

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Solar bus depo in Budapest

MTI/Zsolt Szegedváry

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

CAFe Budapest Contemporary Arts Festival begins

2020 National Gallop Final in Heroes' Square

2-day Budapest Marathon run

TOP STORY

ORBÁN SEES COVID CRISIS LASTING UNTIL MID-2021

As the likelihood of a vaccine against the coronavirus appearing before mid-2021 is small, "we Hungarians will have to endure it ... until June or July," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview.

Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, Orbán also commented on the economic aspects of managing the epidemic, noting that the government is focusing on jobs and investments which also include family businesses, not only corporations. He said the biggest danger to the economy would be "to wait", as the economy stops when businesses and households put investments and purchases on hold. Over 900 companies have received 300-400 billion forints (EUR 837m-1.1bn) of central support for investments, thereby saving 155,000 jobs.

Orbán referred to the government's recent decision to cut VAT on construction to 5% as well as other measures such as a rebate on renovations, saying the highest value that can be got out of family investments "is always home building and renovation". Concerning epidemic protection measures, he said Hungary had acquitted itself well in the spring and ranked among the top countries in terms of its defence measures. "We can win when it comes to the second wave, too," he said. Hungary's health-care system can bear the burden until a vaccine arrives, he added.

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ORBÁN ACCUSES OPPOSITION OF UNDERMINING PROTECTION EFFORTS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has accused the opposition left wing of undermining government protection efforts, expressing his surprise, however, that it had voted for a package of health-care measures which raises doctors' salaries while clamping down on gratuities in the sector. Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, he added that the left wing should oppose the government "not the country".

The prime minister vowed that outstanding issues such as the status of GPs and private practices would be resolved by the end of the year.

Referring to German EP vice-president Katarina Barley's criticisms in connection with corruption, Orbán insisted that it was a "left-wing reflex" to accuse right-wing politicians of corruption. He added that graft in "the German-speaking world" was "greater than in Hungary", and he cited global money laundering at Deutsche Bank as an example. He added that several Scandinavian banks had been plagued by graft. Orbán said he resented "westerners taking the position that they are flawless" when it comes to corruption, "simply by virtue of being western", while accusing central Europeans of being corrupt "because they are central European". "This doesn't square with reality. None of

us is flawless, but none of us is guilty [before being proven so]," he said, adding that the Hungarian economy had made "good use" of the EU funds.

Orbán accused George Soros of being behind "international attacks", saying he "buys western European politicians" as a way of growing his influence and making more money.

"As long as Soros has such huge influence in the EU, we have to say that the union is corrupt," he said. A big step in the fight against corruption would be to "expose" Soros, he added. Put to him that Soros had "called on the EU to punish Hungary", Orbán said: "There is an open battle ... he has issued the order."

FIFTEEN FATALITIES, REGISTERED INFECTIONS UP 1,176 IN HUNGARY

Fifteen Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 1,176 to 35,222, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday morning. The number of fatalities stands at 913, and 9,202 people have made a recovery.

There are 25,107 active infections and 993 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 56 on ventilators. Altogether 22,385 people are in official home quarantine and 803,648 tests have been carried out.

The website warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines and hygiene regulations. It asked elderly people to pay increased

attention to protecting themselves and observe general 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. Regulations include a ban on visiting hospitals and elderly care homes which have to take every possible measure to prevent infections, the site said.

The operative body responsible for handling the epidemic response has ordered six schools and 138 classes to revert to digital education. Fully 39 kindergartens and 14 schools have gone on emergency breaks, the website said.

Most infections have been registered in Budapest (12,066), followed by Pest County (4,562) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (1,994), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (1,728), Hajdú-Bihar (1,600), Csongrád-Csanád (1,536) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1,513). Tolna County has the fewest infections (335).

CORONAVIRUS - MÜLLER: NEW HOTBED OF INFECTION EMERGES IN HUNGARY

A new hotbed of novel coronavirus infection has emerged at a construction site in Tiszaúlváros in north-eastern Hungary, with 242 of 1,717 coronavirus tests showing positive results, Chief Medical Officer Cecília Müller said. The local Borsod-

Abaúj-Zemplén County hospital is prepared to receive patients, currently only one person is being treated for the disease, she added. The workers have been isolated at their accommodation and the army has started disinfecting the construction area, she told a press conference of the operative body responsible for handling the epidemic response.

