

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Snowy landscape in the Salgótarján area, in northern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

HUNGARY TO GET 4.4 M DOSES OF PFIZER VACCINE

Hungary will receive a total of 4.4 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine in the 2020-2021 period, including 80,000 doses scheduled to arrive before the end of this year, representatives of Pfizer's local unit have said.

Krisztina Zsigmond, vaccine distribution chief at Pfizer's Hungarian unit, said that the European Commission had reserved 200 million doses, and would have an option for a further 100 million in 2020-2021. She said the vaccines would be distributed under agreements with the government and would only be available through the centrally designated vaccination spots rather than from private suppliers or from pharmacies.

Tamás Fabó, Pfizer's medical director in Hungary, said that clinical trials had shown the vaccine to be 95% effective. He added, however, that it was not yet known how long the vaccine would ensure protection against Covid-19. Those inoculated will be monitored for two years, he said.

Péter Vereckei, managing director of Pfizer's local unit, said that the vaccine had been developed using mRNA technology, which allowed rapid reactions to possible mutations of the virus and could be used to produce a new vaccine in as little as six weeks. He noted that the first patent for the technology was filed by Hungarian biochemist Katalin Karikó, who lives in the United States.

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.

All rights reserved. Enquiries should be made to the English Help Desk at +361 441 9340
For MTI's real time coverage please visit <http://english.mti.hu>, <http://econews.hu>



HUNGARY RECEIVES 6,000 DOSES OF RUSSIAN COVID VACCINE

Hungary has taken delivery of 6,000 ampoules of Russia's Covid-19 vaccine, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. The vaccine shipment entered Hungary from Slovakia and will be transported to the National Public Health Centre under police guard, Szijjártó said. "Hungarian experts there will have another opportunity to decide how the vaccine will be used," he added. Russia has concluded clinical trials of the vaccine with 40,000 volunteers, which have shown it to be 91.4% effective, Szijjártó said. Hungary is keeping an eye on every promising vaccine candidate and is doing everything it can to import those that prove effective, regardless of whether they are developed in the West or the East, he added.

Meanwhile, the head of the South Pest Central Hospital said that vaccination of health-care workers with the Pfizer vaccine received on Saturday was progressing well and no side effects have been reported by the 225 people inoculated on Sunday. István Vályi Nagy said that immunity would develop some three weeks after getting the first jab. He also said a new US medicine was available to treat coronavirus patients and several thousand doses were scheduled to arrive in early January.

MATOLCSY: INVESTMENT GROWTH, JOB CREATION, CHEAP CREDIT KEY TO RECOVERY

National Bank of Hungary (NBH) governor György Matolcsy said investment growth, job creation and cheap credit will be necessary for Hungary's economic recovery from the coronavirus crisis in an interview published in Monday's issue of daily Magyar Nemzet. "We have every chance for Hungary to achieve one of the fastest rates of post-crisis economic growth in the past century. But that will require achieving three things," Matolcsy said. "First, the investment rate must remain over 25% each year, and it has to be raised by over 27% from 2022, because investments are the foundation for future economic growth," he said. "This will require an increase in state investments as well as support for investments by households." Matolcsy said the other two factors that must be achieved were creating as many jobs as have been lost because of the coronavirus crisis, and making cheap credit available to corporate and retail borrowers. "A credit-free recovery must be avoided, because that would, by necessity, be slow and protracted. Every business that wants to invest and upgrade, and every family that wants a bigger, more environmentally-friendly home must have access to cheap financing," he said. Looking forward to 2021, Matolcsy said he was "optimistic",

but added that achieving widespread immunity among the country's population and "overcoming the fear caused by the pandemic" would be the "decisive factor". He also stressed the importance of being proactive in supporting a speedy economic recovery. "The National Bank of Hungary remains ready to support the recovery of the Hungarian economy with all tools at its disposal," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, ESTONIA COOPERATE CLOSELY ON EU ISSUES

The foreign ministers of Hungary and Estonia are cooperating closely on matters that will fundamentally define the European Union's future, among them the fight against illegal migration, the Hungarian foreign minister said. Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook that Urmas Reinsalu, his Estonian counterpart, "is no favourite of the liberal mainstream. How could he be when he speaks directly, honestly and clearly and is not afraid of standing up for his opinion, his patriotic views and for his nation's interests?" Szijjártó said. He welcomed Reinsalu's remarks on Estonian radio, where he said vetoing the EU's multiannual budget was not "holding the EU at ransom" but the right of every member state enshrined in European treaties. Szijjártó also cited Reinsalu as saying that he "personally disagreed" with the notion of tying EU funding to the issue of migration.

114 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, INFECTIONS UP 609

Fully 114 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 609 newly infected were officially registered, bringing the total number of infections to 316,669, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. The death toll has risen to 9,161, while the number of people who have made a recovery has increased to 134,344. The number of active infections stands at 173,164, while there are 6,261 hospitalised Covid patients, 448 on a ventilator. Altogether 173,164 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,615,237. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (60,924) and Pest County (39,843) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (18,486), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,100) and Hajdú-Bihar (18,025). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,140).

