

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Debrecen's Christmas tree returns for the holiday season

MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Family affairs minister presents awards

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: SOROS 'THREATENING HUNGARY, POLAND'

Financier George Soros, the "most corrupt man in today's international politics", is threatening Hungary and Poland, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a regular interview with public radio.

He noted that Soros had published a "big article" recently, "instructing Brussels bureaucrats" what to do. The European Council reacted "calmly" by saying they knew how to resolve debates within themselves, he told Kossuth Rádió. Orbán said Soros was threatening Hungary and Poland, though the EU habitually resolved debates through negotiation. "Debates at knifepoint" are not uncommon in the EU, a natural consequence of having to reconcile the interests of 27 member states, he said.

Orbán said the only acceptable solution to the current impasse over the EU budget and recovery fund would be a genuinely legal, not a political, one. With Soros's input, he said "they want to create institutions" that could force Hungary to dismantle its fence on the southern border and let migrants into the country. Orbán said that Hungary was a stable country where all the developments planned for the next ten years could get off the ground regardless of political debates and without the input of Brussels. Orbán added that the country had raised a credit of 2.5 billion euros recently.

ORBÁN: 12 M DOSES OF VACCINES EXPECTED TO SUFFICE

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview with public radio that the 12 million doses of vaccines Hungary had procured against the coronavirus are expected to be sufficient to stem the epidemic. The vaccines are likely to be rolled out at the end of spring, although exact dates are as yet uncertain, he said, adding that vaccines were health-care issues, not political ones. If certain countries are further along in developing it, then it "makes sense" that Hungary should order from them as well, he said, referring to talks under way with China and Russia. Referring to financier George Soros's call for an inquiry as to why Hungary had received samples of a Russian vaccine on Thursday, Orbán said: "It isn't Soros's job to decide which vaccines are good and which aren't. That is for laboratories to decide and the Hungarian people, who will be free to choose from among several vaccines."

Orbán said the favourable statistics recorded in the past few days weren't proof that the coronavirus epidemic was subsiding. Referring to a recent consultation with Hungary's chief medical officer, Orbán said the number of infections "may fall further but equally it could start rising again". He asked Hungarians to be more disciplined "because the lives of the elderly are in danger, and all lives matter." He said the number

of people in hospital was high, but the health-care system had not yet reached capacity. Orbán noted that 1,150 soldiers are serving in hospitals and another 1,150 are on standby. He rejected accusations that the government had failed to prepare adequately for a second wave. The prime minister expressed doubt about quick coronavirus tests and said the logistical task of organising testing in the smallest of localities was hard, "but we are prepared", noting that 2,000 students were involved in the operations. Orbán said mass testing was good preparation for when mass vaccinations occur.

COE: GOVT BILLS WOULD HAVE DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IF PASSED

The Council of Europe has called on Hungary's parliament to postpone voting on bills the government submitted last Friday, predicting "far-reaching detrimental effects" on human rights if they are adopted, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights has said. Dunja Mijatović said the government had submitted proposals contained in the legislative package that would affect the functioning of the judiciary, the electoral law, national human rights structures, public finance controls and sexual minorities, without prior consultation. Democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Hungary would be undermined as a result, she added.

EU member states, she said, have some leeway in forming the structures governing human rights but internationally agreed principles should be respected to ensure the independence and efficacy of the bodies concerned. Some of the amendments could undermine the independence of the judiciary, Mijatović said, noting a provision which would expand the powers of the head of the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court. Also, the "increasing stigma" being attached to sexual minorities and the "manipulation of their rights for political gain" was also a cause for concern, she said. Legislative proposals on the scale proposed by the government, involving constitutional changes, should not be adopted during a state of emergency because opportunities to discuss them democratically are constrained, she said, calling on the parliament to postpone the vote until after the special legal order has been lifted.

