

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

Models at the 5th Budapest Central European Fashion Week

UPCOMING EVENTS

Foreign Minister Szijjártó holds talks with UK Tory MP Liam Fox

Coronavirus updates

Science academy holds conference on controversial issues of Horthy era

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: HUNGARY MUST FUNCTION

The government is working to ensure that Hungary is able to function, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public broadcaster M1 on Saturday evening, asking the public to observe coronavirus-related measures.

Referring to the government's "National Consultation" survey, Orbán said that respondents indicated a common wish that the government, the prime minister, the health-care system and economic policymakers should ensure that Hungary continues functioning and that they should prevent the epidemic from paralysing the country. Orbán said he was not as worried as during the first wave of the epidemic, because "we now know exactly what we are facing" and the country has all the equipment needed for defence against the virus.

"I am not alone in this fight, but together with 1.8 million people," Orbán said, and thanked the survey's respondents. The prime minister said that the number of new infections had been record high for the previous two days, adding that that number was expected to further increase. He noted, however, that during the second wave it was the number of deaths rather than new infections that should be in the focus. "The success of prevention could now be measured by the number of lives saved versus fatalities," he said.

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ORBÁN: SECOND WAVE OF EPIDEMIC CALLS FOR DIFFERENT STRATEGY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a television interview on Saturday that the second wave of the novel coronavirus epidemic called for a different strategy, but added that the country has gained experiences from the first wave and hospitals, as well as health equipment producers were prepared. Based on results of the “National Consultation” survey, the government knows “what people expect us to do and that gives us calm,” Orbán said. The government has a strategy to save lives and keep the country going at the same time, he said, adding that “flexibility, an ability to take action and rapid reactions” were crucial. The government wants to avoid curfews or re-introducing digital education, Orbán said, insisting that “everything should go on in its own order, whether it is jobs, schools, and even sports, culture, and art”. Tourism and catering should be continued, too, he said, but added that “not as if nothing had happened, but their operations must be maintained”.

“Where one must wear a mask, everybody should wear them and keep a distance, and if they feel ill, they should avoid others.” Under decisions approved on Saturday, if a customer is found without a mask in a shop, both the customer and the shop will be fined, Orbán said, adding that on the third such instance the shop could

be closed. “The state is not flexing its muscles ... but if the rules are not observed they will be enforced,” he said.

Through their answers in the survey parents indicated a clear wish that schools should open in September in the traditional way, Orbán said. “If there is trouble”, classes will be reorganised and if isolation is needed, classes, rather than the whole school, will be sent home, he added, noting that schools had been closed down in spring to ease the pressure on the health-care system. “As long as fatalities are not rising, and it seems we are able to save the elderly, school closures will not be on the agenda,” the prime minister said.

Orbán said the government was prepared to introduce certain restrictive measures, adding, however, that these would not be about “restricting everyday life” but rather rules such as potentially mandating bars and clubs to close at 11pm and enforcing mask-wearing in shops and on public transport. The government’s measures saved the lives of tens of thousands of elderly citizens in the spring and “we will not risk a single life this time, either, but the country must function,” Orbán said. The prime minister said hospitals had more than 10,000 beds available to treat coronavirus patients and there was a sufficient number of doctors and nurses and capacity was also sufficient in terms of protective gear and ventilators. The Hungarian health-care sector is capable of protecting “all Hungarian lives”, he said.

Orbán also announced that Katalin Novák, the state secretary for family and youth affairs, will be appointed minister without portfolio for family affairs. The government is creating the position in order to devote close attention to and to improve the living standards of families, Orbán said, adding that Novák will take up the post on Oct. 1.

Orbán said that his government had made a commitment to create as many jobs as were lost to the virus. The indicators show that the government has been true to its word, he said, adding that employment figures were projected to grow for the remainder of the year. The government has spent a lot of money and energy on launching new investments, Orbán said. “Hungarian businesses haven’t weakened, but have been strengthened.”

He said the one sector that was “facing serious problems” was the tourism industry. The industry in Budapest had relied almost entirely on foreign visitors “and now tourism has come to a halt,” he said. The business model that Budapest hotels and restaurants had relied on, namely that foreign tourists had accounted for more than 90% of guest nights, will not be sustainable this year or the next, the prime minister said. Budapest needs to transition to a new business model and taxi drivers, hotels and the catering and tourism sectors need separate government aid, he said. “The government helps everyone,” Orbán said, noting that it had reduced



contributions, "but a special scheme is needed". He said it was "good news" that the metropolitan council had more than 100 billion forints (EUR 279.6m) to spend on these schemes.

