

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamas Kovacs

Commemoration of 1849 martyrs in central Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

General assembly of Hungarian Art Academy

Coronavirus updates

National Election Committee meets

Stats office releases hotel occupancy figures for August 2020

TOP STORY

LAWMAKERS APPROVE MAJOR WAGE HIKE FOR DOCTORS

Parliament has approved a major wage hike for doctors, to be carried out in several steps starting next year.

The legislation submitted by head of the Prime Minister's Office Gergely Gulyás and Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler was approved unanimously, by 165 votes in favour. The law, which also contains provisions criminalising gratuities to doctors, was fast-tracked through parliament days after Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said he had accepted a proposal by the Chamber of Physicians.

The law sets the monthly pay for doctors in practice for a period of up to two years at 481,486 forints (EUR 1,335) from the start of next year. At the top of the pay scale, doctors in practice for 41 years or more will earn 1,666,040 forints a month. From January 1, 2022, the legislation raises the pay scale to a range of 619,053 forints to 2,142,051 forints. The range will increase a third time, from January 1, 2023, to 687,837 forints to 2,380,057 forints.

The law also criminalises gratuities offered as a bribe and sets a limit on the value of non-cash gifts from patients to doctors at 5% of the monthly minimum wage.

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ECJ: HUNGARIAN LAW ON HIGHER EDUCATION BREACHES EU LAW

Provisions in Hungary's law on higher education that affect how foreign universities operate in the country breach EU law, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled. Hungary's parliament amended the country's law on higher education in 2017, obliging foreign universities that issue their own degrees in Hungary to carry out educational activities in their home countries, while also making their operations dependent on a bilateral agreement between the Hungarian government and the country in which the universities are based. Later that year, the European Commission launched an infringement procedure against Hungary, saying the new regulations violated EU laws. In its ruling, the court said the regulations unnecessarily curbed the institutions' freedom of establishment and the free movement of services.

Justice Minister Judit Varga said in reaction to the ruling that "applying double standards is unacceptable", arguing that each university must observe effective regulations. Referring to the Central European University (CEU) founded by financier George Soros, which moved the bulk of its teaching to Vienna after the law was enacted, she said: "It is not possible to pass legislation which would benefit the Soros university more than Hungarian universities." Varga

added, however, that the Hungarian government would, as always, abide by the court's ruling. The minister also said that "a dozen" foreign universities in Hungary were governed by the contested legislation, adding that "most of them had no problem" meeting its stipulations.

CEU head Michael Ignatieff hailed the ECJ ruling as a major moral and legal victory for academic freedom. At a press conference held in Vienna, he said that a benchmark decision had been passed to reinforce legal protection for Europe's free institutions. He welcomed that the ruling annulled Hungary's "lex CEU" and restored the CEU's freedoms. He added, however, that the university would maintain its campus in Vienna, while plans concerning Budapest were yet to be finalised.

István Hiller, Socialist deputy speaker of parliament, said he did not expect the ruling to change the situation, adding that "the government will stick to its point". He said that a political decision had led to the contested legislation, and argued that "the problem was not with the performance of the CEU but with the fact that it had been founded by George Soros". He insisted that issues around the university could only be resolved through a "political change".

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said the city would "happily" welcome the university and its students and teachers back. "Today the European Court of Justice ruled that lex CEU breaches EU law and that it's simply

unacceptable in Europe," Karácsony said on Facebook. "I am under no illusion as to whether the government will repent and invite the CEU back but Budapest would happily welcome the university, its teachers and students back."

Driving away the country's most internationally renowned university was "one of the most outrageous government decisions of the last ten years", the mayor said. "The university's move to Vienna made both the country and Budapest poorer and the capital's previous leadership silently played along," Karácsony said. "The government considered its deceitful propaganda more important than education and respecting academic freedom."

