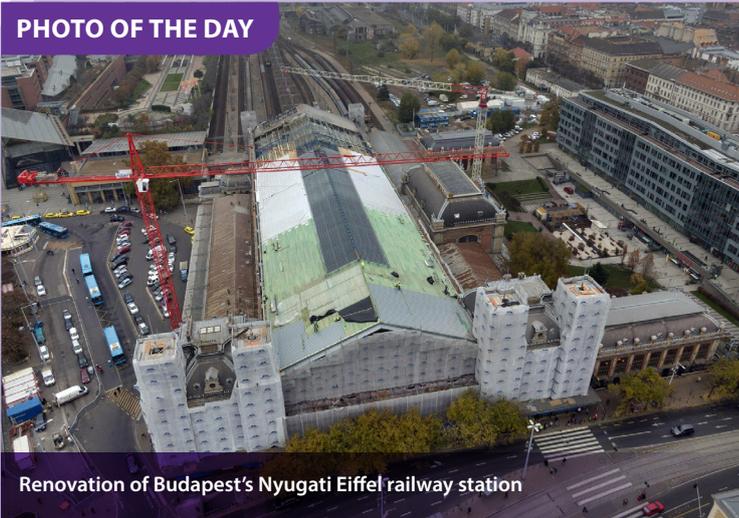


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Máthé

Renovation of Budapest's Nyugati Eiffel railway station

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU defence ministers in video conference

Plenary session of parliament

Coronavirus updates

LMP presser on free parking

TOP STORY

RUSSIAN VACCINE SAMPLE DELIVERED

A sample of Russia's coronavirus vaccine has arrived in Budapest, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Thursday.

Hungarian scientists will now begin examining the vaccine so that they can make an informed decision on its usage and approval, the minister said on Facebook. Today it is clear to everyone that only a vaccine will provide the best and most effective solution to the pandemic, Szijjártó said. "Therefore the government is making every effort to make the best, safest and most effective vaccines available..."

Gergely Gulyás, the PM's chief of staff, said Hungary has contracted altogether 12 million doses, costing 36 billion forints (EUR 99.6m), from three manufacturers. Fully 3,270,000 doses are contracted from British AstraZeneca, 4,360,000 doses from US company Janssen and 4,439,000 doses from Pfizer in addition to potential Chinese and Russian vaccine purchases now under negotiation, he said. The government has a duty to procure any vaccine that has been duly tested and proven to be effective as quickly as possible, and so it is in talks with "every entity" potentially able to provide it, including the EU, Israel, the US, China and Russia, he said.

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**HUNGARY FIRST
EUROPEAN COUNTRY TO
RECEIVE RUSSIAN VACCINE**

Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, noted that Hungary is the first European country to have received a sample of Russia’s vaccine. Russia delivered 10 doses of the vaccine, making sure to keep their temperature at -18 degrees Celsius during shipping, Szijjártó said. The samples will now be moved to laboratories where the Hungarian authorities will have an opportunity to study them and make an informed decision on “their potential usage and approval”, he added. The lab tests on the samples will get under way once Russia sends the full documentation on the vaccine, the minister said. “This is also in progress and will arrive shortly, and then Hungarian experts can begin their analysis,” Szijjártó said.

**GULYÁS: SOROS CALLS FOR
FINANCIAL SANCTIONS
AGAINST COUNTRIES THAT
REFUSE MIGRANTS**

Commenting on a call by George Soros for financial sanctions against countries that refuse to take in migrants, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office, told a regular press briefing that Hungary “cannot accept any form of lecturing” from the American-Hungarian financier. Hungary insists that it has the right to decide whom to live with

and whom not to live with, Gulyás said. “It has the right to decide whether to reject migration or not, and its citizens gave an unambiguous response in the referendum and the general election.” Gulyás said Hungary’s opposition had published a position “strikingly similar to Soros’s” on this issue. The opposition now sees a chance to “force migration on Hungary” with the help of Brussels after it failed in the elections. “Hungary will not give in to blackmail,” he said.

On the topic of the EU budget and recovery fund, Gulyás said Hungary could not approve them in their current form because the rule of law criteria that are conditions for receiving funding were unclear. He insisted that only those countries that allow immigration are regarded by Brussels as upholding the rule of law. He said Hungary was dedicated to the rule of law and considered freedom of speech, opinion, assembly and the press, as well as the independence of the judiciary, as important. Meeting these requirements is at least as much guaranteed in Hungary as in western Europe and much more than it used to be during left-wing governments when for instance in 2006, peaceful demonstrators were attacked and the EU’s reaction was that it was a domestic issue, he added.

