

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVI/Tibor Illés

Former Fidesz lawmaker Mária Wittner, who received a death sentence after 1956, at the unveiling of a bust of 1956 martyr Ilona Tóth

UPCOMING EVENTS

Commemorations of Oct. 23 national holiday

Coronavirus updates

Opposition Democratic Coalition marks 9th anniversary

Shopping Night in Hévíz

TOP STORY

HUNGARY AIMS FOR SWIFT ACCESS TO VACCINE

The Hungarian government is working to create the legal background to have the swiftest possible access to the coronavirus vaccine once it is developed, the head of the Prime Minister's Office said.

Hungary has signed up for all European Union research programmes and has secured 6.5 million doses of the vaccine at a cost of 13 billion forints (EUR 35.7m), Gergely Gulyás told a regular press briefing. Meanwhile, the operative board responsible for handling the epidemic is examining Chinese and Russian vaccines, with a view to buying them should they prove effective, Gulyás said. He said Hungary currently had 1.3 million flu vaccines, adding that more would be obtained if necessary. Answering a question, he said that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had been inoculated with a domestically produced flu vaccine.

The minister noted that the coronavirus situation was worsening worldwide, and Hungary was no exception, but while the mortalities per one million residents averaged 357 Europe-wide, in Hungary it numbered 129. Put to him that the situation had been far worse in the past 14 days, Gulyás said: "Statistics reflect a momentary state and may not have much meaning ... the data must be assessed as a whole."

GULYÁS: HOSPITAL BEDS READY TO TAKE IN COVID-19 PATIENTS

A total of 47% of Hungary's hospital beds are unoccupied and ready to take in Covid-19 patients, Gergely Gulyás, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, told a regular press briefing. Those infected will have access to care of the highest standard, he said. He noted that nurses will benefit from a 20% pay rise from November and a further 30% on Jan. 1. Concerning a salary hike for doctors, Gulyás said details of a recently adopted agreement between the medical chamber (MOK) and the government were being negotiated, and said he trusted that open issues could be resolved. The government is expected to discuss proposals concerning rules for general practitioners in two weeks' time, he added. Gulyás said tourism would be shaky until a vaccine arrives. He also warned Hungarians against taking skiing holidays.

Asked whether the government was planning to switch schools to digital learning after the autumn break, Gulyás said the government was committed to keeping schools open, adding that the past two months had shown that "schools can operate even amid the current circumstances".

Meanwhile, Gulyás said the government will leave the current rules for SZÉP cards, a voucher system

of fringe benefits for employees used mainly to pay for catering services, unchanged next year. The decision is aimed at helping domestic tourism, allowing cardholders a budget of up to an annual 800,000 forints (EUR 2,200) to pay hotel and restaurant bills, he said.

GULYÁS: EU 'BLACKMAILING 'C EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Responding to a question concerning the rule of law, Gulyás referred to the death of a Slovak citizen in police detention in Belgium two years ago, insisting the EU was "more interested in blackmailing central European member states than in upholding fundamental human rights".

Asked about the EU's climate targets, Gulyás said all member states should honour their 2030 commitments. Hungary is doing well in this regard, having reduced its CO2 emissions by 40% against 1990 levels, he said. Germany and Sweden, by contrast, "are not even close to meeting their commitments." Gulyás added that it was "difficult to discuss any targets for 2050 while more prosperous founding member states walk all over the 2030 agreement".

The PM's Office chief said it was questionable whether the EU's Next Generation recovery package would get off the ground. Gulyás said Hungary disagreed with the way the EU was handling the economic crisis caused by the pandemic but, he

added, the government supports the bloc's plans to jointly take out a loan to finance the post-pandemic recovery package out of solidarity with southern member states. Every member state must make sure funds are spent as effectively as possible, he said, adding that the European Commission was due to start talks on the scheme with member states next week.

Asked about the renovation of Budapest's M3 metro line, he said the matter fully fell within the competence of the metropolitan council, adding that the government was hopeful that the city's leadership could get the project done. The government has offered the city council financial assistance in a number of areas to prevent it from having to borrow to fund its projects, but has yet to receive a reply, he added.

Asked about the situation around Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE), Gulyás said the government was not involved in the talks between the university's leadership and its students and instructors, but expressed hope that the two sides would reach an agreement on the future of the institution. The government's sole aim is to ensure that there is quality theatre and film education in the country, he said, noting that the university's supervisory board had been provided the necessary level of funding to achieve this.