The prime minister said that if everyone did their job in a calm manner and observed the rules, the elderly would be protected and families would not see their living standards fall.

FOUR DIE, REGISTERED INFECTIONS UP 484 IN HUNGARY

Four Covid-19 patients, all with underlying illnesses, have died, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 484 to 12,309 over the past 24 hours, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Sunday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 637, and 4,069 people have made a recovery. There are 7,603 active infections and 282 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 16 on ventilators. Altogether 26,531 people are in official home quarantine and 537,897 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 (5,330), followed by Pest County (1,752) and the counties of

Fejér (697), Komárom-Esztergom (454), Hajdú-Bihar (460) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (394). Békés County has the fewest infections (76).

ORBÁN: CENTRAL EUROPE ECONOMY TO BE MAINTAINED

The Visegrad Group has a vested interest in keeping central Europe's economy going while curbing the spread of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after a meeting with his Visegrad Group counterparts in Lublin, in southern Poland, on Friday. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are working to set up a coordination mechanism that will enable by-the-hour cooperation among them on epidemic-related matters, Orbán said. He said that the second wave of the pandemic seemed "especially aggressive" with increasing numbers globally, and insisted that the speed with which governments could respond to new developments could be of crucial importance in the next few months. Despite the epidemic, the Visegrad countries must not lose their enthusiasm to exploit their economic potential.

Concerning the unrest in Belarus following the August election, Orbán said that Hungary supports Poland's proposal to develop the economic leg of a strategic cooperation. "Democracy is important, and so are human rights, but demanding them will not be enough ... a strategic approach will be necessary," he said. He also suggested that in a few weeks' time

a military policy component of that approach could be developed, but noted that it would require a meeting of the European Council, with the issue stretching beyond the scope of the Visegrad Group.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR FREE CORONAVIRUS TESTING

The opposition Socialists have asked Hungary's chief medical officer to issue an immediate order for social sector workers, retirement home residents and Hungarian employees in general to be tested en masse for coronavirus free of charge. The number of active infections in Hungary is soaring, Lajos Korózs, the head of parliament's welfare committee, told an online press conference on Saturday, noting that more than 700 new cases were registered on Friday while the highest number of daily cases in the spring was 210. Health authorities are capable of carrying out up to 10,000 tests a day, so "the only responsible decision" is to introduce mass free testing immediately, Korózs said.

He noted that employees who test positive for the virus are allowed to return to work after presenting two negative tests. "Hungarian people can't afford to spend tens, or in the cases of families, hundreds of thousands of forints on getting tested, nor will they tolerate two weeks in quarantine," he added.

Korózs said that hopefully the chief medical officer would not "shut the door on health institutions to keep the virus inside, as she did in the spring".

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY BACKS MIDDLE EAST PEACE EFFORTS

Hungary continues to support efforts to bring about peace in the Middle East and will continue to advocate a fair approach to countries of the region by international organisations, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said over the weekend in connection with Bahrain's move to normalise its ties with Israel.

Szijjártó called it "good news" that Bahrain has joined the United Arab Emirates in agreeing to normalise its diplomatic relations with Israel. Since the White House drafted its plan for stabilising the region, this is the second such development, demonstrating that the most recent American peace plan "is the best one yet" with the best chance of establishing peace in the Middle East, the minister said. Szijjártó praised US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu along with his UAE and Bahraini counterparts for their efforts in finalising the agreements to normalise diplomatic ties.

He said it was an "honour" that Hungary has received a ministerial-level invitation for the signing of the agreement to be held in the White House garden next Tuesday.

FINANCE MINISTER ATTENDS INAUGURATION OF NEW REFORMED CHURCH IN NYÍREGYHÁZA

Finance Minister Mihály Varga attended the inauguration of a new Reformed

church in Nyíregyháza-Örökösöd, in north-eastern Hungary, over the weekend. In his address at the ceremony, the minister said that "our Christian culture is an asset which helps the nation survive, serves as a basis for our freedom and a resource for our renewal". The government considers the churches as its "natural allies" that are "crucial for Hungary's intellectual and spiritual renewal", he added. The government has contributed a grant of 450 million forints (EUR 1.3m) to the construction, which cost a total of 700 million forints.

