

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Szibetváry

Budapest Wine Festival in the Castle District

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Zsigmond Vilmos Film Festival award ceremony**

**Coronavirus updates**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: VIRUS MUST NOT PARALYSE HUNGARY

The government's survey on the first lessons learnt from the novel coronavirus epidemic showed that "Hungary must function and the virus must not be allowed to paralyse the country", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview.

the first wave of the epidemic, but at the same time it wants to protect the elderly, he said. "The aim isn't for everyone to stay at home and the country to come to a halt, but to protect Hungary's ability to function," he added. The entire population of Hungary "passed the test well" in the first wave of the epidemic, with people "demonstrating discipline ... and responsibility", Orbán said. "I can call it national cooperation." He said there were several differences between the first and second waves, but one commonality was that the virus threatened the elderly the most and elderly care homes were especially vulnerable, he said. The government will introduce a series of epidemic-related measures and steps to boost economic growth in the coming weeks, he said. The operative board will meet on Saturday early morning and the economic cabinet will also meet later in the morning, he added. Orbán said he would meet heads of government of the Visegrad Group to discuss coordination concerning the pandemic.

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## **ORBÁN: BLANKET RESTRICTIONS NOT PLANNED IN SCHOOLS**

The prime minister said blanket restrictions in education were not planned and schools would not be closed down. Instead, attempts would be made to isolate the infected, he said, adding that individual schools would only be closed down if isolating classes failed. Even then, he said, supervision of non-infected children will be provided in order to allow parents to carry on with their lives. Orbán confirmed that elderly care homes and hospitals have been closed to visitors in order to protect the elderly and bans on visits would be enforced even by police if necessary. He said rules on wearing masks may be expanded if necessary and temperature checks will be introduced at school entrances. Further, everyone will be eligible for a flu vaccination free of charge, he said, adding that he was planning to introduce centrally regulated prices for coronavirus tests in the near future.

Domestic tourism performed better this year than ever before thanks to the government's related measures, he said, though tourism in Budapest, which relies on foreign visitors, collapsed. He said that for this reason the city's leadership should make use of 50-60 billion forints (EUR 140-168m) out of over 100 billion forints of savings that the previous mayor, István Tarlós, racked up, he added.

He asked Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony to carry out his tasks "with due seriousness" instead of "writing politically motivated letters". "Let's stay away from experimenting. This is not like painting cycle lanes on roads: either they work or they don't," Orbán said, referring to new bicycle lanes in Budapest.

On the subject of border closures, the prime minister said that "Brussels bureaucrats" at first had reacted nervously to Hungary's partial closure of its borders. But in the end, he added, they would, "as usual", follow Hungary's example.

Orbán insisted that central Europe would be a safe zone within an otherwise troubled Europe, and Slovaks, Czechs and Poles would be able to move about and live together. The prime minister related how he had been in his kitchen on Thursday evening when President Donald Trump phoned him. He said they spoke at length about virus control measures, the presidential election and cooperation between the US and Hungary. Orbán said Trump had a close and almost friendly relationship with the leaders of eastern European countries, adding that what the president represented "is good for central Europe". The prime minister also said he was rooting for Trump in the US presidential election.

Meanwhile, Orbán said that were it not for the pandemic, Europe-China relations would be among the "top hits" of politics since, with the world in transition, "the United States is no

longer sitting alone on its throne" and the geopolitical situation was now more complex. Europe, he added, did not want to be trapped between the US and China.

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## **ONE DIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 718 IN HUNGARY**

One Covid-19 patient who was elderly and suffering from underlying illnesses has died, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 718 to 10,909 over the past 24 hours, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 631, and 4,014 people have made a recovery.

There are 6,264 active infections and 259 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 12 on ventilators. Altogether 25,117 people are in official home quarantine and 517,222 tests have been carried out.

Most infections have been registered in Budapest (4,735), followed by Pest County (1,568) and the counties of Fejér (630), Hajdú-Bihar (410), Komárom-Esztergom (407) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (375). Békés County has the fewest infections (68).

