesh. Migration waves make their way to Europe from the country occasionally, which should be thwarted, he said. The best way to do that is cooperation against terrorism and religious extremism, he said. Bangladesh faces a migration crisis, with large numbers of Rohingya refugees entering the country, he noted. "We therefore share the view that everyone should be given the opportunity to make a living and

live in peace and security in their own homeland," he said. During the visit, Szijjártó also met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and held talks with Minister of Commerce Tipu Munshi. He announced that Hungary would open a consular office in Dhaka.

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH EU LEADERS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán evening held preparatory talks for the next European Union summit with European Council President Charles Michel, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Cypriot president as well as his Italian, Slovenian, Estonian and Luxembourg counterparts. The videoconference was called to allow the leaders in attendance to discuss the topics on the agenda of the EU summit to be held at the end of the month. The issues discussed included the Turkish-Greek dispute over overlapping resource claims in the Mediterranean and the bloc's relations with China. The summit could in part be seen as "making up for" the EU-China summit that had to be cancelled earlier this year because of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

ORBÁN TO ATTEND V4 SUMMIT IN POLAND

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will participate in a summit of Visegrad Group (V4) prime ministers in Lublin, in central Poland, on Friday, his press chief said. The meeting has been convened

by Mateusz Morawiecki, of Poland, Bertalan Havasi told MTI. It will focus on the EU's relations with China, its legal disputes with Turkey and the current situation in Transatlantic cooperation. Recent developments around the crisis in Belarus are also expected to be discussed, he said.

The V4 prime ministers are scheduled to assess novel coronavirus-related protection measures and address EU economic issues such as the single market, industrial policy and digitalisation.

MINISTER: HUNGARY LAUNCHES STANDALONE LUNG TRANSPLANT PROGRAMME

Hungary has started operating its own lung transplant programme independently of the Vienna Medical University's transplant centre, the human resources minister said on Thursday. Lung transplant surgeries have been performed on Hungarian patients in Hungary since 2015, but those have been carried out in collaboration with the Vienna centre, Miklós Kásler told a press conference.

"It has been the joint ambition of the profession to implement a domestic lung transplant programme," he said. Since 1996, lung transplants have been performed at the Vienna University on Hungarian patients by medical teams composed mainly of Hungarian doctors, Kásler said.

The first lung transplant in Hungary was performed in 2015 at the Budapest

Semmelweis Medical University's clinic established at the headquarters of the National Institute of Oncology, the minister said, adding that a total of 92 lung transplant surgeries have been carried out since that year. A new surgery block will be inaugurated soon at the Oncology Institute, built using 3 billion forints (EUR 8.3m) of state support, Kásler said.

Sándor Mihály, the director for transplants at the Hungary's National Blood Transfusion Service (OVSZ), noted at the press conference that the domestic lung transplant programme was launched in coordination with Eurotransplant, an international organisation coordinating transplants between eight countries.

This means that Hungarian patients no longer need to be registered on waiting lists in Vienna but may receive a donor lung offered directly to Hungary by Eurotransplant, he said. Currently, 16 Hungarian patients are awaiting lung transplants, he added.

TWO DIE, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 476 IN HUNGARY

Two Covid-19 patients, both elderly and with underlying illnesses, have died, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 476 to 10,191 over the past 24 hours, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 630, and 3,990 people have made

a recovery. There are 5,571 active infections and 234 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 11 on ventilators. Altogether 25,043 people are in official home quarantine and 505,585 tests have been carried out. The site warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines and hygiene regulations. The government closed borders to foreigners from Sept 1, with certain exceptions, re-introducing border protection measures in force during the first wave of the epidemic. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (4,466), followed by Pest County (1,464) and the counties of Fejér (598), Komárom-Esztergom (401), Hajdú-Bihar (363) and Zala (349). Békés County has the fewest infections (55).

DISTRICT MAYORS URGE ‘REMOVAL OF CORDONS’ FROM CITY PARK

The mayors of Budapest’s 6th, 7th and 14th districts have urged that construction now under way in the City Park should be completed as soon as possible and area returned to residents. Csaba Horváth, opposition mayor of the 14th district, told a press conference on Thursday that the park could not be currently used due to construction works under the contested Liget Project. “The City of Budapest has made it clear that the City Park must be renewed as a public park and the government must accept that

no new building should be built,” he said.