SZIJJÁRTÓ OPENS CONSULATE IN LAOS

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó opened a consulate in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, on Friday. At the opening event, Szijjártó said his official visit to Laos was to prepare Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's visit to the country, which is slated for November. Hungary decided to open towards the East ten years ago, Szijjártó said. "We realised the East's weight is going to grow in coming years ... Looking at the numbers, I have to say the Hungarian government was right," he said.

During his visit, Szijjártó met his Laotian counterpart, Saleumxay Kommasith, and Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith.

RULING PARTIES CALL ON BUDAPEST MAYOR TO SET UP TOURISM FUND

The Budapest chapter of the ruling Fidesz-KDNP parties on Friday called

on Mayor Gergely Karácsony to reserve funds worth 50 billion forints (EUR 139.9m) to support those working in tourism in view of the coronavirus epidemic. Group leader Zsolt Láng told MTI that entrepreneurs and employees in the sector were especially impacted in the capital, and noted the vital importance of maintaining economic competitiveness.

OPPOSITION PÁRBESZÉD RE- ELECTS SZABÓ, KARÁCSONY AS CO-LEADERS

Tímea Szabó and Gergely Karácsony were both re-elected for another two years as the liberal opposition Párbeszéd party's co-leaders at a party congress on Sunday. Party members also voted to appoint members of Párbeszéd's board, which was expanded from seven to nine members. The party's co-leaders are members of the board by default.

At a press conference held on the sidelines of the event Karácsony said that the congress had set up a team to prepare the party for the 2022 parliamentary elections. He highlighted the importance of fielding joint individual candidates, and noted that all opposition parties were in consensus to do so in all 106 individual constituencies nationwide. Karácsony added that his party maintained its position that candidates should be selected in a primary. On another subject, Karácsony said that the introduction of a universal basic income could be "an important

pillar for Hungary in the future” and added that Párbeszéd would work to convince its political partners to support that proposal.

Szabó said that over 80% of Hungarian voters, including supporters of ruling Fidesz, would welcome the introduction of a UBI, adding that it would help each adult with “at least” 100,000 forints (EUR 280) a month, while minors would be ensured half of that amount. She added that Párbeszéd would increase the net monthly average wage to 166,000 forints.

JOBBIK CALLS FOR EXTENSION OF DEBT SERVICE MORATORIUM

The opposition Jobbik demands that the government extend the current debt service moratorium, introduced in response to the economic impact of the coronavirus epidemic in the spring, by at least one year and that it be made applicable for both retail and corporate

loans, the party’s deputy leader said in Tiszaújváros, in north-eastern Hungary. Jobbik wants the moratorium, which would expire on December 31, “to help individuals and companies in January, too, and without having to pay an interest even on a compound interest,” Dániel Z Kárpát said. He also suggested that a moratorium on evictions of troubled mortgage holders should be in force until the end of the coronavirus crisis. Z Kárpát insisted that the government was unable to handle a deepening economic crisis and it could not provide jobs to “masses of people becoming unemployed”.

ATTILA MIHÁLY NAGY NOMINATED TO HEAD ELECTION OFFICE

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has nominated Attila Mihály Nagy, currently a deputy state secretary at the justice ministry, to the post of National Election Office (NVI) head, the PM’s press chief told MTI. Nagy is to

replace Ilona Pálffy, who resigned from the post on August 31. The official will be appointed by President János Áder, and is expected to take up his post on September 15.

FORMER SOCIALIST DEFENCE MINISTER KELETI DIES AGED 74

György Keleti, minister of defence from 1994 to 1998, has died at the age of 74 after a long illness, his widow told MTI. Born in 1946 in Czechoslovakia’s Lučenec (Losonc), Keleti attended the Máté Zalka Military Technical College and the Miklós Zrínyi Military Academy and started working at the Ministry of Defence in 1977. He was the ministry’s spokesman between 1989 and 1992 before going on to serve as minister in Gyula Horn’s government. Keleti was a Socialist lawmaker from 1992 to 2010 and served several terms as the head and deputy head of parliament’s national security and defence committees.