ÁDER MARKS MEMORIAL DAY OF 1849 ARAD MARTYRS

Marking the anniversary of the execution of 13 revolutionary leaders in Arad on October 6, 1849, President János Áder said that "the heroic deaths of the Hungarian freedom fighters has become a source of strength". Áder said that what took place in 1849 in Arad was a symbol of how the uprising may have been overpowered but "the desire of Hungarians for freedom cannot ever be broken". Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, Áder said the 13 leaders were of diverse backgrounds, age, religion, temperament and style. Besides Hungarians, some of them were

of German, Serbian and Croatian ethnicity, Áder noted. Some were members of the nobility while others came from humble families, and their political views also differed widely, Áder said. "They were friends, mentors, brothers in arms and they constantly debated; they were tough opponents, diverse characters who were united in death," Áder said.

The generals executed in Arad in what is today Oradea, in Romania, ended their lives that day "aware of their own innocence but in dark anxiety for their loved ones, knowing ... they would be tarred with unjust accusations," Áder said, noting that October 6 was the "darkest day of a period of brutal retaliations". The measures taken by the Habsburg Empire to trample the remaining nests of revolution ran afoul of the laws of the time, Áder said. The sentences were "mostly ready" before the trials, which were only held to keep up appearances, he said. "Europe looked on, shocked, at the bloody retaliations," Áder said. However, the heroic deaths of the 12 generals and Count Lajos Batthyány, the prime minister of Hungary's first independent government, "has become a source of strength for Hungarians", Áder said. The political achievements of the freedom fight survived the defeat, and were realised at the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, he said. "If we know what happened to them, bear witness to their lives and remember their deaths, this day becomes more than just a day of mourning, of final,

great silence. Besides martyrdom, it also proclaims a life worth living; loyalty and love of country; the value of honour; faith borne with dignity; an example to be followed; and justice," Áder said.

FLAG LOWERED TO HALF-MAST IN FRONT OF PARLIAMENT ON ANNIVERSARY OF ARAD MARTYRS

Hungary's national flag was hoisted with full military honours and lowered to half-mast in front of Parliament to mark the anniversary of the 1848-49 war of independence and the martyrs of Arad, at an event attended by Defence Minister Tibor Benkő. The flag remained at half-mast throughout the day in tribute to the martyrs on the national day of mourning.

The celebrations continued at the Fiumei Road cemetery, where Benkő laid a wreath and delivered a speech at the mausoleum of Count Lajos Batthyány, Hungary's first prime minister. Benkő said the Hungarian people had always fought for freedom during their thousand-year history. "Not only can we call ourselves the people of freedom ... but we can also say that we never give up the fight [for freedom]", he added. Benkő said Hungary's fights for freedom throughout history were not waged in vain. "Today we can live here in the Carpathian Basin as Hungarians, dedicated to the peace and security of our nation," he said. The cemetery

hosted students and visitors all day for walks and talks on the period.

The government declared October 6 Hungary's national day of mourning in 2001, in commemoration of the 13 martyrs executed in Arad following the crushing of the revolution. Batthyány, also commemorated on this day, was executed in Pest.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HOLDS TALKS WITH BELARUSIAN, NIGERIAN COUNTERPARTS

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó held talks with his Belarusian and Nigerian counterparts. In a Facebook entry, Szijjártó said he was briefed by Vladimir Makei, the Belarusian foreign minister, on the situation in his country. "I told him that we have an interest in maintaining communication," Szijjártó said, noting that Belarus is part of the European Union's Eastern Partnership programme. Szijjártó underscored the importance of a broad social dialogue in Belarus, saying it was the only way to resolve the ongoing crisis in line with the rule of law.

As regards his talks with Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama, Szijjártó said their discussion centred on the election of the World Trade Organisation's new director-general. Szijjártó said he had told Onyeama that Hungary had agreed to support the EU's decision to back the South Korean and Nigerian candidates in the second round of the election. "I did not tell him, however, that I had serious concerns about the procedure

with which the European Commission achieved this ‘consensus,’” Szijjártó said. “Because consensus is usually achieved through talks rather than threats and blackmail.” Szijjártó said the EC had threatened to launch infringement procedures against member states that “had a different opinion” even though “they could not make any compelling arguments” against either the Kenyan or the British candidates.

