

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

The convoy of the Hungarian Food Bank Association and the FAO in Budapest on World Food Day

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

HUNGARY COMMENTS EC FARM TO FORK STRATEGY

Hungary will submit a dissenting opinion on the European Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy for fair and sustainable food production if the Agriculture and Fisheries Council adopts it at a meeting on October 19-20.

The Hungarian agriculture ministry said in a statement that while Hungary's government will back the approval, it will also add a dissenting opinion to say that the strategy disproportionately burdened member states. The statement called the strategy's goal to reduce the amount of chemical pesticides used in agriculture by 50% and to increase the proportion of ecological farmlands to 25% "overly ambitious". Regulations on the use of pesticides and fertilizers should take into account the individual member states' situation and the efforts made so far, it said. Lacking a comprehensive impact study, the strategy's effect on the competitiveness of farmers is impossible to forecast, the ministry said. Regarding talks on the reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, the ministry said the changes should be rooted in EU law, and called on the EC to assess the strategic plans submitted by the member states accordingly.

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ORBÁN: PANDEMIC EXPECTED TO SPREAD DURING 'HARD AUTUMN, HARDER WINTER'

The continued spread of coronavirus will make "this autumn hard, and the winter possibly harder," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said, adding that the Hungarian health-care system was holding its ground. In a video message posted on Facebook during a European Council meeting in Brussels, Orbán said that in view of the European experiences in handling the pandemic, which the summit discussed "at an overnight meeting" on Thursday, Hungarians should not plan "trips abroad in this year's ski season". The Hungarian health-care system is holding its ground, Orbán said. "We trust our doctors, nurses and epidemiologists, as well as the policemen securing our borders," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ INAUGURATES HUNGARIAN EMBASSY'S NEW CONSULAR SECTION IN HANOI

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó inaugurated the Hungarian embassy's new expanded consular section in Hanoi. In his speech at the ceremony, the minister said it was "more than just symbolic" that Hungary was inaugurating the new section of the embassy during a pandemic. Szijjártó said the inauguration was an expression on the part of the state that it had to balance its protective

measures and ensuring that the country continues to function. This requires that foreign relations and diplomacy also continue to function, he said, arguing that otherwise Hungary risked wasting the efforts it had put into building these relations and falling behind in global competition. The minister said the coronavirus pandemic was set to bring about a new global economic order "in which Hungary wants to be among the winners". This requires the country to develop its ties and cooperation with international partners, he added.

Szjijártó said the Hungarian government's policy of opening to the East would play a key role in making sure that Hungary was among the winners of the new global economic order. "It was clear to all of us as early as ten years ago when the government introduced this policy that the role of the East would grow," he said. The minister noted that last year 58% of worldwide investments were financed by capital from Eastern countries. Over the last ten years, Hungary's exports to that part of the world have increased by 22% and its trade turnover by 25%, Szijjártó said. He noted that in 2019, for the first time, the majority of foreign investments into Hungary had come from a Far Eastern country.

Concerning economic ties between Hungary and Vietnam, Szijjártó said Hungarian firms were mainly carrying out water management and pharmaceutical investments, building hospitals and developing the food industry in the Southeast Asian country.

Szjijártó said a 440 million dollar tied aid programme Hungary had launched for Vietnam which he discussed with his Vietnamese counterpart, Pham Binh Minh, would further advance bilateral ties. "Another aspect demonstrated by this occasion is that we attach deep significance to Hungarian-Vietnamese cooperation," he said. "Our economic cooperation has intensified to the extent that bilateral trade turnover increased by 60% in the first eight months of the year, when all economic indicators were down." Szjijártó highlighted the friendship between the two countries, noting that Hungary offers scholarships to 200 Vietnamese university students each year. He noted that Vietnam provided Hungary with 85,000 face masks and other protective gear in the spring. Szjijártó is scheduled to meet Vietnam's Planning and Investment Minister Nguyen Chi Dung later in the day.

