

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Six-week-old leopard cubs in the Gyöngyös zoo in NE Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

Coronavirus updates

Monetary council holds rate-setting meeting

Events marking World Prematurity Day

TOP STORY

HUNGARY VETOES EU BUDGET, RECOVERY PACKAGE

Hungary and Poland have vetoed the European Union's next multi-year budget and post-pandemic recovery package, diplomatic sources told MTI on Monday.

Budapest and Warsaw reportedly blocked the budget and the recovery package because they view them as being in violation of the EU's founding treaty and an agreement reached in July on not tying receipt of EU funds to political conditions. Without a unanimous agreement, the issue could go back before the European Council. Sebastian Fischer, the spokesman for the German EU presidency, has said that EU ambassadors in Brussels had failed to reach unanimity on the budget and the coronavirus recovery fund due to reservations expressed by two member states. Fischer said the ambassadors had approved the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism with a qualified majority.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán earlier informed German Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel that Hungary would veto legislation related to the budget and the recovery fund. Orbán has said that tying the EU's budget and the recovery package to unclear conditions put trust between member states, as well as the interests of Hungary, at risk.

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ORBÁN SALUTES HEALTH-CARE STAFF, TEACHERS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has saluted nurses, doctors, health-care staff and school employees, thanking them for their enduring efforts in coronavirus protection. In a video posted on Facebook, Orbán said that the meeting of the operative board in charge of coronavirus measures he attended on Monday morning evaluated the weekend developments of Hungary's pandemic situation and reviewed the capacities of the health-care sector. "The pressure is big at the moment, but doctors, nurses, hospital staff and schools have so far been up to the task on every front," Orbán said. He noted that Hungary has hospital beds available for 13,049 Covid patients and 1,634 beds for intensive care. There are currently 582 patients on ventilators and in intensive care, Orbán said, adding that Hungary has three times more extra capacity to provide care for patients.

JUSTICE MINISTER: HUNGARY FIGHTING FOR EUROPE, NOT AGAINST

Justice Minister Judit Varga said that ahead of the final decision on the European Union's next budget framework it must be clarified that "Hungary has never fought against Europe, but for Europe". "Hungary has never fought against Europe, but for Europe and for the European future

of our children and grandchildren," she said on Facebook. Varga said that during the extended negotiations on the EU budget, "some Member States and the domestic opposition included many issues in the figures". "Hungary agrees with the founding fathers of the Union that Europe will be Christian and humanist or it will be nothing," she said. The majority of Hungarians, and Europeans, clearly believe that "Europe should not give up its identity and the fundamental values that make Europe the most liveable continent in the world", she said.

"At the time of its accession to the EU in 2004, Hungary did not say yes to a federalist Europe, or to globalism and especially not to the United States of Europe, but to a mutually supportive and respectful alliance based on strong nation-states," Varga said. By joining the EU, Hungary did not give up that part of its national sovereignty "that decides who we want to live with in our own country", she said. "We did not say yes to joining the EU so that Brussels could define for us what we consider a family, what we call marriage and who can adopt children in Hungary and under what conditions," she said.

Varga said it was not true that Hungary failed to demonstrate solidarity with other member states during the migration crisis. She said Hungary had spent hundreds of billions of forints to protect Europe's borders and was trying to help people locally because Hungary believes that instead of importing problems to

Europe, assistance should be brought to those in need. Varga said it was not Hungary that "attacked" other member states for their migration policies but the other way round. She also said that contrary to the Hungarian opposition's claims, EU support and cohesion funding were not charitable donations but payments that Hungary was entitled to based on the EU treaties. "It is not Hungary blackmailing and putting pressure on Brussels in the EU budget negotiations, but it is Brussels blackmailing us," she said. "Anyone who knows Hungarian history knows exactly that when it comes to the future of our children and grandchildren, the Hungarian people and Hungary makes no compromise, be it a war of independence or just a simple veto," she added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ URGES JOINT EFFORTS TO STOP PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

The persecution of Christians must be stopped both in Europe and across the entire world, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has said. Addressing an online conference organised by the International Religious Freedom Alliance, Szijjártó said the world had a greater need for Christianity's role in building communities than ever before. "Unfortunately Christianity is still the most persecuted religion on Earth and we should not forget about that, not even under these challenging

circumstances we are experiencing now," he said.