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## **GULYÁS: CONDITIONS SET FOR PROTECTION AGAINST EPIDEMIC**

The conditions are in place in Hungary for effective protection efforts against the novel coronavirus epidemic, the head of the Prime Minister's Office

said. Capacity is sufficient in terms of available hospital beds and ventilators, and there are reliable supplies of masks, gloves and other protective equipment, Gergely Gulyás told a regular press briefing. He said the government considered the protection of people's lives the top priority. The number of new infections is not the most important indicator, he said, adding that Hungary's position, however, was good in European comparison. The number of new infections is at a record high today but there has been no noteworthy increase in the number of deaths, he said. This suggests that the virus is less powerful than it was in the spring, he added.

He also said that an assessment of the results of the latest National Consultation showed that people considered it important to carry on with everyday life, protecting jobs and maintaining normal classroom education. "Hungary must continue to function while making every effort to protect people's lives," he said. The aim is not only to protect people's health but also to maintain the operation of creches, kindergartens and schools, he added.

"Protection was successful against the first wave of the epidemic," he said. "Everybody agreed in the summer that the greatest threat was importing the virus from abroad. This is why the borders were closed, and strict controls will be maintained in the future," he added.

Hungary has overcome the first wave of the epidemic with the lowest loss

among EU member states in terms of employment figures, he said. The unemployment rate was 4.7% in Hungary in June, as against a European Union average of 7.7%, he added. A total of 4.46 million people held jobs in July, Gulyás said.

Regarding a UEFA Super Cup match scheduled to be held in Hungary before spectators on Sept. 24, Gulyás said the UEFA guidelines did not make it obligatory for Hungarian spectators to be tested. He added that he did not think the event presented a danger of catching the virus. On the topic of the protection of teachers against the coronavirus, Gulyás said the school operator Klebelsberg Centre should exempt teachers above the age of 65 from teaching during the pandemic. Those quarantined for having been in contact with infected students should be tested, he said.

Commenting on the leadership change at Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts and the ensuing demonstrations, Gulyás said the point of reforming higher education was to remove government influence from the sector. "We are not actors but passive spectators of the events," he said. Hopefully, he added, the university's new leadership and its students would start talks and teaching would resume soon. That is in the interest of all parties, "except for anyone who wants to create political hysteria at home and around the world." He praised the new supervisors of the university's foundation as the "topmost

professionals in the country" and said they should have the opportunity to prove their stewardship.

Regarding peace negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, Gulyás called the EU's common foreign policy "extremely weak". The EU could have contributed to brokering a peace in the region but let the US take the lead there, he said. "The EU had done the absolute minimum in the region until Olivér Várhelyi was appointed commissioner of enlargement," he said.

### **KARÁCSONY: BUDAPEST LEADERSHIP TRIED TO ESTABLISH CORONA COOPERATION WITH AUTHORITIES IN FEB**

Budapest's leadership, at the end of February, tried to establish a working relationship with the government's operative board in charge of coronavirus policy, but to no avail, the city's mayor, Gergely Karácsony, said on Facebook.

The mayor also said Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had failed to respond to his proposal regarding mass coronavirus testing free of charge. He added that Orbán's advice that the Budapest leadership should make contact with the government's operative board was "all well and good", but Budapest's own operative board had already initiated contact, only to receive the reply that: "No tasks have been elaborated at municipal level ... so far; if this happens, we will inform you immediately."

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH LAOS COUNTERPART**

Hungary and Laos have agreed to launch tied aid schemes helping Hungarian companies invest some 100 million US dollars in Laos, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with his Laotian counterpart, Saleumxay Kommasith. The investments involve building hospitals, developing Laos's national statistical system, and digitizing postal services, Szijjártó told a joint press conference in Vientiane.

Hungary will also contribute to the training of flood protection experts in the region most often hit by floods, he said. Hungarian companies are already playing an important role in Laotian agriculture, water management, and the development of electronic public services, Szijjártó noted. Currently investments to the tune of 160 million dollars are under way in the country: Hungarian firms are building animal breeding farms in projects worth 35 million US dollars, modernising the capital's sewage system with an investment of 100 million dollars and developing the population registry system for 25 million, he said.

Szijjártó said the aim was to help as many Hungarian companies as possible gain access to market opportunities in Laos. Eximbank is financing Hungarian companies' investments in Laos, and an agreement has been signed on starting

investment protection talks, he said, adding that Hungary is opening a consular office in Vientian today. Another important link between the two countries is a bilateral scholarship agreement allowing 100 Laotian students to study in Hungary each year. It was also agreed on Friday that Hungary will welcome students from Laos for farming and environmental protection studies, he added.

