

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Máthé

Police patrol Budapest streets, enforcing Covid-19 curfew

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases prelim Q3 GDP report

Coronavirus updates

National Public Services University holds online conference on Minority SafePack initiative

Modern Factories Night

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: ACCESS TO MULTIPLE VACCINES KEY

It is important for Hungary to have access to multiple types of vaccines against coronavirus, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has said.

In a videoconference with Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, which was uploaded to the PM's Facebook page, Szijjártó is heard telling Orbán that Hungary's most advanced talks on acquiring a vaccine are with Russia. The preliminary results show Russia's vaccine, Sputnik V, is 92% effective, he said, adding that Hungary will receive a sample of the Russian vaccine within a week and a half, after which it will undergo laboratory testing. Hungary has also signed a contract with China's state-owned vaccine developer, one of the three companies working on a Covid-19 vaccine in the country.

Orbán said Hungary "isn't looking bad" in terms of acquiring vaccines developed in the West, either. "We're able to obtain vaccines from everywhere."

Meanwhile, Orbán noted that a new government decree states that members of the government can return to work only in possession of two negative tests taken 48 hours apart. In the video, Szijjártó said his illness was "more stressful mentally than physically". The foreign minister tested positive on Nov. 4, during official engagements in Asia.

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GOVT STREAMLINES LICENSING PROCEDURE FOR COVID-19 VACCINES

Hungary’s government streamlined the licensing procedure for Covid-19 medicines and vaccines from countries outside of the European Economic Area in a decree published in the latest issue of the official gazette Magyar Közlöny.

The decree, issued under the special legal order, allows the National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition to issue temporary licences for such medicines and vaccines for a period of six months. The period may be extended by another six months under extraordinary circumstances. In a statement issued on Thursday, the Government Information Centre noted the importance of keeping “bureaucratic hurdles” from preventing quick access to Covid-19 vaccines.

CORONAVIRUS - GOVT: EPIDEMIC SITUATION WORSE IN MOST OTHER PARTS OF EU

Hungary ranks 10th in the European Union in terms of the number of people per million infected by the coronavirus and 15th in terms of the death toll, suggesting that the situation “is worse in most of the EU than in Hungary”, the government website koronavirus.gov.hu said, adding that pandemic data on various countries is best compared “in the broadest

possible timeframe” because data methods varied widely. The EU average number of cases is 150 percent higher than the Hungarian figure, the website said. “It is important to point out that Hungary’s data supply is among the most transparent and open, with every deceased person infected with the coronavirus included in the daily deaths figure, even if the direct cause of death was not the virus but an underlying illness.” Since the start of the pandemic, some 2,784 infected people have died in Hungary. Their average age was 76 and most had an underlying illness. Only 7% of the cases showed no indication of an underlying illness, it added. All Hungarian hospitals automatically report a Covid-related death, and this data is incorporated into the official statistics within 24-48 hours, the website said. The death rate in Hungary is around half the EU average, with worse figures reported from Belgium, Spain, Italy, France, Sweden, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Romania, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Portugal, it added.

GULYÁS: HEALTH SERVICES ‘FAR BETTER PREPARED’ FOR 2ND WAVE

The second wave of the coronavirus epidemic is “more serious” than the first, but “the country and its health services are far more ready for the challenge”, Gergely Gulyás, the prime minister’s chief of staff, told a regular government press briefing. Gulyás

said the government trusted that the new restrictions over the next thirty days would stop the spread of the virus and health capacity would be sufficient to treat patients requiring intensive care. He added that Hungary was monitoring the practices of neighbouring countries, especially those of Austria. “The same measures in Hungary have resulted in far lower case numbers,” he said. Hungary, he added, had the highest number of ventilators per million people and the third-highest number of hospital beds and intensive care beds in the European Union.

Asked about the US-German coronavirus vaccine, Gulyás said that so far the government has signed a 13 billion forint deal with a single company for 6.5 million doses. He said the government must try to obtain any other vaccine that has been tested three times, is proven to save lives, and can be imported before the US-German vaccine is made available. Talks are under way with Israeli, Russian, and Chinese parties “concerning any vaccine that cannot be obtained through EU ties”. Vaccinations will be provided on a voluntary basis and free of charge “no matter which vaccine is available”, Gulyás said, emphasising that only vaccines that are not harmful would be procured. Talks “with all parties” are under way on licencing the vaccine so that it can be produced in Hungary, the chief of staff added.