THIRTY-THREE FATALITIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 1,293 IN HUNGARY

Thirty-three Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 1,293 to 43,025, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday. The number of fatalities stands at 1,085, and 13,134 people have made a recovery. There are 28,806 active infections and 1,642 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 171 on

ventilators. Altogether 22,656 people are in official home quarantine and 871,417 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 10 schools and 185 classes to revert to digital education. Fully 52 kindergartens and 22 schools have gone on emergency breaks, the website said. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (13,804), followed by Pest County (5,546) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (2,632), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (2,311), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1,989) and Hajdú-Bihar (1,979). Tolna County has the fewest infections (422).

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: RETIREMENT HOME LOCKDOWNS WORKING

The decision to introduce a visiting ban on elderly care homes and prohibit residents from leaving their institutions

has proven effective, the chief medical officer said. Currently there are 60 retirement homes dealing with a total of 707 active coronavirus infections, Cecília Müller told a press conference. Altogether 55 residents have recovered in the second wave of the epidemic so far, she added. The virus has only spread to 4% of retirement homes, Müller said, noting that the country's 1,600 institutions house some 100,000 residents. Meanwhile, the chief medical officer said the youngest of the 33 Covid-19 patients who died on Thursday was 20 years old and had been suffering from a serious, rapidly progressive disease.

FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY: OVER 300,000 TONNES OF FOOD WASTED IN HUNGARY ANNUALLY

Hungarians waste over 300,000 tonnes of food annually, representing a total value of more than 170 billion forints (EUR 480m) which translates to 18,000 forints per person, the National Food Chain Safety Office said. Food waste is an environmental, economic and also ethical problem, the statement said. World Food Day was established on a Hungarian proposal by the United Nations in 1979 and the event is marked for the 41st occasion this year in order to raise awareness of the issues behind poverty and hunger, and to encourage cooperation, it added. Similarly to other European Union countries, the largest proportion of food waste in Hungary results from

households throwing away food. The National Food Chain Safety Office launched a programme to highlight this issue in 2016, NÉBIH said.

ELECTION CTTEE REJECTS REFERENDUM QUESTION ON FREE CORONA TESTS

The National Election Committee rejected a question submitted for a referendum on free coronavirus testing. The question was submitted by opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) politician László Sebián-Petrovszki as a private individual on whether the state should provide PCR tests free of charge to all Hungarians as well as European Union citizens staying in Budapest. A majority of the committee argued that the issue belonged to the authority of parliament, not the government, and a national referendum could only be held on a matter which fell within the government's powers. Additionally, the committee argued that the question submitted could result in the false conclusion that PCR tests were not currently available free of charge. Tests are available free of charge in Hungary if a doctor prescribes one because there is a well-founded reason to believe a patient is carrying the virus.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR CONTRACTION SLOWS IN AUGUST

Output of Hungary's construction sector fell by an annual 13.6% in August, an

improvement after a 21.0% decline in the previous month, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) show. Output of the construction sector started dropping in March, when the first pandemic restrictions were introduced, and the decline reached the double digits in May. In August, output of the building segment declined by 17.1% and output of the civil engineering segment dropped by 8.9%. In a month-on-month comparison, construction sector output rose by a seasonally- and workday-adjusted 1.9%. In absolute terms, construction sector output came to 362.6 billion forints (EUR 994.6m) in August. Construction sector order stock at the end of August was down by 18.4% from twelve months earlier, as building orders rose by 11.4% but civil engineering orders fell by 30.4%. New order volume was up 6.0%, with new orders in the building segment increasing by 16.5% and new civil engineering orders dropping by 5.5%.

Commenting on the data, a state secretary of the innovation and technology ministry said the sector's improved performance was a sign of the economy's recovery from the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The construction sector contracted from a high base by 10.4% in the first eight months of 2020, a "relatively good performance", Anita Boros said.

Analyst András Horváth of Takarékbank said he expected the construction sector's output to contract by 9-10% this year. Gábor Regős of economic research institute Századvég said the reduction of the

VAT rate on new home construction to 5% could give a boost to housing constructions but keeping the sector's performance at a high level would also require boosting large-scale construction projects.