Péter Niedermüller, the mayor of the 7th district, said that several components of the project to build a museum quarter, could no longer be reversed and suggested that the park “should be renewed based on a new and reasonable concept”.

László Baán, the ministerial commissioner in charge of the park’s renewal, said that the cordons would be removed in a month or two, once “a pen for dogs and a small botanical garden” are completed. Baán insisted that the government is committed to building a City Park “which has more green surfaces and which benefits visitors more than it did earlier”, adding that the project components completed so far would meet that purpose.

Horváth said in response that “we need evidence rather than pledges”. “They keep creating an appearance that the parkland is growing whereas it isn’t,” he said, adding that no construction worker should be in sight in the City Park after the period of a year.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO SEND VIDEO MESSAGES FOR INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

Several religious leaders who planned to address the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress, originally scheduled to be held in Budapest between Sept. 13 and 20 this year,

will instead send video messages during that week on the congress’s YouTube channel, the organisers said on Thursday.

The congress has been postponed by Pope Francis due to the coronavirus pandemic. On the first day, a video message by Cardinal Péter Erdő, the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church, will be played, the chief of the secretariat organising the congress told a press conference in Budapest. Further messages will be sent by 11 religious leaders representing Christian communities in the world’s five continents. They include Piero Marini, president of the Eucharistic Congress’ Pontifical Council, Nigerian prelate Valerian Maduka Okeke, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York and Moyses Louro Azevedo Filho, the leader of the Shalom Catholic Community in Brazil, he said.

JOBBIK CALLS FOR GOVT ACTION TO STRENGTHEN FORINT

Opposition Jobbik has called on the government (MTVA) to take action against an “appalling weakening” of the national currency and “help close the gap between Hungarian wages and the European average”. Jobbik deputy leader Dániel Z Kárpát said that the government’s passive stance concerning the weak currency was “deliberate” and was aimed at “helping international export producers to the detriment

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of ordinary Hungarians ". Z Kárpát insisted that increasing prices of imported products put a huge burden on consumers, and argued that a mobile phone could now be up to 100 euros more expensive. "The government should stop deliberately weakening the forint," he said. Further, companies that are reluctant to increase wages and bring them closer to European levels should be excluded from central subsidies, he added.

HUNGARY TO BUILD HUF 60 BN PLANT TO MAKE LYNX ARMoured FIGHTING VEHICLES

A 60 billion forint (EUR 167.8m) plant will be built in Zalaegerszeg, in western Hungary, to manufacture the Lynx infantry fighting vehicles in cooperation with Germany's Rheinmetall, Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics and Defence Minister Tibor Benkő said. A test track for the Lynx tanks and for offroad vehicles will also be established on an area of 20 hectares at the Zalazone test track, in cooperation with Rheinmetall, Palkovics said. Production at the plant is scheduled to start in 2023. Including suppliers, the plant will employ 500 people. Under a more than 2 billion euro modernisation scheme, Hungary will receive 218 Lynx KF41 combat vehicles. Of those vehicles, 172 will be made in Hungary, under an agreement signed recently between Rheinmetall and the state of Hungary.

VARGA: TAX EVASION IN HUNGARY PLUNGES TO ALL-TIME LOW

Government measures to whiten the economy have worked spectacularly, Mihály Varga, the finance minister, said on Thursday, noting that the tax evasion rate was 21% in 2013 before dropping to 6.6% by 2019.

This means Hungary is performing better on this score than many Western European countries, Varga told MTI, commenting on the European Commission's VAT study released today. He said the European Commission has acknowledged Hungary's results, adding that Hungary had been among European Union countries with the highest rate of tax evasion.

The minister noted that the government began its campaign to whiten the economy in 2014, when the use of online cash registers became obligatory. A raft of other measures followed in subsequent years, he added. As a result, the rate of decline in tax evasion in Hungary was the sharpest among European countries in 2018, Varga said.