Gulyás said that in principle Hungary disagreed with the idea of raising joint debt since if any one country went bankrupt,

Hungary would also be liable for it. Even so, Hungary approved the package in the spirit of European solidarity, he said, adding that the fund had become a further means to “blackmail” Hungary to force it to change its migration policy.

Gulyás noted that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had already vetoed the EU budget and recovery package. He said that in its current form, the chances of the recovery package being implemented were “zero”. In the EU’s history spanning more than seven decades, never before has funding been linked to any interests other than financial protection, he said. Charges against the government of corruption are “a lie”, he said, adding that the Hungarian government would be prepared to back significantly stricter rules on how EU money is spent. He said helping southern EU states was a priority. “The money could be handed to the southern states even tomorrow,” he said, adding that in this way Hungary would not be open to “blackmail” because of its immigration policy. “If there’s a technical solution whereby payments are not linked to lax immigration, then we’d gladly be on board.”

Gulyás said the Hungarian economy was on a strong footing to see out the crisis. The deficit will be high due to the pandemic fallout but the public debt declined by 20% over ten years and there are



now sufficient resources to take out credit, he added.

Asked about a statement by European People's Party (EPP) President Donald Tusk and whether Fidesz may be expelled from the EPP, Gulyás cited a 2018 statement in which Tusk said making Poland's EU funding conditional on the rule of law was risky and went in the wrong direction. If Tusk were consistent, Gulyás said, "then we know he'd be among the supporters of the current Hungarian position".

GOVT SPOX: EU INSTITUTIONS 'OPERATIONALIZING FINANCIAL BLACKMAIL, POLITICAL RETRIBUTION'

European Union institutions are using "financial blackmail" and "political retribution" against member states that refuse to take in migrants, Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications, said on Twitter, reacting to a tweet by Project Syndicate, citing US financier George Soros as saying that Hungary and Poland's veto of the EU's next multi-year budget and post-pandemic recovery package "directly threatens the rule of law - and thus the bloc's future". Referring to the "Soros plan", Kovács cited Soros as suggesting in 2015 that countries refusing to take in migrants should be subjected to financial penalties. "Today we see financial blackmailing and political retribution operationalized by EU institutions," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: MIGRATION, THREAT OF TERROR IN EUROPE LINKED BY CAUSE AND EFFECT

Illegal migration, the growing threat of terrorism, and violence based on religious extremism in Europe are causally related, Foreign Minister Péter Sijjártó said, commenting on a Foreign Affairs Council meeting on Facebook. He proposed that EU foreign ministers should discuss ways to stop migration outside of European Union borders as soon as possible. He also proposed holding a debate on the European Commission's migration package, which he said offered encouragement to people thinking about setting off for Europe.

Szijjártó said the mandatory migrant settlement quota, which, he insisted, the EC and "Brussels bureaucrats" wanted to maintain, should be removed from the agenda immediately, adding that as long as it was on the agenda, hundreds of thousands of migrants would think it safe to set off for Europe. Szijjártó said that unless migration flows were stopped, it would be impossible to stop the spread of terrorism and violence in Europe.

GULYÁS: REGULAR TESTING OF ESSENTIAL WORKERS TO START ON FRIDAY

Hungary is set to begin testing certain essential workers for coronavirus on a regular basis from Friday, Gergely

Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office has said, adding that the staff of social care homes will be the first to be tested. The government last week decided that health-care workers, teachers and staff members of social institutions will be tested on a regular basis, determined by the operative board responsible for handling the epidemic, Gulyás told a regular press briefing. Testing will be voluntary, he said, adding that testing is scheduled to get under way in schools, kindergartens, creches and health-care institutions next Monday. The government offices will be instrumental in organising the testing of 191,000 people in 15,000 venues, with the testing teams always including a medical student, Gulyás said.

Regarding the coronavirus vaccine, Gulyás said Hungary has contracted altogether 12 million doses, costing 36 billion forints (EUR 99.6m), from three manufacturers. Fully 3,270,000 doses are contracted from British AstraZeneca, 4,360,000 doses from US company Janssen and 4,439,000 doses from Pfizer in addition to potential Chinese and Russian vaccine purchases now under negotiation, he said. The government has a duty to procure any vaccine that has been duly tested and proven to be effective as quickly as possible, and so it is in talks with "every entity" potentially able to provide it, including the EU, Israel, the US, China and Russia, he said.