MANUFACTURE OF COVID DRUG REMDESIVIR UNDER WAY IN HUNGARY

Domestic manufacture of the Covid-19 drug Remdesivir is under way in Hungary, with pharmaceutical company Richter having manufactured enough clinical trial doses in the initial phase to treat some 250 patients, the innovation and technology ministry said. By the end of the month, the drug will be available in enough doses to treat more than 800 patients, state secretary József Bódis said in a statement. The government contributed 400 million forints (EUR 1.1m) to Richter's production of the drug, he added.

Mass manufacture in Hungary of the antiviral drug favipiravir is also under way, Bódis said. The innovation and technology ministry has been coordinating R+D projects aimed at combatting the coronavirus pandemic since March, he said, noting that the government has set aside 3 billion forints for the purpose. The projects, which range from the development of therapeutic treatments to the

mass production of ventilators, are all progressing according to schedule, the state secretary said.

CORONAVIRUS - DK: HOSPITALS DON'T HAVE ENOUGH PROTECTIVE GEAR

Hungary's opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) said that hospitals still did not have enough protective gear. The party said it had seen a letter showing that a senior hospital doctor had asked colleagues to use FFP2 masks more than once.

DK board member Olga Kálmán presented the letter at an online press conference with the names of the doctor in question and the hospital blanked out. Kálmán cited the part of the letter stating that wearing surgical masks would not protect hospital workers from infection, therefore FFP2 masks should be worn. However, since not enough FFP2 masks were available, staff were asked to re-use them after two days of "rest", she added.

Kálmán said masks of this type only provided protection for up to four hours. She added that she would make a written request to Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler seeking an explanation from the government as to why hospitals still lacked proper amounts of protective gear.

In response to a question, Chief Medical Officer Cecília Müller told a press conference that all hospitals had two weeks' supply of the FFP2 masks and there existed no "letter" instructing

doctors that they should reuse such masks. The hospital commanders send regular reports to the operative body on the volume of protective gear available in their respective hospitals, she added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT'S 'OPENING TO THE EAST' POLICY WORKING

The Hungarian government's policy of opening to the East has lived up to its promise, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Mukhtar Tleuberdi, his Kazakh counterpart, in Budapest. The role of the East in the global economy has grown significantly in recent years and the balanced bilateral relations Hungary has built with eastern countries will also benefit Hungarian businesses, Szijjártó told a press conference he held jointly with Tleuberdi.

Hungary devotes special attention to Central Asia, he said, pointing to the region's rapid economic growth. He also noted the European Union's strategy to intensify cooperation with the region. Szijjártó called Kazakhstan a key player in Central Asia, praising its efforts to combat terrorism and religious extremism. "Today, with the threat of new illegal migration waves looming, it's important to take action against their most serious causes - terrorism and religious extremism," the minister said.

The situation in Central Asia has a significant impact on the security of Europe, Szijjártó said, underlining the

importance of Kazakhstan's ability to maintain stability in the region.

He noted that Kazakhstan and the EU have committed to strengthening their cooperation and partnership, and he expressed Hungary's support for a visa facilitation agreement between the two sides. Kazakhstan has already offered its own visa exemptions, and the EU should do the same, Szijjártó said.

Szijjártó said Hungary offered scholarships to 250 Kazakh university students.

Turning to economic cooperation, he said the coronavirus pandemic was set to bring about a new global economic order "in which Hungary wants to be among the winners". This is why it is crucial that Hungarian businesses succeed in expanding their presence on the global market and that they take advantage of the fact that there are no unresolved political issues between Hungary and Kazakhstan, Szijjártó said.

Hungarian oil and gas company MOL has now invested more than 200 million dollars in Kazakhstan. The company is exploring a new major gas field in the country and is set to begin extracting it next year. Hungarian drugmaker Richter is also expanding its market share in Kazakhstan, Szijjártó said.

