

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/György Varga

The new Little Balaton Visitor Centre on the outskirts of Keszthely, in western Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Foreign Minister Szijjártó holds talks in Ukraine

TOP STORY

EPIDEMIC MEASURES 'IN LINE WITH INTL LAW'

The Hungarian government's measures taken during the first wave of the coronavirus epidemic were in line with international law and did not harm human rights or freedoms in any way, the foreign minister said.

Speaking by phone from Strasbourg after meeting leaders of the Council of Europe, Péter Szijjártó noted the "unprecedented attacks" on Hungary from international organisations and EU member states during the first wave of the epidemic, when the government was endowed with special powers to fight the spread of Covid-19. "All attacks have been proven to be unfair and based on lies," he said. "International organisations should aid protection efforts against the pandemic, or at least refrain from attacking countries working to protect their citizens and economy by taking extraordinary measures," Szijjártó said. Hungary expects to be free from such attacks while tackling the second wave of the pandemic, he said. Szijjártó said the Hungarian government was unwilling to bend to the expectations of international organisations or the international press. In the coming weeks and months, Hungary will carry on protecting the lives, health and jobs of the Hungarian people while making sure the country is functional, regardless of its repercussions in certain international organisations, he said.

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QUARANTINE FOR FOREIGN TRAVELLERS LOWERED TO 10 DAYS

Mandatory quarantine for travellers entering Hungary from abroad has been lowered to 10 days from 14 days, a member of the operative board responsible for handling the epidemic said. The amendment of the relevant government decree came into force on Monday, Róbert Kiss said. Kiss told an online press conference that apart from quarantine, foreign citizens must also show permission issued by the police before they are allowed into the country.

In the past 24 hours, 3,062 people have been ordered into self-quarantine, 774 of them upon entering across the border, Kiss said. Currently, 25,212 are in home quarantine, he said. Of those self-isolating, 1,823 have allowed the authorities to electronically control compliance with quarantine regulations, Kiss said, noting electronic verification eliminates the dangers associated with physical checks without affecting data management. On Monday, the authorities took action in 49 cases due to people neglecting to wear masks or wearing them incorrectly, he said. Twenty-two cases took place on public transport, while 27 were in shopping centres, he added.

EIGHT DIE, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 633 IN HUNGARY

Eight Covid-19 patients, all suffering from an underlying illness, have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 633 to 19,499, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 694, and 4,559 people have made a recovery. There are 14,246 active infections and 534 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 36 on ventilators. Altogether 25,212 people are in official home quarantine and 632,031 tests have been carried out. The website warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines and hygiene regulations. A cabinet meeting on September 16 decided to extend entry restrictions for travellers from abroad. In addition to shops and public transport, wearing a mask will be made mandatory in cinemas, theatres, health and social institutions and public offices, and clubs will have to close by 11pm to curb the spread of the virus. The operative body responsible for handling the epidemic response has so far ordered seven schools to revert to digital education. Fully 204 classes in otherwise operating schools have also been ordered to work from home, and 23 kindergartens and six schools have gone on emergency breaks, the website said. Most infections have

been registered in Budapest (7,883), followed by Pest County (2,679) and the counties of Fejér (945), Győr-Moson-Sopron (811), Hajdú-Bihar (803), Csongrád-Csanád (786) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (779). Békés County has the fewest infections (153).

NOVÁK: FAMILY POLICY AIMS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

The government aims to maintain and improve the quality of life of families, Katalin Novák, who was appointed minister of family affairs on Monday, said. Next year's budget allocates 2,500 billion forints (EUR 6.9bn), or 5% of GDP, to family affairs, Novák said. That is the largest proportion allocated to family affairs in any European Union member state, and two-and-a-half times the 2010 figure, she added. Thanks to the government's policy, the number of marriages has grown by 80% in the past decade, Novák said, adding that the number of divorces was at a 60-year low. The number of children born in January-July 2020 was up by 2,500 from the year before, Novák said. Regarding women's employment, the minister said the government offered various options to families. Mothers can stay at home for up to three years with their children if they so choose, she said. At the same time, the government has boosted the capacity of crèches and made family allowance available for grandparents to enable mothers to go back to work should they want to, she added.