Gulyás thanked health-care staff for their efforts, noting that the death-to-

infection ratio has declined since the spring. The health-care system is ready to handle growing case numbers, he said. Gulyás said the number of new infections was increasing along the Austrian border, and he asked commuters to exercise extreme caution. The government will assess the effects of the latest restrictions on Wednesday, and decide whether new measures or a prolongation of the recent ones are necessary, he said.

Gulyás said there were 580 coronavirus patients in intensive care. Hungarian hospitals have around 1,700 intensive care beds, he said, adding that this number could be increased if necessary. Concerning the official number of Covid tests carried out, Gulyás said the numbers on the government's coronavirus website did not yet include antigen tests for technical reasons.

Asked about the timeframe of the current restrictions and whether the government had any plans to tighten them, Gulyás said the government had not discussed the implementation of tougher measures. The cabinet will review the situation and the effectiveness of the restrictions currently in place at a meeting next Wednesday, he said. "In a situation like this, no responsible government can decide on measures that would need to be taken in 2-3 weeks' or a month's time." The government is ready to tighten restrictions if necessary, he added.

Asked about the government's reasoning behind its decision to

submit a constitutional amendment proposal while the special legal order is in effect, Gulyás said: "Despite the epidemic, everyone has to work and even lawmakers are expected to work in line with the normal legislative agenda."

Gulyás was also asked whether there were any plans for primary schools to transition to online classes and whether university students studying to become teachers would be hired to ease the load on the education system. He said the government was hoping to avoid having to switch primary schools to digital classes but would do so if it became necessary. He added that there were enough teachers in the sector.

Concerning projections on when the epidemic was expected to peak, Gulyás said experts forecast case numbers cresting around December or January.

He said there were currently 7-8 coronavirus vaccines undergoing trials. Hungary is working to obtain "even the very first one" that becomes available so that it can begin carrying out its vaccination plan, he said, adding that inoculations would be voluntary and be made available to everyone free of charge.

In response to the issue of adoptions by same-sex couples, Gulyás noted that a law on same-sex civil unions passed by the previous Socialist-liberal government in 2009 prohibiting adoption by same-sex couples has been kept unchanged by the Fidesz-led government.

FINANCE MINISTER: GOVT TO DOUBLE INVESTMENT SUPPORT SCHEME FOR LARGE COMPANIES

The government will raise investment support for large companies in 2020 to 80 billion forints (EUR 221.5m) from 40 billion, Finance Minister Mihály Varga has said. Speaking at the online cornerstone-laying ceremony of hygienic paper manufacturer Vajda-Papír's new plant, Varga said it was the government's priority that Hungarian companies emerge from the crisis "as winners". The government will continue to introduce tax cuts, job-protection measures and increase investment support, he said. Hungary will have to be ready to temporarily spend more to leave the economic crisis behind, Varga said, and pledged that the government would not give up its economic goals. Vajda-Papír's 16 billion forint investment, which will protect some 600 jobs and create 50 new ones, was supported with a 5.5 billion forint government grant, Varga said.

SOROS: EUROPE MUST STAND UP TO HUNGARY AND POLAND

US financier George Soros said in a Project Syndicate opinion piece that Europe must stand up to Hungary and Poland. Soros said the "EU can't afford to compromise on the rule-of-law provisions it applies to the funds

it allocates to member states". "How the EU responds to the challenge to those provisions now posed by Hungary and Poland will determine whether it survives as an open society true to the values upon which it was founded." Soros said Hungary and Poland had vetoed the European Union's proposed seven-year budget and recovery fund because their governments were opposed to the rule-of-law conditionality that the EU had adopted and they did not want to pay the consequences. For Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and "Poland's de facto ruler" Jarosław Kaczyński "the rule of law represents a practical limit on personal and political corruption," Soros said. "The veto is a desperate gamble by two serial violators." "Orbán has constructed in Hungary an elaborate kleptocratic system to rob the country blind," Soros said. Only the EU could help, he said, by directing funds to local authorities, "where there is still a functioning democracy in Hungary, unlike at the national level".

Soros suggested that "the Orbán-Kaczyński veto could be circumvented". Considering that the rule-of-law regulations have been adopted, "in case there is no agreement on a new budget, the old budget, which expires at the end of 2020, is extended on a yearly basis". "Hungary and Poland would not receive any payments under this budget, because their governments are violating the rule of law," he added. He said the question was whether the EU could "muster the political will".

