



Empty restaurants in E Hungary after the government has banned dining in place. Restaurants may only offer takeout and home delivery

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Coronavirus updates**

**Stats office releases September construction, industry output figures**

**National Public Services University holds conference on labour market**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: ARMY TO JOIN CURFEW MONITORING

Hungarian soldiers will be involved in enforcing the new curfew regulations, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said.

Orbán said he had consulted Interior Minister Sándor Pintér and Defence Minister Tibor Benkő on involving the army “to enforce curfew rules and maintain public order, and, where possible, to ease the burden on health services” amid the coronavirus pandemic. “Our soldiers will not defend the homeland in war now but help ... in areas where the ministers of the interior and health deem necessary,” Orbán said. The prime minister said a government decree on legal, staffing, and financial details would be issued after the next government meeting. On Tuesday, lawmakers extended the government’s special powers by 90 days, allowing the government to suspend the application of some legislation and take extraordinary measures by decree. A curfew is in force between 8pm and 5am, and work carried out beyond the home must be justified. Face masks must now be worn in public spaces in localities with more than 10,000 residents, though it is up to local mayors to decide which spaces the rule applies to. Schools from the eighth grade as well as universities are now holding lessons and lectures online.

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**ORBÁN HOPES FAMILIES CAN SPEND CHRISTMAS TOGETHER**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in an interview with commercial broadcaster TV2, expressed hope that restrictions on family gatherings, which are limited to ten people, could be lifted by Christmas. The effects of the restrictions introduced on Wednesday against the coronavirus pandemic will be visible in two weeks, Orbán said. "I cannot answer sooner than that, but I have strong hope," he said. Orbán said he hoped that "European states with good protective measures, Hungary among them, will be able to celebrate Christmas in a more liberated manner than the way we are currently living."

Regarding the new restrictions, Orbán said they were instrumental in ensuring the necessary quality and safety of hospital treatment. Without such measures, "we would run out of doctors and nurses," he said. Hospital beds, protective gear and ventilators are at hand, "and we have doctors too, only not enough," Orbán said. Without the restrictions, the health-care system had a 50% chance of withstanding the onslaught of the epidemic, he said. "With restrictions, that chance is 99.99%," he added.

Orbán said the public "seemed ready" to accept draconian measures such as a curfew between 8pm and 5am. Ahead of outlining the restrictions, Orbán said he had reviewed the Austrian measures and

consulted with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. On Thursday, he will talk to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, he said.

Orbán praised the Hungarian health-care system, saying it was in a "heroic state" with hospital staff working beyond their strength. However, "there are only so many of them", he said. "Had everything gone on as it did before, they would have had to capitulate after a while," Orbán said. With the restrictions aiding their work, "they will hopefully withstand the pressure," he added. "We have excellent doctors and nurses ... but they are also human," Orbán said, adding that the number of infected professionals was "not low".

Orbán said a vaccine against Covid-19 was within reach, and medicines to alleviate the symptoms of the disease were available and procured regularly. No vaccine has as yet passed all four requirements for public distribution, but several have passed three, he said. Vaccines developed in the European Union will pass the last hurdle in January, and their Russian and Chinese counterparts are expected to do the same, he said. Hungary is in contact with all three countries, he added. It would be "liberating" to have several vaccines Hungarians could choose from, he said. He noted, at the same time, that only smaller quantities of either would reach Hungary by December-January. "There will be a feeling of relief nonetheless." One person will likely need two jabs to be

inoculated, he said. The hundreds of millions of vaccines needed across the EU are set to become available in April or May "and then we'll experience a feeling of liberation", Orbán said.

Put to him that many would have wanted primary schools and kindergartens to be closed, the prime minister said most people believed that the country must continue to function even while mounting a defence against the epidemic "and for parents this means being able to go to work". If crèches are closed and kindergartners and primary school students are sent home, a parent would be forced to stay home with them and would not be able to go to work, Orbán explained. "This is something that most people don't want," he said, adding, however, that if at some point the majority supported this solution "there'll be a chance to implement it".