MINISTRY: BRUSSELS TALKS ON REFORMING CAP ON TRACK

The German EU presidency wants the European Council's position on new Common Agricultural Policy rules to be adopted in October, and EU agriculture ministers discussed remaining contentious issues at a meeting in Brussels on Sept 21, the ministry of agriculture said. Minister of Agriculture István Nagy said after the meeting that the CAP budget should be sufficiently ambitious and new rules should be simple enough so they can work in practice. The statement noted that resources available for CAP were agreed by EU leaders in July. The proportion of Hungary's funding has been maintained, with more than 12 billion euros available to Hungarian agriculture in the next seven years. EU agriculture ministers will decide on policy measures at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 19-20 October. "In the course of the remaining tough negotiations, we will fight to maintain subsidies that are area-based and production-linked, and for investment funding to be upheld in the next financial cycle," the statement said.

Another contentious area is transitional national subsidies for sensitive sectors such as beef cattle, milking cows, milk and ewes, Nagy said. Most of the detailed rules requiring clarification in connection with the new aid distribution model are up for grabs, the statement said. Farmers must receive subsidies in

a timely manner each year, so new rules should favour simplicity, it added. Besides the Council, the European Parliament will also formulate its own position on CAP reform, signalling the final phase of CAP talks, the ministry noted.

GOVT PROPOSES BILL TO LAWMAKERS ON TIGHTENING RULES ON PAROLE

With a view to reinforcing protections for victims of violent crime and their relatives, the government has submitted a bill on tightening parole rules. In a debate of the bill in parliament, Pál Völner, the state secretary of the ministry of justice, said perpetrators of the most serious crimes, such as a deliberate attack on human life, should not be eligible for parole if sentenced to a fixed prison term.

CORONAVIRUS MAINLY ENDANGERS ECONOMY, SAY 70% OF HUNGARIANS

Fully 70% of Hungarians say the economy and jobs are most endangered by the coronavirus epidemic, while 27% are most concerned about people's health, according to a survey by the Századvég Institute. Altogether 60% of Hungarians are most worried about job losses in terms of the economic effects of the epidemic, while rising food prices and declining incomes are seen as the biggest problems by 14% and 10%,

respectively, the daily Magyar Nemzet said in its report on the survey.

Almost all respondents, 96%, agreed with the statement that the economy should be allowed to function and people should work with safety protocols in place. Fully 79% of respondents agree with reopening schools and kindergartens, and only 15% opposed the move, the survey found. Magyar Nemzet said there is a broad consensus regarding the government's measures to control the epidemic this autumn. Fully 92% of Hungarians were in favour of the ban on hospital visits and nursing homes, and the same proportion supported free influenza vaccinations. Fully 89% of the respondents approved of the rule on wearing masks indoors, and 85% supported temperature measurements at school gates. Two-thirds of respondents did not agree with the statement that "importance of the coronavirus is exaggerated", while 29% were of the view that "the virus does not pose a real threat to human health". Meanwhile, Hungarians have high hopes for a vaccine as the guarantee a return to normal life.

FIDESZ: PARLIAMENT'S EUROPEAN AFFAIRS CTTE ADOPTS RESOLUTION BACKING POLAND

Parliament's European affairs committee has adopted a resolution on showing solidarity with Poland, at the initiative of the ruling Fidesz party. Richárd Hörcsik, the (Fidesz)

chairman of the committee, told a press conference that the European Parliament had adopted a resolution on the Polish rule of law on Sept. 17 that “lacked objectivity and made false statements”. He accused its authors of being “ideologically motivated” and of politically blackmailing Poland. The EP, he added, had stepped beyond its remit and delved into matters that, according to the EU basic treaty, were the competences of EU member states. “Hungarian MPs find this political blackmail unacceptable and unworthy of democracy,” he said.

The resolution noted the close historical ties between Hungarians and Poles as well as the close cooperation between the parliaments and governments of the two countries. It states that powers that are not defined by the basic treaty as falling within the scope of the European Union should remain with the member states, including criminal law, justice, education and family law. Also, the protection of the rule of law is the responsibility of national institutions in upholding the constitution of member states, it states. The resolution calls on the Hungarian government to stand by Poland in the European Council and promote the swiftest possible conclusion of Article 7 procedure against it.

Balázs Hidvéghi, a (Fidesz) member of the European Parliament, told the same press conference that left-wing MEPs wanted to force EU member states to accept migrants as well as their “extremist ideology”.

HUNGARIANS, GERMANS TRUST EACH OTHER - NÉZŐPONT

Germans and Hungarians trust each other, with 80% willing to have the other national as a friend or relative, while 70% would accept them as a boss, a survey conducted by the Nézőpont Institute shows. Two-thirds of Germans had a positive view of Hungary, while approval of Germany has grown substantially among Hungarians since 2019, from 45% to 72%, Nézőpont said, explaining the large difference in terms of “the improvement of cooperation” between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Chancellor Angela Merkel, and “the failure of the mandatory migrant quota initiative”.