Concerning the timing of recent coronavirus-related restrictions, Gulyás said the government had taken “timely

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and appropriate” measures. Whereas twice as many hospital beds are available compared with the current number of Covid patients in the country, “this is not true in terms of nurses and doctors”. The restrictions were introduced to maintain an appropriate level of health services, he said, adding that the government was confident that Hungary’s health system would withstand the burden of the epidemic.

GULYÁS: ELECTION LAW AMENDMENT ‘JUSTIFIED, NECESSARY’

Addressing the topic of Hungary’s recent amendment to the election law, Gergely Gulyás, the PM’s chief of staff, said the move was “justified and necessary”, insisting that the changes would not have an impact on the opposition’s ability to cooperate. The changes, he said, were aimed at ensuring that only those parties that can field at least fifty individual candidates would receive central financing. “This has nothing to do with the ability of opposition parties to field candidates...” he said, adding that all parties agreed that election and campaign financing rules had been open to abuse. Under the amended law, political parties will need 25,000 signatures to set up a national list and receive central subsidies, Gulyás said. Also, the new rules, he said, were passed as a matter of urgency so they could come into effect before the 2022 elections. Addressing the issue

of fake political parties, he noted that some public prosecutions were still ongoing related to the 2018 general election, adding that similar abuses would no longer be feasible in the 2022 ballot now that the government has introduced tougher requirements for anyone applying to receive central campaign funding.

Answering a question concerning homeless services, Gulyás said: “Nobody should sleep on the street in the second half of November, irrespective of the epidemic”. He noted that municipalities are obliged to run homeless shelters, adding that rooms should be made available for homeless people who have not yet been tested for coronavirus. The government, he said, was ready to help with legal changes if necessary.

GULYÁS: GERMAN EU PRESIDENCY RULE-OF-LAW DEAL ‘BREACHES TREATIES’

On the subject of the EU agreement to make funding contingent on meeting rule-of-law standards, Gergely Gulyás, the PM’s chief of staff, said Hungarian lawmakers had already defined the conditions under which the government could give its approval to the EU budget and recovery fund, adding that the German presidency’s current formula for the agreement breached the EU treaties. Hungary, he said, would not help to form a consensus on the matter under such conditions.

He said a “stealthy” attempt was being made to override EU treaties, adding that in order to amend the treaty, unanimity was required. The rule of law only works if decisions can be appealed in court, Gulyás said. The key question, he said, was whether government decisions would be made in Budapest or Brussels. Gulyás added that allowing two-thirds of EU member states to back a rule-of-law procedure would amount to “blackmail” over matters that, based on the Lisbon Treaty, belonged exclusively to “Hungarians and the Hungarian government”. Gulyás said Hungary had agreed to consider the Next Generation EU fund out of solidarity with southern member states, even though it disagreed with the principle of joint borrowing. He added that Hungary had no financing difficulties, and, notwithstanding its desire to help other countries, it could not accept the rule-of-law contingency on funding. Asked about EU country reports, Gulyás slammed the EU for creating “the right to blackmail”. Legal consequences should not arise if a document does not meet objective standards, he said.

GULYÁS: CHILDREN SHOULD BE BROUGHT UP BY MOTHER AND FATHER

On the topic of the government’s recent move to ban single people from adopting a child, with minor exceptions, Gergely Gulyás, the

PM's chief of staff, told a regular government news briefing that a child's physical and mental development was best served by an upbringing involving both a mother and father, and the policy was "reasonable and in the interests of children".

Meanwhile, asked about the US presidential election, Gulyás said an official result had yet to be declared. Had a similar situation arisen in Hungary with similar irregularities, a US Democratic administration would have censured Hungary, he said. Exporting democracy, he added, was "very dangerous" because "little may be left of it at home". Gulyás insisted that the Obama administration had fallen short in finding common solutions to common goals, and whether the Biden administration would fare any better was an open question.

CORONAVIRUS - 87 FATALITIES, INFECTIONS UP 3,927

Fully 87 Covid patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, have died in the past 24 hours and coronavirus infections have risen by 3,927 to 126,790, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday. Altogether 2,784 Covid patients have died since the appearance of coronavirus in Hungary, while 29,302 have made a recovery. There are currently 94,704 active infections and 6,426 patients are in hospital, 486 on ventilators.