JUSTICE MINISTER: HUNGARY NEVER TO ALLOW 'IDEOLOGICAL BLACKMAIL'

Hungary will never allow to be "blackmailed" on ideological grounds, Justice Minister Judit Varga said in connection with the Hungarian and Polish veto of the EU's next budget in an interview to Polish public broadcaster TVP. Hungary will be the European Union's constructive partner in evaluating proposals for the EU's 2021-2027 budget, she said. "But one

thing is for sure: Hungary will not allow ideological blackmail, and will never accept the principle that a member state rejecting to accept immigrants is not governed by the rule of law," Varga said. In the next period, "only politically and legally acceptable solutions can be brought to the table," she said. Further talks must be held in the spirit of solidarity that brought about the compromise at the EU summit in July, she said. The German presidency's steps regarding the EU budget have nothing to do with laws and legal guarantees, but are meant to exert political and ideological pressure, Varga said. Poland and Hungary clearly stated their position on the budget when the draft budget was first tabled, she said. As "allies", they "gave warning in a fair and loyal way" to other EU partner states early on that they would never accept the set of conditions that served to "blackmail" certain member states, Varga said. Hungary and Poland do not bear the responsibility for changes of the budget since the July compromise between the European Parliament and the German presidency, she said. "The responsibility lies with those who override the historic July agreement," Varga said.

JOBBIK: THREATENING WITH EU VETO HARMS HUNGARY

The opposition Jobbik party has demanded the government "stop dangling the threat of a veto" of the European Union's multiannual budget. Jobbik said the government's stance

was "dangerous and could inflict enormous harm" on Hungary. The veto harms Hungary's "already tattered" reputation, Jobbik lawmaker Zoltán Balczó said. At an EU summit in July, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán already accepted the EU's seven-year budget and its coronavirus recovery package, Balczó said. That document contained an "unequivocal reference" to the funding conditionality based on the rule of law, which Hungary and Poland now object to, he said. The sanctions laid down in the agreement clearly apply only to states committing "rule-of-law violations that pose immediate and grave harm to the EU's financial interests," he said. Member states will be penalised only if their institutions handling EU funds are operated irregularly, if their judiciaries are not independent, or if the public prosecutor turns a blind eye to the fraudulent handling of EU monies, Balczó said. The only solution is to adhere to those regulations, "even though EU monies are clearly essential to maintain Orbán's feudal regime," he added.

NOVÁK: PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN 'OUR PRIORITY'

Marking World Children's Day, the minister for families said children have the right to grow up in a loving family and community, so families should be helped and strengthened. On the 31st anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child, Katalin Novák said a host of dangers, physical, mental and online compromised the health and mental development of children, and a loving family and strong community were the best guarantee of a child's welfare. Over the past ten years, the government has put priority on strengthening families, introducing tax breaks, free textbooks, free meals, support for newborns, home-building schemes and new crèches, among other measures, she noted. Novák said the coronavirus pandemic also raised awareness of children's rights since restrictive measures affect their health and social circumstances, as well as their access to education and child-protection networks. For this reason, the government is providing "safe public education" during this period, she said.

96 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, INFECTIONS UP 4,440

Fully 96 Covid patients, mostly elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, have died in the past 24 hours and coronavirus infections have risen by 4,440 to 165,901, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday. Altogether 3,568 Covid patients have died since the appearance of coronavirus in Hungary, while 38,074 have made a recovery. There are currently 124,259 active infections and 7,512 patients are in hospital, 604 on ventilators. Fully 42,241 people are in official home quarantine, while the number of tests stands at 1,455,868.

CORONAVIRUS TESTING OF CARE HOME STAFF BEGINS

The comprehensive testing of essential workers for coronavirus has started with the testing of care home employees, while the testing of public education and health-care staff will follow on Monday, a government official has said. Antigen fast tests will be used to test some 370,000 people in 16,691 venues, State Secretary István György told the press conference of the operative body responsible for the coronavirus epidemic response. The operative body has scheduled regular testing employing nearly 1,000 teams to collect the samples, György said. Medical students will be part of the effort, he said.

NEW FAVIPIRAVIR DELIVERY FROM CHINA TO ARRIVE NEXT WEEK

Another million favipiravir pills will arrive from China next week, bringing the total number imported from China to 2.8 million, the foreign minister said in a statement after speaking by phone with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. Péter Szijjártó said Hungary is in close touch with all three Chinese companies developing vaccines against the coronavirus, and soon the Hungarian health authorities will have the relevant documentation, on the basis of which a decision will be made on whether to allow use of the vaccine in the country. Export approval

is in the pipeline, and pending the results of Hungarian laboratory tests, 500,000 Chinese vaccines may arrive in Hungary in the coming months, he said.