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## **SOCIALIST MEP CALLS ON GOVT TO SUPPORT TOURISM SECTOR**

The coronavirus epidemic has brought great hardship for the 400,000-500,000 Hungarians working in the tourism sector, Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi said, and called on the government to do more to support the sector. Ujhelyi, a deputy head of the European Parliament's committee on transport and tourism, said the second wave of the epidemic boded "a dire autumn and a hopeless winter" for those in the industry, leaving it virtually without revenue for the entire year.

Referring to a demonstration of the sector's workers on Friday in Budapest, Ujhelyi said the tourism sector had never before turned to the government asking to shield it from collapse. He pledged his support to the demonstrators and called on the government to "listen to the comments of the professionals speaking there". Ujhelyi called on the government and the EU to provide immediate aid to the sector, and

for a permanent European tourism fund as well as a common European protocol regarding border closures and testing. The government has sufficient EU funds to pay salary supplements to the sector's employees next year, Ujhelyi said.

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## **FINANCE MINISTER: BOOSTING COMPETITIVENESS KEY IN EU CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

Boosting competitiveness and investments is key to handling the crisis in the European Union and increasing the bloc's economic weight, Hungarian Finance Minister Mihály Varga told a meeting of EU finance ministers on the use of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, a part of its 750 billion euro recovery programme to offset the damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Varga said the package should close the economic gap between member states. Funds should be distributed flexibly and tailored to the needs of EU member states, he said. Funds should indeed be spent on promoting the transition to the green and digital economies, but Hungary, for example, also wants to spend money on infrastructure development so it can catch up with its European peers, he said. Regarding member states' own resources to finance the EU budget, Varga said the system should be proportionate and take into account their respective economic weight. Also, national budgets must not be burdened unduly and tax

sovereignty should be respected, he said. The finance ministry noted in its statement that the EU has agreed on its 1,074 billion euro multiannual financial framework in July, along with the recovery package to protect the bloc's economy against the effects of the pandemic.

### **INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT DOWN 8.1% YY IN JULY**

Hungarian industrial output dropped by an annual 8.1% in July, according to unadjusted data, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday in a second reading of the data. Based on working day-adjusted data, output in July fell by an annual 7.7%. Output of Hungary's automotive sector, an engine of industrial growth under normal circumstances, fell by an annual 13.2% in July, outpacing the 12.9% decline in June. The automotive sector accounted for 29% of manufacturing sector output in July. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment, which made up 12% of manufacturing sector output, rose by an annual 2.3%. Output of

food, drink, and tobacco companies eased by 0.3%, after edging up in the previous month.

### **PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE: HUNGARY PROSECUTES OLAF CASES ABOVE EU AVERAGE**

Hungary prosecutes 47% of the cases investigated by the European Union's anti-fraud body OLAF, far above the European Union average of 39%, the Public Prosecutor's Office said. In the body's 2019 report, OLAF said the body's recommendations directed at Hungary had fallen from ten in 2015 and 2016, to six in 2017, 4 in 2018 and 3 in 2019. Several of the recommended cases were already being investigated at the time of the recommendation, the office said.

### **NEW HUNGARIAN SATELLITE PRESENTED AT ROME RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

A new Hungarian satellite developed by the Budapest University of

Technology and Economics with financing from the Foreign Ministry has been completed and presented at an Italian Space Agency (ASI) research institute in Rome, Hungarian ambassador to Italy Ádám Zoltán Kovács said. The Hungarian satellite named SMOG-1 will be loaded into the Italian-developed Unisat-7 satellite's launch facility, Kovács said. The main mission of the new satellite is to measure electromagnetic smog and it will also gauge the electronic effects of particles originating from the sun. It is planned to be put into orbit in November, together with a CAS500-1 South Korean satellite, with the help of a Soyuz-2 carrier rocket from Baikonur, and it will be positioned 500 km from Earth, he added. The SMOG-1 was presented at the Rome-based G.A.U.S.S. research institute, a co-institute of ASI and the La Sapienza University of Rome, Kovács said. The Budapest university has already developed several similar satellites, and once SMOG-1 is orbiting Earth, there will be three Hungarian satellites operating in space, he added.