GOVT OFFICIAL HAILS 'SUCCESSFUL' MUNICIPAL PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING

The government and the Budapest municipal council reached agreements on multiple key projects, including the renovation of the capital's iconic Chain Bridge, at a meeting of the municipal public development council, the state secretary in charge of development projects in and around Budapest has said. The government has agreed to provide the six billion forints (EUR 16.5m) it promised earlier towards the renovation of the Chain Bridge if the municipal council guarantees that the bridge will not have to be closed for longer than 18 months, Balázs Fürjes told a press conference. The money will only be transferred to the capital if it runs out of funding for the project, he added. The two sides also agreed on the need to upgrade the Danube embankments. Also, the metropolitan council will have advisory rights in the designation of the capital's "brown-field" zones, Fürjes said. In addition, the council will hand over its plans on linking the M2 metro and the H8 HÉV lines. An agreement was also reached on the extension of Buda's interconnected tram network,

he said. The government and the city council, however, failed to reach a deal on planned traffic changes on the city's Grand Boulevard and the Liget Project, the state secretary said. He expressed hope that the city council would accept the government's proposal to take over certain development projects.

Budapest Deputy Mayor Ambrus Kiss said the talks had not yielded any major developments in the city's main projects, "but at least we're negotiating". He said the council had decided against repealing extra taxes Budapest had to contribute to the central budget, which he said would cost the capital 40 billion forints between 2020 and 2022. The government did not support the introduction of a new tax aimed at rebooting the city's economy and neither will the municipal council be allowed to take out a loan from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), he said.

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said on Facebook that the government was "trying to take Budapest under its guardianship". This was reflected, he said, in that "all the capital's proposals were rejected while [the central government] offered to pay for and carry out developments". Karácsony said it was actually not the government or the municipal council, but the taxpayers including Budapest residents, who would pay for developments. He added that 36% of Hungary's GDP is generated in Budapest. The government is trying

to reduce the opposition's room for manoeuvre in municipalities in order to "point a finger at them and endlessly repeat the mantra that they are incompetent", he said, adding that the projects that are supported by Budapest residents should be implemented. "More green instead of concrete and a liveable city instead of prestige projects," he said, stating that he had received his mandate to follow this principle and would insist on doing so.

PLAQUE UNVEILED IN BUDAPEST IN TRIBUTE TO CATHOLIC PRIEST WHO SAVED JEWS

A memorial plaque dedicated to Catholic parish priest Gyula Hévey, who issued several thousand certificates of baptism in order to rescue Jews between 1938 and 1944, was inaugurated by Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and Prince-Primate of Hungary,

and Chief Rabbi Róbert Fröhlich in Budapest. Journalist János Dési said at the event that Christian priests who were willing to help Jews by issuing certificates of baptism had risked their own lives.

HUNGARIAN DOCTORS TO PERFORM RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY ON BANGLADESHI SIAMESE TWIN

A team of Hungarian doctors will be travelling to Bangladesh to perform a delayed skull reconstruction surgery on one of the Bangladeshi Siamese twins who were separated in a series of operations last year. The Foundation for Defenceless People, which organised last year's operation to separate the twins, said Rabeya's surgery had been delayed from this past summer because of the coronavirus pandemic but could not be held off any longer. The operation will be performed by neurosurgeon András Csóky from Budapest's

Honvéd Hospital, plastic surgeon Gergely Pataki and pediatrician Marcell Csapodi, who is leading the series of medical procedures on the twins dubbed "Operation Freedom". The team's journey to Bangladesh and the procedure itself will be organised under strict epidemiological protocols, the statement said.

Rokaiya and Rabeya were separated in a 33-hour operation organised by the Foundation for Defenceless People in August 2019 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in what was the third step of Operation Freedom. The first phase, including groundbreaking work to separate the blood flow of the brains, was conducted by a Hungarian team led by István Hudák in Bangladesh in August 2018. Preparatory surgery to separate the twins was performed in Hungary in January last year. The marathon operation in Dhaka in August was carried out by a team of 35 Hungarian doctors and assistants led by Csóky.