Szjijártó noted that trade between Hungary and China has grown by 18% in the past eight months, and Hungary's trade relations with China has grown faster than any other country's in that period. Five Chinese investments worth 100 billion forints (EUR 279m), creating 2,000 jobs in Hungary have been announced by Lenovo, Huawei, Chervon Auto, Shenzhen Kedali and Semcorp, he noted. China has indicated further plans to make investments, and Hungary is poised to compete for these, he added. "Balanced relations based on mutual respect and common sense have had clear results: most Chinese high-tech investments in central Europe have come to Hungary, and the most jobs have been created here," he said.

BUDGET DEFICIT HUF 2,604 BN AT END-OCT

Hungary's budget deficit, excluding local councils, was 2,604.2 billion forints (EUR 7.2bn) at the end of October, up 333.9 billion from a month earlier, the Finance Ministry confirmed in a detailed release of data. The deficit has swelled this year because of pandemic defence spending, economic stimulus and pre-financing for European Union-funded projects. The central budget

had a 2,140 billion forint deficit and the social insurance funds were 489.9 billion in the red, but the separate state funds had a surplus of 25.7 billion. The ministry said spending on medical equipment necessary for pandemic defence came to 593.3 billion forints by the end of October. Payouts for European Union-funded projects reached 1,642.0 billion forints, while transfers from Brussels came to just 997.4 billion. The government has been pre-financing EU-funded projects for years to avoid backups and ensure all available monies are used up.

"The government's most important goal during the second wave of the pandemic is protecting human lives and maintaining the ability of the economy to function," the ministry said. "Thus the central budget continues to ensure all necessary resources for health defence and economic protection measures."

SZIJJÁRTÓ IN TALKS ON ENERGY COOPERATION WITH CROATIA ECONOMY MINISTER

Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade, has had talks on energy cooperation with Croatia's economy and development minister in Budapest. The foreign ministry said in a statement that energy cooperation has been a key long-standing issue for central Europe and it was in Hungary's interest to purchase gas from as many sources

as possible. Croatia's LNG terminal will come online next year, and Hungary will be able to buy one billion cubic meters of gas each year, the statement said, adding that Hungary has reserved capacity for the next few years. The statement said both countries were "committed to the further development of Hungarian-Croatian energy cooperation". Hungarian infrastructure is now fit for the purpose of transporting gas in all directions, it added.

PAKS 2 NUCLEAR POWER PLANT GETS ENERGY OFFICE PERMIT

Hungary's energy regulatory authority (MEKH) has given its permit for the construction of the Paks 2 nuclear power plant, the agency said in a statement on Friday. Atomerőmű Zrt, the company responsible for the project, submitted an application for a construction permit to MEKH in

October 2020, the statement noted. After examining the contents of the application to ensure that it complies with the relevant legislation, MEKH said construction of the plant with a nominal capacity of 2,524 megawatts can proceed, it added. The agency considered the security of supply to the electricity network and the procedures related to the security of the nuclear technology carried out by the National Atomic Energy Agency in the course of its assessment, the statement said.

István Mittler, the Paks 2 project's communications director, told MTI that the MEKH permit was of "paramount importance", similarly to such specific permits as the environmental permit and the site permit, preconditions for the construction, production, procurement and installation of the new blocks, as well as for the construction permit issued by the National Atomic Energy Agency.

BUDAPEST DEPUTY MAYOR FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION RESIGNS

Dávid Dorosz, Budapest's deputy mayor for climate protection and development, has resigned from his post, Mayor Gergely Karácsony has said. Dorosz said in his resignation letter he would in future work to help his Párbeszéd party, and the joint opposition, to oust the incumbent government in 2022, Karácsony said. In a Facebook post, Dorosz criticised the Orbán government for "working against and completely paralysing" the Budapest municipality. "If [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán stays in office after 2022, that could be the end of the democratic institution of local self-government, as well as the fair and green future of Budapest," Dorosz said. As a recently appointed board member of Párbeszéd, Dorosz said he would lead the party's campaign for the 2022 general election.