TWENTY FATALITIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 818 IN HUNGARY

Twenty Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 818 to 32,298, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 853, and 8,723 people have made a recovery. There are 22,722 active infections and 627 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 37 on ventilators. Altogether 20,088 people are in official home quarantine and 771,297 tests have been carried out. The website warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines and hygiene regulations. Entry restrictions for travellers from abroad remain in force. In addition to shops and public transport, wearing a mask is now mandatory in cinemas, theatres, health and social institutions and public offices, and clubs have to close by 11pm to curb the spread of the virus.

Most infections have been registered in Budapest (11,424), followed by Pest County (4,254) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (1,737), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (1,541), Hajdú-Bihar (1,419), Csongrád-Csanád (1,371) and Fejér (1,370). Tolna County has the fewest infections (311).

SZFE STUDENTS REJECT NEW LEADERSHIP’S ‘ULTIMATUM’

The students of Budapest’s University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) vowed to maintain their blockade of university premises, insisting the new leadership was “illegitimate” and its overtures were “an ultimatum” rather than conciliatory. The students held a press conference in response to an open letter by university leaders promising full-time employees a wage hike in two stages, talks on the university’s planned developments as well as a promise not to punish the student organisers of the blockade. The students said the country’s law on higher education set down the conditions regarding the autonomy of universities, and this was not up for discussion. They said they were prepared to discuss the university’s transformation in the presence of a guarantee of autonomy. The students insisted that only a leadership “appointed lawfully” would have the authority to certify the validity of the school year. They said they would continue to exercise their democratic right to protest and maintain their blockade.

SZFE’s previous senate and leadership announced their resignation on Aug. 31, saying the foundation that took over the university on Sept. 1 under a government decree had deprived them of “all essential powers”. The students cordoned off the university’s main building and employees went on strike.

DK CALLS FOR CUTTING LOCAL COUNCIL ‘SOLIDARITY CONTRIBUTIONS’

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) is submitting a proposal to parliament, calling for a cut in the so-called “solidarity contribution” imposed on local councils by the central government to offset falling revenues. DK board member Judit Földi Rácz told an online press conference that solidarity contributions in next year’s budget of 160 billion forints (EUR 445.1m) amounted a four-fold increase on the sum this year. Földi Rácz insisted that during the coronavirus pandemic, the government had put all “burdens and responsibilities” on local governments without providing additional funding. The government “has even taken away” local government revenues from vehicle taxes, she added. The government’s “promise” to allocate 16% more in funding to local governments in 2021 than it did this year will not raise the real value of revenues, Földi Rácz said. Moreover,

it is unclear “who will receive those monies or for what purpose,” she said.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT DROPS BY 2.1% IN AUGUST

Output of Hungary’s industrial sector fell by an annual 2.1% in August, after an 8.1% drop in July, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The August figures indicated a move closer to a recovery after falling by around 8% in the previous two months. The scale of those declines was an improvement from double-digit drops in April and May because of a pandemic lockdown. Working day-adjusted data show industrial output edged down by 0.2% in August. KSH said the output of most branches of manufacturing fell in August but the biggest, such as vehicle manufacturing and, “to a lesser degree”, computer, electronics and optical equipment, increased. In a month-on-month comparison, industrial output rose by 6.8%, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data. For the period January-August, industrial output fell by an annual 11%.

CONSUMER PROTECTION TO MONITOR PCR TEST PRICES

The consumer protection authority is monitoring providers of PCR tests nationwide to ensure that tests are not conducted above the official price which the government has capped at 19,500 forints (EUR 54), the

innovation and technology ministry said. State hospitals and clinics provide coronavirus tests free of charge for those entitled under the relevant epidemiological regulations, Tamás Schanda, a state secretary of the ministry, said. Providers that overprice the tests risk having to pay fines in the millions of forints, Schanda said. “The spread of coronavirus can be curbed only if we stand together. Profiteering on the tests is unacceptable,” he said. The price of the PCR tests, the best known method to identify Covid-19 infections, was capped on September 21, the ministry noted. The government set the combined price for taking the sample and carry out the test in the lab at 19,500 forints, the statement said. Since then, laboratories offering PCR tests have changed their practices in multiple ways. The ministry has instructed the consumer protection authority to ensure that prices are kept within the official boundaries and that consumers are duly informed, the statement said.