Asked to comment on Pope Francis's remarks that same-sex couples should be protected by civil

union laws, Gulyás said the Fidesz-led government had kept a law on same-sex civil unions passed by the previous Socialist-liberal government intact. He added, at the same time, that under Hungarian law, gay couples are not eligible to adopt, arguing that every child had a right to a mother and a father. Asked to comment on a decision by eight civil groups to turn to the ombudsman for fundamental rights over what they said were hateful remarks by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in connection with a children's book depicting sexual minorities, Gulyás said the ombudsman "has a broad range of powers but he has a hard time dealing with nonsense". Orbán had said Hungary was tolerant regarding homosexuality "but there is a red line that shouldn't be crossed, and that is how I would like to sum up my opinion: leave our children alone".

On another subject, he said there was no specific date set for the next meeting between Orbán and Russian President Vladimir Putin, adding that plans for the meeting may be affected by several factors, including the pandemic.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, POLAND 'WON'T BE BLACKMAILED' OVER EU FUNDS

Poland and Hungary will "do what it takes" to stop any potential blackmail when it comes to accessing European Union funding, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Zbigniew

Rau, his Polish counterpart, in Warsaw. The two ministers underlined their respective standpoints that both countries are entitled to those funds because "Poles and Hungarians contribute to the EU's economic output," Szijjártó told MTI, adding that "the EU's funds are a common asset". Attempts to "blackmail" Hungary and Poland to give up their migration policy or other policies "are unacceptable", he added. Szijjártó and Rau also agreed to reject the European Commission's new migration pact. The package "advocates the same principle along with the same mistakes that the [European] commission pushed in the past five years," he said.

HUNGARY OPENS CONSULATE GENERAL IN GDANSK

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó opened Hungary's consulate general in Gdansk, in Poland. In his address at the opening ceremony, Szijjártó said that building cooperation with Gdansk, a major port and economic centre, was instrumental in terms of promoting Hungary's exports. The new consulate general will ensure diplomatic support to Hungarian companies, as well as serving some 500 Hungarian nationals living in the area, he said. Szijjártó noted the multiple tasks facing the government at the time of the coronavirus epidemic. It has a duty to protect the health, life and jobs of Hungarians but also to ensure that the country, including its foreign relations,

continue to operate, he said. He said the region had deep-rooted historic ties to Hungary, with several Hungarian statesmen remembered in Gdansk. The consulate general opened there is the fifth after Germany, Russia, China and Ukraine, Szijjártó said.

ORBÁN HAS TALKS WITH AUSTRALIA COUNTERPART

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had talks with Scott Morrison, his Australian counterpart, on the coronavirus pandemic and its economic impact, Orbán's press office has said. The two prime ministers discussed ways to tackle the economic crisis, with special regard to reviving tourism, and touched upon bilateral business ties, as well as topical issues in international politics.

SZFE CHANCELLOR: UNIVERSITY WEBSITE HACKED

The website of Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) has been hacked and is currently unavailable, the university's recently appointed chancellor said. Gábor Szarka said in a statement that "the problem is being dealt with". According to press reports, the website has been unavailable since Wednesday afternoon. SZFE's new leadership had internet services cut off from SZFE's central campus on Oct. 13. The facility has been blockaded by students protesting for restoring

the university's autonomy for some 50 days. On Oct. 16 the leadership decided to bring the autumn break forward and called on students to leave the premises but they refused.

KOVÁCS: 'RULE OF LAW WARRIORS' PUSHING POLITICAL AGENDA

Proponents of the idea of tying European Union budget allocations to member states' respect for the rule of law are unable to define what that mechanism should be and are simply waging an ideological battle, Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications, wrote in an op-ed for Brussels-based news portal Euractiv. One of the reasons for the current debate around the EU's next multi-year budget is that certain member states "continue to push for the so-called conditionality mechanism, which would place conditions on budget allocations to member states based on nebulous rule-of-law criteria", Kovács wrote. The European Council decisively rejected this idea at a meeting in July, he said. Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel, he added, affirmed that a rule-of-law mechanism would require the consent of all member states as well as an amendment of the EU treaties. "But none of this deters the rule of law warriors, who wage this campaign like an ideological struggle," he wrote. "If they cannot use objective criteria and reasonable argument to support

their cause, they bend the details to make their case."

Citing opposition Momentum Movement MEP Anna Donáth's recent op-ed for Euractiv, Kovács accused the MEP of attempting to "alter the scope of the rule of law debate". He challenged Donáth's claim that Hungarian democracy "contains no real limitations to the exercise of power" saying that elections remained "the most fundamental means to exercise -- and limit -- power".