KARÁCSONY: ARRIVAL OF VACCINE COULD MARK NEW PHASE IN ANTI-EPIDEMIC PROTECTION

The arrival of a Covid-19 vaccine could mark a new phase in the protection efforts, if public trust in the authorities is high enough for people to get vaccinated, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said. "A government will win people's trust only with honest

communication. The Hungarian government does everything to gloss over data connected to the epidemic," he said on Facebook. The epidemic's mortality rate was half the Hungarian average in Budapest, a fact "the Hungarian government tries in vain to hide" as it is clearly visible in European statistics, he said. Little is known about regional mortality rates even though this information would be essential to fight the epidemic, he added. Karácsony said the official government website showed only Budapest figures separately, insisting that this way, the city's high early mortality rates "could be laid at the city leadership's doorstep". Currently, the Covid-19 mortality rate in the capital is significantly below the average rate, the mayor said, adding that "the government makes sure to keep quiet" about this. "Probably many more people died as a result of the epidemic than the number shown in statistics but the government also keeps silent about this," Karácsony said. The number of deaths in Hungary had spiked in the past few months, a development that could only be explained by the pandemic and an overwhelmed health-care system, he insisted. Karácsony said the Hungarian statistical office had not published regional mortality rates, but European statistics had. "And the shocking figures show that during the peak of the epidemic, nearly twice as many people died in certain counties as in the same period last year," he added. The rise was much smaller in Budapest, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HAILS 'RECORD HIGH' INVESTMENTS IN 2020

Hungary has "never had such a successful year" in terms of investments as it has in 2020, thanks to the government's economic promotion schemes, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said on Facebook. Since the beginning of 2020, the government has provided assistance to a total 1,433 investment projects worth a combined 1,676 billion forints (EUR 4.6bn), Péter Szijjártó said, adding that the government grants had totalled 472 billion forints. The government-assisted projects have created 12,603 new jobs and helped retain 264,595, Szijjártó said. The minister also said that 80% of the small and medium-sized companies embarking on investment projects were Hungarian businesses.

SOCIALIST MEP: EU JOB PROTECTION FUNDING OPENS SECOND ROUND OF APPLICATIONS FROM JAN 1

Hungary will have another chance from January 1 to apply for funds from the European Union's SURE fund to help employees suffering the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi said. The EC's instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) has been created to support countries hit by the

coronavirus epidemic, by disbursing loans to support short-term work schemes and other measures. SURE has already approved 90.3 billion euros of its 100 billion euro framework to 18 member states, Ujhelyi said. He said he had turned to Nicolas Schmit, the EU commissioner for jobs and social rights, who said the remaining 9.7 billion euros will be available in a second round of applications from January. Ujhelyi noted that since the programme was launched last year, Poland applied for 11 billion euros, the Czech Republic for 2 billion euros, and Romania for 4 billion euros. Hungary, at the same time, only applied for 504 million, he said. "The Hungarian government had to be pressured into applying at all, and then lied about the projects the funds were allocated to," Ujhelyi insisted. The funds were used to finance the temporary tax cuts for SMEs, the short-term expansion of family benefits, and the one-off salary supplement for health-care workers, he said. "Thanks to successful lobbying", Hungary now has a second chance to apply for support, Ujhelyi said. He also called on the government to cooperate with the opposition and

trade unions to develop an employee aid scheme, and to "concern itself with the real problems of the people instead of propaganda and lying."

SOCIALISTS TURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OVER SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS LAW

The Socialist Party has turned to the Constitutional Court asking for a review of an amendment to the law on social contributions, which the party says allows "inhumane and unfair" practices, a party lawmaker said. Lajos Korózs told an online press conference that the amendment, which came into force last summer, makes it possible for the state to bill private citizens for emergency health-care treatment if they have six months' arrears on their social contribution fees. Korózs said the amendment was in violation of basic human rights, the principle of solidarity and the right to social security and health care, and so infringed on "several articles of the constitution, previous decisions of the Constitutional Court and international treaties." The legislation

"risks the lives of hundreds, maybe thousands," Korózs said, and called it "unacceptable" that "the government is willing to help only those able to pay for services".

HUNGARIAN PORK FROM AREAS UNAFFECTED BY ASF CLEARED FOR EXPORT TO JAPAN

Japan has agreed to allow imports of Hungarian pork from areas of the country that have not been affected by African swine fever (ASF), the Agriculture Ministry said. The agreement was reached on December 16, after two years of negotiations involving Hungary's chief veterinarian, Lajos Bognár, and supported by the Hungarian embassy in Tokyo. Hungary is the first country in the world affected by ASF to reach a regionalisation agreement on pork imports with Japan, the ministry noted. State secretary for food oversight Norbert Erdős said the agreement puts local hog farmers at an advantage and is an acknowledgement of the work of Hungarian veterinary professionals to contain the spread of ASF.