Hungarian exports to Kazakhstan have increased by 69% so far this year. Eximbank has opened a 170 million dollar credit line to help finance Hungarian-Kazakh business cooperation, he said.

In response to a question, Szijjártó said Hungary had decided to join the Turkic Council as an observer so that it could "use our shared cultural and historical heritage to benefit everyday cooperation". During the first wave of the pandemic, Hungary received help from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey, he noted.

Tleuberdi called Hungary Kazakhstan's closest ally in the region, adding that it was a strategic partner, and that the two countries had significant shared political and economic interests. He said Friday's talks focused on bilateral political, economic and cultural ties as well as Kazakhstan's and Hungary's roles in international and regional organisations.

In response to a question, the minister said that though Hungary only held an observer status in the Turkic Council, it fulfils the role of a full-fledged member in the council's work.

Meanwhile, asked about a potential high-level summit between Hungary and Russia, Szijjártó said the two countries' leaders met every year, and after Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Budapest last year, this year's meeting should take place in Russia. The matter is still on the agenda, Szijjártó said, adding that while plans were to have the meeting take place towards the end of the year, "the pandemic has delayed or thwarted every plan". Plans are still to hold the meeting at the end of the year, but this could be impacted by several external factors, he added.

Meanwhile, after a meeting of the Hungarian-Kazakh strategic council, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said in a video on Facebook that opportunities are expanding for Hungarian companies investing in Kazakhstan. The meeting focused on boosting economic relations, he said. Varga said that although bilateral trade shrank due to the global health crisis, Hungary had been able to increase its exports.

Around 50 Hungarian companies operate in Kazakhstan in areas such as energy, building and agriculture, he noted. A Hungarian-Kazakh agreement to increase agricultural exports was on the agenda, as well as a project to equip Kazakh hospitals with Hungarian health-care equipment, Varga said.

FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSES MIGRATION RISKS WITH V4, FRENCH COUNTERPARTS

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has attended a working lunch with his counterparts from the Visegrad Group and France, where he said the three main risks regarding migration in Europe "are all due to the European Union's approach". At the lunch attended by Foreign Ministers Tomáš Petříček of the Czech Republic, Jean-Yves Le Drian of France and Ivan Korcok of Slovakia, and by Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Szymon Szynkowski, Szijjártó said a migration wave would be a "much greater danger

for Europe now than it was in 2015, as it would also constitute a serious public health risk besides risks to security and culture". "Uncontrolled crowds would spread the novel coronavirus extremely quickly," he added.

Regarding the migration route across the Western Balkan countries, Szijjártó noted that the EU had agreed to pay Turkey six billion euros in support, to be paid until 2018. So far, it has only paid 4 billion, Szijjártó said. This may prompt Turkey to open its borders with Europe for the four million refugees it is currently housing, flooding the Western Balkans with hundreds of thousands of migrants, he said. Another source of danger is the EU's tardiness in boosting border protection near the coasts of Libya to thwart illegal entry attempts across the Mediterranean, Szijjártó said. The Visegrad Group paid 35 million euros to the European Commission to that end, but the EC has since failed to buy even a single ship, he said.

"The third risk factor is the new migration pact of the European Commission ... basically a renewed encouragement for those about to break out for Europe," Szijjártó said. The pact "clearly aims to push through mandatory quotas and settlement," he added. The Visegrad Group is in agreement regarding migration, Szijjártó said.

Ahead of the lunch, Szijjártó met Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, to discuss issues around migration.

HUNGARY MEP: BULGARIA 'IN LEFT'S CROSSHAIRS' OVER RULE OF LAW

Bulgaria and its right-wing government is "in the crosshairs of Europe's Left", Balázs Hidvéghi, MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz, said after a plenary session of the European Parliament adopted a resolution concerning the state of the rule of law in Bulgaria. The European Parliament said in the resolution that rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights, including the independence of the judiciary, have "significantly deteriorated" in Bulgaria, and condemned police violence against participants of the protests that have been ongoing in the country since June 9. In the resolution approved with 358 votes in favour, 277 against and 56 abstentions, the EP expressed "its solidarity with the people of Bulgaria in their legitimate demands and aspirations for justice, transparency, accountability and democracy."