Nézőpont’s analysis of 8,750 articles published in the German media since 2016, however, showed that only 221 were sympathetic to the Hungarian government. Fully 3,757 attacked Hungary’s administration or depicted it one-sidedly, the survey said. Only 36% of German respondents thought Hungary’s media were allowed to criticise the government, and 23% said the Hungarian government protected the rights of national and ethnic minorities. On the other hand, 61% of Hungarians said German media could criticise the government and 57% said Germany was protective of minority rights, Nézőpont said.

Fully 33% of Germans and 60% of Hungarians thought bilateral ties were good, while 75% of Hungarians and 67% of Germans said they should

be further improved. According to 51% of Hungarians, the focus of cooperation should be on economic policy, while German respondents said cooperation should centre on migration and climate policy (48% and 37%, respectively). The survey was conducted with representative samples of 1,000 Germans and 1,000 Hungarians, with the cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Polgári Magyarországért Foundation.

NBH KNOCKS DOWN GDP FORECAST

The National Bank of Hungary (NBH) expects the economy to contract between 5.1% and 6.8% this year, forecasts from its latest quarterly Inflation Report show. The central bank had forecast GDP growth of between 0.3% and 2.0% in the previous report released late in June, a relatively optimistic projection that assumed a V-shaped rather than a swoosh-shaped recovery. The finance ministry expects GDP to fall by 5.1% this year. The NBH puts the average annual inflation rate for this year at between 3.5% and 3.6% in the fresh Inflation report, higher than the 3.2-3.3% range in the June report, but still within the +/- one-percentage-point tolerance band around the 3.0% mid-term inflation target. The central bank sees the economy bouncing back next year and forecasts GDP growth of between 4.4% and 6.8% for 2021 and in the 4.5-5.7% range for 2022. Its forecasts for inflation show CPI at 3.4-3.6% in 2021 and 3.0% in 2022.

HUNGARY CBANK KEEPS BASE RATE ON HOLD

Hungarian rate-setters kept the base rate on hold at 0.60% at a regular meeting. The Monetary Council also left the interest rate corridor unchanged, the National Bank of Hungary (NHH) said.

In a statement released after the meeting the Council said the 0.60% base rate "supports price stability, the preservation of financial stability and the recovery of economic growth in a sustainable manner". "The Council remains committed to maintaining price stability during the coronavirus pandemic and pays particular attention to the persistence of inflationary effects arising as a result of the economic recovery," the rate-setters said. "If warranted by a persistent change in the outlook for inflation, the Council will be ready to use the appropriate instruments," they added.

The Council said it decided to raise the allocation for the NBH's Bond Funding for Growth Scheme (BGS) from 450 billion forints to 750 billion forints (EUR 2.07bn). "The increased amount may help the Hungarian

corporate bond market continue to converge to European and regional averages," the policy makers said. The NBH launched the BGS more than a year ago to give impetus to Hungary's relatively small corporate bond market.

The Council noted they had decided at the previous policy meeting to raise weekly purchases of government bonds in the framework of a quantitative easing programme to 40 billion forints. They said the programme will be used "through a lasting market presence to the extent required", adding that the NBH will continue to purchase securities with long maturities.

HUNGARY JOINS EU MEDICAL EQUIPMENT STOCKPILE

Hungary, Denmark, Greece and Sweden have joined Germany and Romania in building up stocks of equipment for managing natural disasters and medical emergencies in the European Union, the European Commission said. The six countries making up the so-called rescEU medical equipment reserve are responsible for building up a stock

of protective gear such as protective masks, gowns, gloves and ventilators, the EC said in a statement. The distribution of the equipment is managed by the bloc's Emergency Response Coordination Centre with a view to ensuring that they go where they are needed most, the commission said.

SZABOLCS ÁGOSTHÁZY APPOINTED STATE SECRETARY FOR EU DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Szabolcs Ágostházy has been appointed state secretary in charge of European Union development projects, the innovation and technology ministry said. Ágostházy, who until now has served as chief of staff of the head of the Prime Minister's Office, will take up his post on Oct. 1, the ministry said in a statement. Ágostházy's tasks will include streamlining the application process for EU funding and accelerating the drawdown of funds with a view to boosting the competitiveness of Hungarian businesses and improving the living standards of families, it added.