Citing the latest official statistics, the minister said some 260 million Christians faced persecution in the world today and 3,000 had been killed this year. This, he said, meant that eight Christians were killed daily on average. He added that 9,500 attacks had been carried out against Christian churches and facilities this year. "And we Europeans do have to be aware that this is not just a remote phenomenon," he said. "This phenomenon has been here in Europe now," Szijjártó added, noting the recent terrorist attacks in France and Austria and the vandalisation of statues of Pope John Paul II in Poland. Szijjártó expressed his solidarity with the Polish government and Poland's Catholic Church, saying that the "extremist attacks" against Christian communities must be stopped. "This is a common responsibility of ours that we do have to push back these extreme anti-Christian movements," he said. Szijjártó also said that measures enacted against the coronavirus pandemic should not limit the right of Christian communities to practise their faith.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER SLAMS TIMMERMANS FOR 'ENDANGERING FARMERS' LIVELIHOOD'

Frans Timmermans, the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, is risking the secure

livelihood of the EU's farmers by threatening to withdraw the EC's common agricultural policy proposal unless it complies with "unattainable green goals", the Hungarian minister of agriculture has said. István Nagy said in a statement that withdrawing the CAP proposal, which the agriculture ministers' council and the European Parliament approved last week, would "ignore two years of work in the Agriculture and Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH) and the EP, and push hundreds of thousands of farmers into uncertainty". Nagy noted that the eco-schemes proposed by AGRIFISH and the EP were much more ambitious than the commission's original goals. The EC's Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies should bring opportunities rather than unbearable burdens for farmers, Nagy said. A balance should be found between competitiveness goals and climate protection, he said. Cutting the amount of pesticides by half or drawing 25% of farmlands into ecological production by 2030 are "impossible demands", Nagy said. In the absence of alternative solutions and methods, such a move would threaten the EU's competitiveness and possibly even food security, he said.

93 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, INFECTIONS UP 6,495

Fully 93 Covid patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, have died in the past 24 hours and coronavirus infections

have risen by 6,495 to 147,961, coronavirus.gov.hu said. Altogether 3,190 Covid patients have died since the appearance of coronavirus in Hungary, while 34,010 have made a recovery. There are currently 110,256 active infections and 7,236 patients are in hospital, 582 on ventilators. Fully 35,090 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests stands at 1,360,840.

On November 10, 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 takeaways, while hotels are not allowed to cater to tourists, only guests arriving for business, economic or educational

purposes. Sports 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 208 kindergartens and 37 schools, while 22 schools have returned to digital education. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (35,174), followed by Pest County (19,247), and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (10,639), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplen (8,217), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (7,938) and Hajdú-Bihar (7,353). Tolna County has the fewest infections (2,026).

OFFICIAL: SOLDIERS TO HELP POLICE WORK IN PUBLIC AREAS FROM MONDAY

Soldiers will be helping police carry out their duties in public areas from Monday, participating in keeping order, peace and public safety, an official of the defence ministry said. State secretary Szilárd Németh told a press conference that soldiers will assist in monitoring public compliance with the rules in force during the special legal

order, including curfew regulations. He said the army would make available all of its capacities and assets to help the Hungarian people and maintain the security and peace needed for a functioning country. He said that during the first wave of the epidemic, the country had demonstrated “how to come together”. Hungary was able “to win the first half” thanks to people’s discipline, the effectiveness of timely government regulations and the dedication and perseverance of health-care workers, he added. “This must stand as an example,” he said, adding that the second wave of the epidemic was much more aggressive and widespread in the whole of Europe. The Hungarian army is participating in anti-pandemic efforts based once again on the introduction of a special legal order which parliament has extended by 90 days, he said. Németh said soldiers were also assisting work in 93 hospitals in addition to “hospital commanders” remaining in place in 51 hospitals. They will be involved in tasks that do not require medical training, such as patient referral and escorting, measuring body temperatures, general administration, IT tasks, moving stocks and warehouse duties, he added. Around two hundred soldiers have also been tasked with guarding and protecting priority institutions, he said. He added that soldiers were involved in the disinfection of more than a 1,000 social care institutions and elderly care homes during the first wave, some 59 educational institutions

were disinfected in the autumn break and they can again carry out such tasks if necessary. Concerning patrolling duties together with police, he said for the time being some 50 soldiers were working with police in 14 cities and towns and their number will increase to 700. Soldiers are also assisting the work of police at Hungary’s southern borders, he said.

KARÁCSONY: GOVT AIMS TO ‘SHACKLE’ LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony has accused the government of trying to “strip local governments of their agency” to cover up the “failures” of its handling of the economic crisis. Karácsony cited a survey by the Závecz research group, saying that the opposition would win the election if it were held this Sunday. He insisted those findings were at the root of ruling Fidesz “punishing” Budapest and opposition-led cities. Karácsony insisted the government was trying to “manoeuvre with [local governments] only substantial revenue, the business tax”. Municipalities would “lose their agency” if they were deprived of that income, and that would threaten public services such as waste disposal, public transport and water supplies, he said. Referring to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s announcement that Hungary would veto the European Union’s 2021-2027 budget and its pandemic recovery fund, Karácsony said the government was “working

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to ruin Budapest for 25 billion forints [EUR 69.7m] while preparing to deprive Hungary of 2,500 billion forints out of a stupid fear for its power". He called on the government to accept the EU's rule of law conditions and to involve local governments in using the recovery funding.

