

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Márton Mónus

Train disinfected at Budapest's Keleti railway station

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Foreign minister visits Washington, DC**

**Coronavirus updates**

## TOP STORY

### SZIJJÁRTÓ TO ATTEND WHITE HOUSE SIGNING

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó will be the only European Union minister to attend in the signing of Israel's agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on normalising diplomatic ties in the White House next Tuesday.

Szijjártó, who will be attending the ceremony at the invitation of US President Donald Trump, will also take part in several bilateral talks while in Washington, DC, including with the president's senior advisor, Jared Kushner, the ministry's press chief told MTI.

Meanwhile, Hungary and its economy have "every chance of being a winner in the new emerging global economy", the foreign minister said after talks with Liam Fox, Britain's former secretary of state for international trade, in Budapest. Szijjártó said that a new economic system must dismantle restrictions and ensure free and fair trade, allowing Hungarian businesses to compete without constraints. Szijjártó endorsed Fox in his bid to head the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO should have a leader who has filled a top position in his home country and gained sufficient experience in politics, he said, adding that Fox fitted the bill.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ TO MEET UKRAINIAN COUNTERPART ON SEPT 23**

Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó said he is scheduled to meet Dmytro Kuleba, his Ukrainian counterpart, in Ukraine on Sept. 23. Szijjártó said on Facebook that progress should be made in moving talks aimed at improving Ukrainian-Hungarian relations ahead “from a stalemate”, and he agreed with Kuleba by the phone to meet in Uzhhorod next Wednesday. After their talks, the two ministers will jointly open the school year at the Rákoczi Ferenc Hungarian College in Berehove, Szijjártó said.

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## **OVER 1,600 SOCIAL CARE HOMES UNDER LOCKDOWN NATIONWIDE**

Hungary’s nationwide ban on visits to social care homes has affected some 1,600 facilities, Attila Fülöp, state secretary at the human resources ministry, told public Kossuth Rádió. Under the ban, ordered by the chief medical officer on September 8, some 100,000 elderly or disabled people, as well as psychiatric patients living in those homes are not permitted to leave the premises, Fülöp said. He said that only 3% of the 1,600 facilities had reported coronavirus infections up until September 1 and welcomed that “the social services sector has passed the test”. He noted, however, that

“Budapest stands out” with 30 homes where residents had contracted the virus, and said that “two-thirds of the fatalities are linked to facilities in Budapest; in those homes the services were not adequate and rules were violated on multiple occasions”.

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## **FIVE DIE, REGISTERED INFECTIONS UP 844 IN HUNGARY**

Five Covid-19 patients, all elderly with underlying illnesses, died over the past day, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 844 to 13,153, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said on Monday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 642, and 4,117 people have made a recovery. There are 8,394 active infections and 287 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 16 on ventilators. Altogether 26,668 people are in official home quarantine and 549,211 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 (5,640), followed by Pest County (1,852) and the counties of Fejér (748), Komárom-Esztergom (469), Hajdú-Bihar (491) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (442). Békés County has the fewest infections (85).

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## **STATE TREASURY: BUDAPEST MUNICIPALITY OWNS HUF 135 BN IN STATE BONDS**

The Budapest municipality owns 135 billion forints (EUR 377.2m) in bonds and more than 27 billion in cash, according to the city council’s balance sheet report submitted on July 20, the Hungarian State Treasury said. In an interview to public current affairs channel M1 on Saturday, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called on the municipality to come to the aid of employees of the hospitality sector, which has been badly hit by the coronavirus epidemic. “It is good news” that the city has some 100 billion forints at its disposal to use as it sees fit, Orbán said. Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony responded on Facebook on Sunday, saying the capital did not have money to take over the responsibilities of the central government. He insisted that the city was “150 billion forints in the red”, and that alongside the contraction caused by the coronavirus epidemic, the government’s austerity measures had eroded the municipality’s resources. Karácsony called on the government to allocate half of the funding from the European Union’s recovery package to local governments, in proportion to their population.

Meanwhile, leaders of the opposition Socialists and Párbeszéd said that helping out the tourism sector hit by the novel coronavirus epidemic was the job of the state

and 50 billion forints support should be paid to businesses in the sector from the national crisis management fund. Karácsony, who was re-elected as co-leader of Párbeszéd last weekend, told an online press conference broadcast on the Socialists' Facebook page that a proposal by the Fidesz-Christian Democrats group in Budapest for the municipal council to pay for this task had been 'hypocritical'. In addition to the extra costs incurred, the coronavirus epidemic also resulted in significant funding drawn away from the municipal council, which, he added, lacked the resources to take over state tasks. Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth said the government was treating businesses in Budapest like "stepchildren". He called on the government to support Hungarians SMEs instead of lining the pockets of oligarchs.