DOBREV VOWS TO GET EP APPROVAL FOR EUROPEAN MINIMUM WAGE

Klára Dobrev, a Hungarian MEP of the opposition Democratic Coalition, has said the European Parliament may pass legislation to introduce a European minimum wage. Dobrev told a press conference that her employment and social policy guidelines had passed in the EP with an overwhelming majority. These could soon be made into EU directives, she said, adding that she had urged the European Commission to establish a methodology for determining a fair minimum wage in each member state. People who work eight-hour shifts must earn enough to provide for themselves and their families, she said. The MEP said her report also urges the establishment of a European health-care union. The bloc must implement rules to ensure that EU citizens have access to the same quality of health care across the bloc, she added.

FIDESZ MEP: DOBREV REPORT ON EURO ZONE UNACCEPTABLE

An MEP of ruling Fidesz has slammed a report by Klára Dobrev, an MEP of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK), saying that "responsible politicians" would not prepare reports on a group they are not members of, or vote for measures curbing member states' competencies. Ádám Kósa said that Dobrev's report, which she presented on Wednesday to the European Parliament, would put the right to determine the minimum wage into EU hands, and insisted that "Hungary has a well-working system". Kósa said the report also promoted progressive taxation, a model Fidesz rejected because "it would introduce a system where many who have the means would not pay taxes" instead of the single-bracket model that "has worked fine in Hungary". Fidesz MEPs rejected the document in Wednesday's online vote, and stood by an "independent tax policy, job creation and responsible budgetary policy," Kósa said. Dobrev has "crammed the proposal full of promises that have no financial footing," he added.

FORTY-SIX CORONAVIRUS PATIENTS DIE, INFECTIONS UP BY 2,032

Forty-six Covid-19 patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died in the past

24 hours, and registered coronavirus infections rose by 2,032 to 52,212, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday. The death toll rose to 1,305, while 15,254 people have made a recovery. There are 35,653 active infections, while 2,132 patients are hospitalised, 197 on ventilators. Fully 24,764 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests carried out stands at 935,842.

Border controls and entry restrictions remain in place and citizens have been asked to avoid participating in large events. Wearing face mask is obligatory in shops, on public transport and in cinemas, theatres, shopping malls, as well as in health and social-care facilities. Restaurants and entertainment venues must close at 11pm. Visits to hospitals and nursing homes are banned and temperature measurements are being carried out at school gates. Fully 73 kindergartens and 40 schools are officially under full suspension, while 172 classes and 16 schools are carrying out teaching online. Budapest (15,623) and Pest County (6,565) have the most infections, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (3,276), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (3,185), Szabolcs-

Szatmár-Bereg (2,698) and Hajdú-Bihar (2,557). Tolna County has the fewest infections (534).

KSH: MORE BIRTHS, FEWER DEATHS IN HUNGARY BETWEEN JAN-SEP

Hungary's population decline slowed in the first nine months of the year as the number of births increased by 3.7% and the number of deaths decreased by 3.9% compared with the same period last year, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. There were 69,543 births in January-September, up by 3,251. The number of deaths was 94,494, down by 3,248 from last year, KSH said. The rise in births and the drop in deaths means that the rate of natural population decline slowed by 21% compared with the same period last year. The number of marriages went up to 53,774, an increase of 1,613 from last year, KSH said.

ITALIAN RIGHT-WING LEADER MARKS OCTOBER 23 HOLIDAY

Giorgia Meloni, the leader of Italy's right-wing Fratelli d'Italia party, paid respects to the anniversary of

Hungary's 1956 uprising, and said that Europe needed "brave peoples like the heroes of '56, to remind it of its real identity". "I always feel at home among Hungarians, not simply because our flags have the same colours and because of our strong historic ties, but because [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán and I agree on the prospects and mission of Europe..." Meloni said.

She said the Europe created to protect borders and European "roots, identity and values" should prevail, rather than one ruling over nation states by curbing their freedom. In a speech in parliament, Meloni said she had called out Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, saying "Italy, like a serf," was unable to protect its freedom, while "less powerful nations such as Poland and Hungary are raising their heads." She called it unacceptable that Hungary and Poland "are being blackmailed" under the pretext of the rule of law. Meloni spoke at a ceremony in Rome, where Pier Francesco Pignitore, writer of a song about the uprising, was awarded the Order of Merit of Hungary, Officers' Cross.