OPPOSITION PARTIES VOW TO SETTLE ON JOINT PM CANDIDATE BY OCT 2021

Hungary's opposition parties have promised to name a joint candidate for prime minister and joint individual candidates for each electoral district for the next general election by October 23, 2021. The opposition Socialist, Jobbik, Democratic Coalition, LMP, Momentum and Párbeszéd parties said in a statement that each of their joint candidates would be chosen in primaries. The parties said they had agreed at a meeting on Sunday that although they "reject the amendment proposals to the election system initiated by the Fidesz regime", they were "preparing to win and take back the public funds being stolen under the guise of a constitutional amendment". The parties also slammed the government's handling of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, saying its measures aimed at managing the crisis were "too little, too late" after "failing to prepare the health-care system" for the surge in cases.

"The Fidesz regime should only be concerned with protecting the Hungarian people and strengthening the economy and the health-care system during the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, instead of matters concerning its powers," the statement said. The parties said they were preparing to replace the Fidesz-led government and usher in the "start of a new era" in 2022. They added that their joint election manifesto would lay down the fundamental principles "that will serve as a compass for the cooperation between the democratic parties". The consultations between the parties will also involve professional and civil organisations as well as labour unions, the statement added.

DK SUBMITS PUBLIC DATA REQUEST ON OCT-NOV HOSPITAL DEATHS

The opposition Democratic Coalition has submitted a request for data of public interest about the number of hospital deaths in October and November because the party is concerned that the government has manipulated the figures and kept real death figures a secret. DK spokesman Balázs Barkoczi told an online press conference that official Hungarian statistics of recent weeks show a "globally unique trend" because no matter how the number of infection cases, people in hospital and on ventilators was increasing,

the number of deaths was not going up. He said he wished this was true but it was practically impossible because anywhere in the world where infections were growing deaths were also growing. DK also expects the government to explain how it is possible that there was a significant increase in the number of deaths among people aged above 65 during the autumn but only a fraction of these deaths were caused by coronavirus according to the official statistics, he said. Ruling Fidesz in a statement called it "outrageous" that leftist parties "fail to set aside their cheap political tricks and keep producing fake news and fake videos, and attacking health-care authorities". Had it depended on DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsany and left-wing parties, the number of infections, deaths and jobseekers would be much higher, "as they continue to hinder rather than assist protection efforts", the party said.

LMP CRITICISES GOVT OVER RECENT BILLS

The group leader of opposition LMP criticised the government over pressing "untimely legislation" instead of taking crucial decisions in connection with the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. While central measures to tackle the second wave are not in place, the cabinet has submitted some 40 bills on other matters that include one allowing the privatisation of state-owned land under nature protection,

László Lóránt Keresztes told an online press conference. He also criticised a proposal by the chamber of commerce and industry on suspending the local business tax payment which he said would put local councils in a difficult financial situation. Keresztes also expressed concern over the proposal on the planned site for depositing nuclear waste in south Hungary's Boda, arguing that residents in the village and its region strongly oppose the project.

GOVT OFFICIAL URGES GREATER INTL EFFORTS TO AID PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

The number of Christians facing persecution for their faith is on the rise worldwide and the international community "must hear their cry for help", Hungary's state secretary in charge of aiding persecuted Christians told an international conference. The international community must

not forget about those for whom "coronavirus seems like the lesser evil" compared with an existential crisis they are forced to face every day, Tristan Azbej told an online conference organised by International Christian Concern, a Washington-based rights group. The number of Christians facing persecution around the world has risen from 245 million to 260 million over the past year, Azbej said, adding that close to 3,000 Christians had been murdered and 3,700 arrested for their beliefs during this period. Also, nearly one hundred places of worship have been attacked, he added. Around one-third of the world's population faces some form of persecution over their religious beliefs, with Christians being the most persecuted community, the state secretary said. Their situation has now also been made worse by the pandemic, Azbej said. He said that rather than encouraging persecuted communities to leave their homelands, help should be taken where the problems arise.

HARGHITA COUNCIL HEAD: MOBILISING HUNGARIANS TO VOTE 'BIG TASK'

Mobilising the local Hungarian community to cast their votes in Romania's parliamentary elections set for December 6 is a big task, the president of the country's Harghita County Council told public news broadcaster M1. Hungarians living in local counties may think that the chance is slim for a Hungarian candidate to garner enough votes to win a parliamentary mandate, Csaba Borboly said. "But I still trust that a mandate can be won in counties where it has never happened before," he said, noting an election cooperation of Hungarian parties in Romania for next month's ballot. The RMDSZ and EMSZ parties reached an agreement two weeks ago, Borboly said, adding that this was the most effective way of representing the Hungarian community's interests.