Fully 34,040 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests stands at 1,282,975.

On Tuesday, lawmakers extended the government's special powers by 90 days, allowing the government to suspend the application of some legislation, diverge from legal provisions and take other extraordinary measures by decree.

A major new rule is that face masks must 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. Among other measures recently introduced: school classes from the eighth grade as well as universities are now holding lessons and lectures online. Also, a curfew is in force between 8pm and 5am, and work carried out beyond the home must be justified.

With the exception of pharmacies and petrol stations, shops can be open until 7pm. 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. Sporting events must be held behind closed doors. Also, leisure facilities such as fitness gyms, indoor swimming pools, museums, libraries, cinemas, zoos and skating rinks must suspend their services.

Events, including cultural events and Christmas fairs, cannot be

held under the special rules. The government has asked religious communities to make sure their conduct during ceremonies aligns with general coronavirus safety rules. The authorities have ordered the total suspension of classroom teaching in 133 kindergartens and 24 schools.

Most infections have been registered in Budapest (31,111), followed by Pest County (16,673), and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (9,250), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (7,204), Hajdú-Bihar (6,433) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (6,406). Tolna County has the fewest infections (1,593).

FIDESZ: EP SHOULD FOCUS ON OWN LAWFUL FUNCTIONING INSTEAD OF 'LECTURING' MEMBER STATES

The European Parliament should be focused on its own lawful functioning instead of "lecturing" EU member states, an MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz party has said. "It is hypocritical of the European Parliament to be lecturing member states in a snooty tone on their coronavirus response measures while being the only parliament in Europe that is unable to guarantee the conditions needed for it to function properly and lawfully," Balázs Hidvéghi said in a statement addressing an EP debate on the effect of Covid-19 response measures on democracy and fundamental rights. Noting that all of assembly's



sessions were being conducted online, the Fidesz MEP insisted that the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic had “paralysed” the EP. “This raises serious doubts about the institution’s lawful functioning,” he said.

Hidvéghi called it “outrageous” that, “even amid these conditions”, the EP was “still preoccupied with lecturing member states on the kind of measures they should enact”. Hidvéghi noted that Hungary had been “on the receiving end of an unprecedented series of attacks” over the enhanced powers that had been granted to the government with a view to containing the spread of the virus. “These attacks included lies such as parliament having been suspended,” he said. “Interestingly enough, the most recent report issued by a Socialist politician does not contain these accusations,” Hidvéghi said. “In other words, the EP itself is admitting that it went too far in the spring by making false claims about Hungary turning into a dictatorship.” Hidvéghi called on Hungary’s left-wing MEPs and the EP as a whole to focus more on mounting a defence against the pandemic rather than hindering it.

JOBBIK CALLS ON GOVT TO SUPPORT ‘AVERAGE HUNGARIANS, NOT WEALTHY’

The government should support people living “in typical, real Hungarian circumstances” and not only “the upper middle class and the even wealthier”, opposition Jobbik deputy leader Dániel Z Kárpát said on Thursday.

Many people are faced with extreme uncertainty, including those working in tourism and the catering industry, he told an online press conference. They are either without any income or receive significantly reduced salaries as a result of the epidemic, while their bills must be paid just as before, he added. Z Kárpát said the government “neglects the basic interests of Hungarian employees”.

He referred to plans prepared by Jobbik for the Hungarian job protection fund and said it could be used to pay for four-fifths of lost wages. All multinational companies and banks “that realised record-high profits in Hungary in recent years” should be expected to contribute to the fund, he added.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OUTPUT DOWN 14.7 % IN SEPTEMBER

Construction sector output in Hungary dropped by an annual 14.7% in September after a contraction of 13.5% in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The sector has contracted since the start of the coronavirus crisis in the spring. In September, output of the building segment declined 9.1% and civil engineering output dropped by 20.6%. In a month-on-month comparison, construction sector output rose by 1.4% based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 2.2 % YR/YR IN SEPT

Hungarian industrial output was up an annual 2.2% in September, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) confirmed in a second reading on Thursday. Adjusted for the number of working days, annual industrial output fell by 1% in September. It increased by 2.3% from the previous month.