Orbán also said that he, too, was surprised that many had held "farewell gatherings" before the curfew came into effect. "But the question is whether those who are better at following the rules can influence those who have a harder time with it," he said. As regards the police monitoring of the curfew, Orbán said officers should be "humane but manly" when enforcing the rules, adding that lawmakers had enacted clear regulations. Patrol groups will consist of a police officer and an armed soldier, he said, noting that



under Hungary's constitution, soldiers are not authorised to police civilians but could still be of help to the police officers.

Orbán said the government would provide relief for hotels, restaurants and leisure companies over the coming month. "But this isn't a solution, it just helps them survive." The prime minister said the government would soon enact measures aimed at helping businesses stay afloat and become stronger over the coming months, adding that these would mainly come in the form of tax cuts. "We have to help businesses stay afloat so that they don't have to let anyone go and so that they can hire new people who will then be able to provide for their families," Orbán said. He added that the government was committed to the concept of a labour-based economy even in a time of crisis management.

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### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO RECEIVE RUSSIAN COVID-19 VACCINE SAMPLE WITHIN WEEK AND A HALF**

Hungary will receive a sample of Russia's coronavirus vaccine within a week and a half, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told public broadcaster M1. The preliminary results show Russia's vaccine, Sputnik V, is 92% effective, the minister said. This is good news for Hungary, he said, noting that the government was in advanced talks on buying the

vaccine. Samples of the vaccine are set to be delivered to Hungary within a week and a half which will then undergo laboratory testing, Szijjártó said. A small quantity of the vaccine will arrive in Hungary next month for clinical trials before larger quantities are imported in the second half of January, he said. Hungary and Russia agreed that Russia will compile and send Hungary the documentation necessary for the vaccine's authorisation by Thursday evening, Szijjártó said. He said Hungary could issue a temporary 6-month import regulation for emergency situations as early as Wednesday. Szijjártó also said that he is scheduled to hold talks with Russia's industry and trade minister on Friday. The meeting will also be attended by representatives of a Hungarian vaccine producer, he said. The company complies with the safety level that would be needed to produce the Covid-19 vaccine but it is still examining whether it can take on the vaccine's production, the minister said. "We could have an answer by the middle or end of next week," he added. Szijjártó said that if a country had the capacity to manufacture a vaccine it would not be at the mercy of others. The government is still committed to procuring coronavirus vaccines from as many sources as possible in order to ensure the safety of the Hungarian people, he said. Szijjártó, who has been in quarantine for nine days, said he had experienced every typical symptom of Covid-19 with the

exception of pneumonia and a fever. The minister said he had been feeling better recently but was missing his family.

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### **JUSTICE MIN: GOVT SUBMITS BILL ON UPBRINGING ACCORDING TO 'CHRISTIAN VALUES'**

The government has submitted to parliament a constitutional amendment proposal with a view to strengthening protections of families and children, Justice Minister Judit Varga noted, adding that the amendment seeks to ensure that all children are brought up according to Christian values appropriate to his or her gender of birth. Safeguards of the right of children to proper physical, mental and moral development are explicitly enshrined in the Hungarian fundamental law, Varga told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, adding that the current amendment proposal would extend those protections.

"We're living in a period when constitutional protections must be further strengthened," she said, adding that the changes would be reflected in lower-level legislation. She said the emphasis of the passages on Christian culture covers cultural and historical traditions on which Europe's identity was also built. "In today's world, it has become necessary to declare this," Varga said.