KARÁCSONY SLAMS ORBÁN'S 'WAR ON EU, LOCAL GOVTS'

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony has called it "unacceptable" that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán "is waging wars against the European Union and local governments, two indispensable allies in handling the economic crisis." In an open letter published on his Facebook page, Karácsony said that rather than multiplying the resources needed to protect lives and livelihoods by strengthening partnerships, "Orbán is about to reject EU support for the Hungarian people". He also said Orbán was pushing local authorities to the brink of insolvency by increasing their burdens. Although the Budapest municipality's revenues have fallen by over 20% due to the coronavirus epidemic, the government has increased its taxes three-and-a-half-fold, and the taxes on its main water supplier four-fold, Karácsony said. "Don't wage a war with Hungarian localities and the EU, which is offering help to the country, but rather make sure that funding reaches those entitled to it..." Karácsony said.

92 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, INFECTIONS UP 4,512

Fully 92 Covid patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, have died in the past 24 hours and coronavirus infections have risen

by 4,512 to 161,461, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday. Altogether 3,472 Covid patients have died since the appearance of coronavirus in Hungary, while 36,345 have made a recovery. There are currently 121,644 active infections and 7,532 patients are in hospital, 580 on ventilators. Fully 38,610 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests stands at 1,433,008. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (38,149), followed by Pest County (21,041), and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (11,144), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (9,173), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (8,592) and Hajdú-Bihar (8,539). Tolna County has the fewest infections (2,141).

MEDICAL OFFICER: PROTECTION MEASURES UNDER CONSTANT REVIEW

The question of whether further restrictions should be introduced is constantly under review, the chief medical officer told an online news briefing. Cecilía Müller said the effectiveness of measures enacted Nov. 11 would be visible in two weeks' time. She also said a new government programme to test people working in social, health, education and training institutions was a logistical challenge but the system was up to the task. Regarding seasonal flu, Müller said that in week 46, 9,700 people consulted their doctor with flu-like symptoms, but no flu virus has been found in samples tested in laboratories.

DK CALLS ON GOVT NOT TO 'TEST' RUSSIAN VACCINE ON HUNGARIANS

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on the government not to conduct "human experiments" on Hungarians with Russia's coronavirus vaccine. DK Balázs Barkóczi noted that Hungary was set to become the first European country to receive a sample of Russia's coronavirus vaccine. "This is no accident, given that no other country would ever consider conducting experiments on its own citizens," Barkóczi said. "Researchers around the world are saying that not even they would want to be administered a vaccine that has never undergone mass trials and not just because several Russian test subjects ended up contracting the virus despite receiving the vaccine," he said.

ARMED FORCES TO BUY NASAMS AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM

The Hungarian Armed Forces will buy NASAMS surface to air missile systems from Norwegian company Kongsberg

and US company Raytheon, the office of the commissioner for defence development has said. The short- and mid-range missiles will replace defence systems in place since 1976, increase defence capabilities, and enable Hungary's military to counter attacks by modern military devices such as drones, Gáspár Maróth said. The missile systems expected to be delivered in 2023 "will restore the army' defence capabilities, which it lost due to the cutbacks in the 1990s, on a 21st century level," Maróth said.

VISEGRAD GROUP COULD POWER AHEAD WITH GREEN POLICIES

Visegrad Group countries could use green policies to multiply the effects of measures taken to restart their economies after the coronavirus pandemic is over, and Hungary could be a winner in the region, according to mathematical modelling by Cambridge Econometrics which resulted in four types of measure to achieve this goal. Getting green policies right could put Hungary in pole position to post the fastest growth in the region, resulting in a

4% surplus of economic output by 2030, putting the country ahead of the Czech Republic with 1.5%, Poland with 1.3% and Slovakia with 0.5%, the report by think-tank's Budapest office found. With such a surplus, Hungary could also put itself ahead in the return to a pre-pandemic performance as early as 2025, the report said.

Regarding growing unemployment connected with the pandemic, the study said that green schemes would help the four countries return to a pre-pandemic employment level 2-8 years before 2030. To achieve a long-term sustainable recovery, the report suggested the Visegrad Group of countries should make grants available to fund renewable technologies and upgrade their national electricity networks. It also proposes granting discounts on the purchase of new electric vehicles in a bid to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The manufacture of electric vehicles would strengthen the economy more broadly, it said. Further it proposes state subsidy schemes to support energy-efficiency solutions for building upgrades to reduce energy consumption.