FOUR COMPANIES TO BID FOR CHAIN BRIDGE RENOVATION

Four companies will make a bid for the renovation of the capital’s landmark Chain Bridge after all four companies applying in the pre-qualification round met the requirements, the Budapest Public Transport Centre (BKK) said. The four prospective bidders are A-Hid Építő, Közgép Építő- és Fémszerkezetgyártó, SDD Konzorcium

(DOMPER, Subterra - Raab, Pannon-Doprastay) and STRABAG Általános Építő. Bids can be submitted by October 28. BKK is expected to sign a contract with the future contractor in February 2021. The renovation work could start one month later, in March, and is scheduled to be completed by 2023.

HUNGARIAN GAS STORAGE FACILITIES AT FULL CAPACITY

Gas storage facilities in Hungary are at full capacity, and the amount available could cover Hungary’s needs for 130 days if necessary, according to a government official. Based on data gathered between September 21 and 27, storage facilities in Hungary hold a combined 6.49 billion cubic metres of natural gas, with 1.45 billion cubic metres of security reserves and 5.04 billion cubic metres available for commercial purposes, Péter Kaderják, the state secretary of energy and climate policy, said. Also, with continuous gas transfers from six neighbouring countries, Hungary’s winter security of gas supply is assured, Kaderják said. Moreover, European storage facilities hold 107.61 billion cubic meters of gas while Ukrainian facilities hold 29.43 billion cubic meters, he added.

The state secretary noted that Magyar Földgázkereskedő, the gas trading unit of the state-owned Hungarian energy company MVM, recently signed a contract booking

regasification capacity of some 1 billion cubic metres annually over a period of almost seven years at the Krk terminal in Croatia. He added that by next year Hungary could also import gas from Serbia following an expansion of transport capacity.

ART MARKET BUDAPEST TO BE HELD BETWEEN OCT 22-25

The 10th Art Market Budapest will be held at the Millennium Park between October 22 and 25 on the sidelines of the CAFe Budapest Contemporary Arts Festival, the organisers said. "Hungary's largest annual contemporary fine art and photography exhibition has been facilitated by exceptionally broad cooperation of committed galleries and artists," the organisers said, adding that promoting artists impacted by the coronavirus epidemic, as well as ensuring the safety of visitors, were top priorities. Despite travel difficulties, representatives of some twenty countries will participate in the

event, while artists that cannot come will be offered a digital platform to present their works. "The Art Market Budapest Virtual will offer a link spanning borders to connect artists with the broad international network of art collectors and consumers," the organisers said. Art Market will offer some 150 smaller events focusing on contemporary Hungarian art and art in the central European region in the past thirty years.

ANOTHER TUNNEL DISCOVERED BELOW HUNGARY-SERBIA BORDER FENCE

Another tunnel has been discovered below the fence along the Serbian border in Csongrád-Csanád County, in southern Hungary, local police said. The 19-metre tunnel leading from Serbian territory to Hungary was discovered by a police patrol during a field search near the town of Ásotthalom, on Monday afternoon, a police spokeswoman said. Earlier

in the day the Hungarian authorities halted four groups of border violators, altogether 74 illegal immigrants in the region. Police officers will hold an on-site inspection at the tunnel's entry and guard it until it is buried.

FOREIGN RESIDENTS TO COMPETE IN 2020 NATIONAL GALLOP

Due to travel restrictions related to the coronavirus epidemic the foreign jockeys competing in the 13th National Gallop will be residents of Hungary, organisers told MTI. The races will be held at Budapest's Heroes' Square on a track specially built for the purpose, on Saturday and Sunday. The 72 participants riding horses from the Bábolna National Horse Farm will represent Croatia, Slovakia, Romania, Mexico, India, Mongolia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Hungary. The races and accompanying programmes will be broadcast live by public Duna Television.