**OPPOSITION CALLS ON GOVT TO WITHDRAW AMENDMENT PROPOSALS**

Hungary’s opposition parties have called on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to withdraw a set of amendment proposals to the country’s constitution and election laws the government submitted to parliament on Tuesday. The constitutional amendment proposal seeks to strengthen protections of families and children, ensuring that all children are brought up according to Christian values appropriate to their gender of birth, the justice minister, who submitted the bill, has said. Meanwhile, the election-related bills would amend the rules on putting together national party lists. In a statement, the opposition Socialists, Jobbik, Democratic Coalition, LMP, Párbeszéd and Momentum parties said the government’s amendment proposals indicated that “Viktor Orbán is terrified of losing the 2022 general election”. “The prime minister and his gang are handing over billions of forints in taxpayer money to oligarchs already basking in castles, boats and private jets, setting themselves up for a loss in 2022,” the parties said.

“They are doing all of this in the middle of the coronavirus epidemic when they should be concentrating on resolving the crisis and saving and protecting as many people as possible,” they added. They said the government’s decision to submit an amendment proposal to the election

law “a year and a half out from the parliamentary elections and without consulting anyone else” was a sign that the prime minister was getting “desperate”. “This just goes to show that Orbán does not even feel safe in an election system he designed for himself,” the statement said, adding that the prime minister had become unfit for office.

**GYURCSÁNY: GOVT ‘HAS LOST CONTROL’**

Opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) leader Ferenc Gyurcsány has accused the government of losing control over the handling of the coronavirus epidemic, saying it had failed to ready the country and its health services for the second wave. The prime minister said on Tuesday evening that there was “a fifty percent chance” that the health-care system would collapse, Gyurcsány told an online press conference on Wednesday. He insisted that the events of the last 24 hours suggested “the government could collapse even sooner”, and he said the cabinet had been gripped by “chaos and panic” over the past week. Gyurcsány said that while “hundreds of Hungarians” were dying every day, the government had preoccupied itself with changing the constitution to accommodate such policies as restricting who can adopt children. In the meantime, “tens of thousands of people are losing their livelihoods,” he said. “We are left to fend for ourselves,” he said. “The government has let us down.” Ruling

Fidesz said in a statement that this week’s measures were introduced to keep hospitals operational and to slow the spread of the epidemic. Referring to Gyurcsány’s tenure as prime minister between 2004 and 2009, Fidesz said “if it was down to Gyurcsány and the leftists, there would be hardly any state-run hospitals left in Hungary by now, most of inpatient care would be privatised and patients would be utterly vulnerable.”

**101 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, INFECTIONS UP 3,945**

Fully 101 Covid patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, have died in the past 24 hours and coronavirus infections have risen by 3,945 to 122,863, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said. Altogether 2,697 Covid patients have died since the presence of coronavirus in Hungary, while 28,808 have made a recovery. There are currently 91,358 active infections and 6,352 patients are in hospital, 473 on ventilators. Fully 36,492 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests stands at 1,259,454.

From Tuesday, shops can open until 7pm, with the exception of pharmacies and petrol stations. Hairdressers, masseurs and personal trainers must observe general curfew rules. Restaurants are limited to offering take-aways, while hotels are not allowed to cater to tourists, only guests arriving for business, economic or educational purposes. Most infections have been

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registered in Budapest (30,345), followed by Pest County (16,107), and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (8,939), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (7,135), Hajdú-Bihar (6,408) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (6,397). Tolna County has the least number of infections (1,502).

### **APPEALS COURT ORDERS RENEWAL OF SZFE STRIKE CASE**

The Budapest appeals court ordered the renewal of a court procedure on a strike of employees at the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) in Budapest. Employees of the university have been on strike since October 1, and students blockaded university buildings since September in protest against a new leadership, which they see as illegitimate. The blockade was stopped on Tuesday, in compliance with new restrictions against the coronavirus epidemic. In its first instance ruling, the Budapest court said the strike was unlawful, a decision the employees appealed. The appeals court said in its ruling that it had made “no substantive ruling regarding the lawfulness of the strike.” The foundation, which took over the leadership of the university in the summer, said earlier that it had met two of the eight requests the strike committee had submitted. “Another request to return to the previous work schedule has also been fulfilled, and the court declared the remaining points unlawful,” the foundation said.