**FÜRJES: COOPERATION BETWEEN CITY LEADERS, CENTRAL GOVT IN RESIDENTS' INTEREST**

The state secretary in charge of the development of Budapest and its agglomeration said it was in the interest of the capital's residents that the city's leaders and the government should be working together. Balázs Fürjes said in an interview published in the online edition of daily Magyar Nemzet that he proposed continued dialogue and holding the next meeting of the municipal public

development council in early October the latest.

He said transport was the most burning topic for discussion. "It would also be good to receive information from the municipal council ... regarding uncertainties surrounding Chain Bridge and the third metro line". "The government will be happy to give a briefing on developments concerning the HÉV suburban railways and the role of railway transport in the capital's transport system," he added. Fürjes said he hoped the issue of new cycle lanes in Budapest could also be addressed, adding that "the persecution of drivers" should be stopped. He said Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony had unexpectedly cancelled a meeting of the council in June, a day before it was supposed to take place, without proposing a new date. Fürjes also said dialogue between the city leaders and members of the public was scant, despite Karacsony's campaign promise to seek Budapest residents' opinions before making important decisions. "It's important for City Hall to understand that it's not the job of politicians to decide for the people what's good for them ... and to force them change their way of life," Fürjes said. Commenting on the fact that many see Karácsony primarily as an opposition leader, Fürjes said: "It's important that the work of the city leader should not be driven by the wish for revenge or a hunger for power".

**JUSTICE MINISTER: GOVT PURSUING DIALOGUE ON HOW TO GUARANTEE CITIZENS' FREEDOMS IN THE DIGITAL DOMAIN**

Following a meeting of the Hungarian justice ministry's Digital Freedom Committee, Justice Minister Judit Varga noted that dialogue between the state and market players on the issue of ensuring freedom of speech and legal safety on digital platforms is ongoing, and she said the practices of social media giants such as Facebook warranted scrutiny. Varga told MTI that the consultations had centred on ways to ensure that the right of Hungarian citizens to express their opinions on social media dominated by tech giants would not be violated. She noted that the ministry's consultation platform, which has operated since February, has provided a forum for discussions on how to guarantee legal safety for citizens online. Varga raised concerns about the financial firepower of tech giants and their "lack of transparency", including their "shady tax practices". These issues, in the context of citizens' rights, are on the policy dashboards of governments worldwide, she added. Legislators and law enforcers at national level have a responsibility to ensure the legal safety of their citizens, Varga said. Citizens have responded to surveys suggesting that currently transparency and accountability are key issues when it comes to using the online space, the minister said. Many

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people, she added, wanted to know on what legal basis “Facebook censors Hungarian citizens”. The ministry’s committee has turned to Facebook’s regional director seeking substantive answers on issues concerning transparency and neutrality, Varga said, adding that the same guarantees of the rule of law should apply to the space online as they do in the physical world.

**GKI: CONSUMER CONFIDENCE CONTINUES TO EDGE LOWER IN SEPT**

Economic research institute GKI’s gauge of consumer confidence slipped to -31.1 points in September from -29.6 points in August, falling for the second month in a row after three consecutive months of improvement following a pandemic plunge in April. In September, consumers’ assessments of their financial situation were slightly more positive than in August. This expectation has recovered 60% of ground lost in April. Their outlook for the economy as a whole was even more positive in August, reaching

a level about 75% higher than the nadir in April. However, pessimism increased again in September so this sub-index has now only recovered two-thirds of what was lost in April. Pessimism is strongest in concerns over unemployment, which climbed the most in April, and, after three months of improvement, negative sentiment rose slightly in August and at a faster rate in September. Households’ assessments of their future ability to make savings remained unchanged from the previous month. Inflation expectations continued to wane, but expectations of their ability to make big-ticket purchases deteriorated.

**SZEGED MEN’S HANDBALL TEAM IN QUARANTINE**

All players of the men’s handball team of MOL-Szeged, as well as staff members and their contacts, have been ordered into state quarantine after a positive coronavirus test result of “a person in the direct vicinity of the club”, the team’s website said. The measure is expected to prevent a Champions League match the team is

scheduled to play against Paris Saint-Germain from taking place in Szeged on Thursday, it added. The club said the testing of all those affected will be undertaken and all training sessions and other official events of the team members have been suspended. The club has informed the Hungarian handball federation, as well as the European organisation and the teams affected of the measures.

**THIRTY HUNGARIAN POLICEMEN DEPLOYED TO NORTH MACEDONIA**

Thirty Hungarian police officers left on Monday for North Macedonia to assist local authorities in border protection duties, the police said. The unit will work to prevent attempts to enter the country illegally and to arrest illegal migrants and people smugglers, the statement said. Hungarian police reinforcements in North Macedonia signal Hungary’s commitment to stopping illegal migration into Hungary and the EU, the statement said.