Hidvéghi insisted that the EP's leftist majority "keeps running amok" and argued that "if any member state should have a Christian Democratic government of traditional values the leftist parties will launch an attack under the pretext of the rule of law". He added that "the concept of the rule of law is now regularly being abused in Brussels".

Authors of the resolution on Bulgaria listed "the same fabricated accusations" as the leftist majority

had already used against Hungary and Poland, Hidvéghi said. "For example, that courts are not independent, nor is the press, same-sex couples are not allowed to marry, the Bulgarian government is not open to gender ideology, and it demands that pseudo-civil groups financed from abroad should be transparent," the MEP said.

Answering a question, the MEP insisted that "the Left's tactics is to blame right-wing governments for harming values they did not actually harm", adding that "some naive members of the European People's Party are sometimes taken in by that but more and more of them can see through that mechanism".

UNION DEMANDS 50% PAY RISE FOR HEALTH-CARE WORKERS

Health-care workers' union FESZ demanded an average 50% wage increase for health-care employees not affected by the wage hikes for doctors, which was approved by parliament earlier this week. FESZ said in a statement that the law passed on Tuesday would lead to "grave difficulties" in the treatment of patients and the ability of health-care workers to perform on-call duty. Unless the entire health-care sector is compensated in direct proportion to its expected losses, the health-care system will likely see a mass exodus of workers, FESZ said, adding that the "biggest losers" would be the patients in need of treatment. The union called

on the government to compensate health-care workers for their increased workload caused by the coronavirus epidemic and the phasing out of gratuities, and to maintain existing wage ratios between doctors and other health-care employees.

FESZ also said it wants to enter into talks with the doctors' union on its proposed wage increase and the sector's employment regulations.

MEMORIAL FOR POLES IN SOLIDARITY WITH HUNGARY'S 1956 REVOLUTION UNVEILED IN LUBLIN

A memorial paying tribute to Poles who expressed solidarity with Hungarian freedom fighters in 1956 was unveiled in Lublin, in eastern Poland, the Hungarian embassy said. The main component of the memorial is a bronze statue made by local sculptor Kazimierz Stasz. It presents events of the Hungarian uprising against Soviet rule and stands as a symbol of freedom, the embassy told MTI. Addressing the unveiling, Orsolya

Zsuzsanna Kovács, the Hungarian ambassador noted that in the city food and clothing collection and blood donations were organised to aid Hungarians.

HUNGARY POSTS EUR 251 M TRADE SURPLUS IN AUGUST

Hungary posted a trade surplus of 251 million euros in August, an improvement on 236 million euros in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said, quoting its first estimate. The value of exports in euros fell by an annual 2.5% while imports increased by 5.4%. In Jan-Aug, the surplus shrank by 547 million euros to 2,504 billion, as exports dropped by an annual 9.6% and imports by 9.2%.

THIRTEEN SUFFER GAS POISONING AT BIOETHANOL PLANT IN C HUNGARY

Thirteen people have suffered severe gas poisoning and another 15 light injuries in an industrial accident at

a bioethanol plant in Dunaföldvár, in central Hungary, on Friday. A seven-cubic-metre outdoor tank was refilled with an inappropriate substance, causing a chemical reaction which produced chlorine gas, the spokesman of Tolna County's disaster management directorate told MTI.

Firefighters were at the site working to prevent the spread of the toxic gas, Péter Köves said. Also, industrial safety specialists and the disaster management's mobile laboratory are on site taking measurements and appropriate action, he added. As no concentrated presence of the toxic gas has been measured in the air beyond the plant, local residents are not in any danger, he said.

Pál Győrfi, the spokesman of the national ambulance service, told MTI that several ambulances, four helicopters and a medical unit specialising in mass accidents have been dispatched to the scene. All those injured received medical aid and were taken to nearby hospital for further medical assessments, he said.