The strikers have also demanded that the “model shift” at the university should be discontinued altogether. In a statement later in the day, SZFE teachers insisted that the appeals court had ruled their remaining six requests were lawful. “Despite the Chancellor’s letter on Friday ordering that teaching be stopped, we will continue to teach as a new form of resistance,” the statement said. “We believe [the leadership’s] cancelling the term without a formal decision to be unlawful and contrary to the founding document.”

### **KARÁCSONY TO COORDINATE MEASURES WITH DISTRICTS**

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said he was ready for talks with district mayors to coordinate coronavirus-related measures. Karácsony said it was “absurd” that each district should define their own rules on wearing masks in public areas, arguing that this made it “nearly impossible” to adopt consistent regulations for the whole of the city. The mayor also slammed the government for failing to address among its recent restrictions issues around testing, both in terms of the need to increase it, as well as offering free screening to crèche, kindergarten, and school staff. “While we are supposed to be saving lives, the government is focused on saving its assets” through new legislation, Karácsony said.

“While we should be reining in the epidemic, the government is working to curb the opposition’s chances by amending the election law,” he added. Karácsony said the city of Budapest would continue its efforts to step up screening in seniors’ homes and making preparations to test teachers and other school staff in cooperation with the districts.

### **OFFICIAL: ENERGY EFFICIENCY LICENSING TO PROMOTE HUNGARY’S ENERGY INDEPENDENCE**

Hungary’s introducing a system of energy efficiency licensing (EKR) will increase the country’s “energy sovereignty”, a state secretary of the innovation and technology ministry said after submitting the relevant bill to parliament. Péter Kaderják said that under the new amendment “the energy bills of end-consumers and the need for energy imports will be reduced sustainably”. The bill places priority on energy efficiency in government decision-making, especially regarding energy policy and investment projects, Kaderják said. The EKR, to take effect in 2021, is designed to promote energy-saving projects in sectors that use high amounts of energy inefficiently, he said, adding that central energy efficiency targets could be met by involving businesses and energy providers. “Businesses and residents alike will benefit from those developments,” Kaderják said.

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## **FOREIGN INVESTORS VIRTUALLY DISAPPEAR FROM REAL ESTATE MARKET**

Foreign buyers and investors have virtually disappeared from Hungary's housing market this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to Wednesday's Magyar Nemzet. Citing ingatlan.com data, foreign participation in Hungary's real estate market dropped by an annual 80% between January and October. Foreign buyers purchased more than half of properties in Budapest, mainly the inner districts, and it is inevitable that sooner or later their absence will be reflected in lower prices, the paper said. Central Statistical Office (KSH) data show that foreigners bought around 7,000 apartments last year. Most were German and Chinese nationals. Austrians and Germans were

interested in holiday homes around Lake Balaton and they typically sought expensive houses with a view. In the capital, the main interest was in buying apartments in the city centre to rent out, while preferring a larger family house on the leafy Buda side of the capital for themselves.

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## **CHI FU HUNGARY GROUP DONATES 10 M MASKS TO PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

The CHI FU Hungary group and its founder, the investor Frank Liu, have made a donation of 10 million masks to public institutions in Hungary and to associations of ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries, the group told MTI. Eight million of the masks will go to public institutions in Hungary and 2 million to associations of ethnic Hungarians living in border regions in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, Croatia and Slovenia. The

masks, of certified European Union quality, are worth 1 billion forints (EUR 2.8m). CHI FU Hungary group counts meat company Pápai Hús among its investments.

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## **HUNGARY SOCCER TEAM COACH TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS**

Marco Rossi, the coach of Hungary's national soccer team, has tested positive for Covid-19, the Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ) said on Twitter on Wednesday. "Following his previous negative tests, Rossi's most recent test has come back positive. He has been quarantined from the team's players and staff," MLSZ said. The Hungarian team is scheduled to play a run-off against Iceland in the European Championship at 8.45pm in Budapest's Puskás Arena on Thursday.