AMBULANCE SERVICE: NUMBER OF TEST SAMPLES TRIPLES

The number of novel coronavirus test samples taken by the ambulance services has tripled in recent days, the director of national ambulance

service OMSZ said. The ambulances aim to visit everyone with symptoms or people who had been in close contact with infected persons within 24-48 hours, Gábor Csató told public radio Kossuth. Ambulance staff wearing protective clothing take nasal and throat swab samples and transport them to a laboratory, he added. Additional patient transport organisations that receive public finances have also been involved in the work, similarly to the situation during the spring wave of the epidemic, he said. Csató said ambulance staff in direct contact with infected persons have been successfully isolated, with merely 30 of the over 4,500 staff members contracting the virus since Jan. 30.

OLAF CLOSES FIVE EU FUNDING PROBES IN HUNGARY IN 2019

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) said it concluded five investigations into the use of European Union funds in Hungary last year in an annual report released on Thursday. OLAF said it closed two of the probes with recommendations, without going into further detail. The office's recommendations related to irregularities detected in the areas of European Structural and Investment Funds and agriculture in 2015-2019 impacted 3.93% of payments, according to the report. It said the indictment rate for actions taken

by Hungarian judicial authorities following OLAF's recommendations issued in 2015-2019 came to 47%.

The group of Fidesz-KDNP MEPs said in a statement on Thursday that OLAF's probes during the period covered by the report had included the investigation of the number 4 metro project, which they called the "most serious corruption scandal" in Hungarian history, as well as other graft before 2010, when the Fidesz-KDNP government came to power. The MEPs placed the blame for the 3.93% ratio in the report squarely on the metro 4 project and other cases of corruption that took place before 2010.

HUNGARY AGAIN FREE OF BIRD FLU

Hungary has regained its status as a bird flu-free country on Sept. 8 based on the specification of the World Organisation for Animal Health, Hungarian food safety authority Nebih said. After the extension of the status to the whole country, markets of non-EU countries may be reopened for shipments of live poultry and poultry products from Hungary. From Sept. 14 compulsory pre-shipment screening will be scrapped but in order to avoid another outbreak, the repopulation of poultry farms can still only take place under strict controls. Poultry still need to be fed and watered indoors to reduce the risk of infection from wild birds, Nebih noted.

Bird flu was detected in Hungary in March and the last territorial restrictions were lifted on July 10.

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AUTHORITY PARTNERS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL FOUNDATION KBKA

Hungary's Public Procurement Authority has signed a cooperation agreement with the Blue Planet Climate Protection Foundation (KBKA) in the interest of promoting sustainable, environmentally friendly and innovative public procurements, the foundation told MTI. The parties will consult on regulations and legal practices to achieve more sustainable, green and innovative procurements. The agreement was signed by Public Procurement Authority chairman László Kovács and KBKA director Nándor Csepreghy. The Blue Planet Climate Protection Foundation was established by President János Áder to fight against climate change and promote environmental sustainability.

ELECTION CTTEE REJECTS REFERENDUM BID ON PROTECTIVE MEASURES

The National Election Committee (NVB) on Thursday rejected a submission by a private individual on holding a referendum on protective measures against coronavirus. The petitioner had intended to ask citizens whether they agree that the government

should not have a right to declare a state of emergency over the pandemic as it cannot be considered a disaster "endangering life and property" under the constitution. The NVB rejected the question on the ground that the matter did not fall within parliament's jurisdiction and was aimed at amending the constitution. A second question was aimed at writing into law that making the exercise of certain rights conditional on wearing a face mask constituted a crime against humanity, while a third called for a law declaring that "making a genetically modified nucleic acid-based vaccine" mandatory also amounted to a crime against humanity.

The NVB's decisions are not legally binding and can be appealed at the Kuria, Hungary's supreme court, within 15 days.

TWENTY-SIX SYRIAN BORDER VIOLATORS FOUND IN SLOVAK VAN

Twenty-six Syrians, including six women and ten children, were found travelling in a closed van with Slovak licence plates stopped on the M1 motorway near Komárom in northern Hungary, police said. A car, also with Slovak licence plates, was driving ahead of the van to keep surveillance. The border violators were apprehended and after being interviewed, they will be escorted back to the border. Proceedings have been launched against the drivers for alleged human smuggling, police said.