

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

Rainbow in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases Sept-Nov jobs report, Q3 budget data

Coronavirus updates

Cbank holds press event on Funding for Growth Scheme Go!

TOP STORY

SOME 12,000 HEALTH WORKERS VACCINATED SO FAR

Some 12,000 health-care employees have already received the first jab of the coronavirus vaccine, the chief medical officer has said.

Cecília Müller told an online press conference of the operative body responsible for handling the epidemic that health-care workers can now get inoculated against Covid-19 at one of 25 vaccination points in the country, and encouraged all to get an appointment by using the contacts provided at koronavirus.gov.hu.

The first to get the vaccine were those working in ambulance care, ICU wards or directly with coronavirus patients, Müller said. Inoculation of health-care workers in other fields has also started, she said. Hungary is scheduled to receive 39,000 doses of the vaccine on Tuesday, she added. Müller said the aim was to inoculate as many people as possible in the shortest possible time.

István György, a state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, said over 20,000 kindergarten and school teachers were tested for the virus on January 2-3, in 99 venues nationwide. The number of positive tests was 209, one percent of all samples taken, he said. That is a great improvement from the November data, when 2% of all tests came back positive, he added.

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>



SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT WILL CONTINUE PROTECTING HUNGARIAN INTERESTS IN 2021

The government will continue protecting Hungarian interests in 2021, the foreign minister said. The year 2020 will certainly be mentioned in history books because of the coronavirus and its effects and the same applies to 2021 because the fight against the pandemic will continue, Péter Szijjártó told MTI. "The government will continue protecting Hungarian national interests in this fight and will not yield to any pressure," he said. Hungary continues to rely on various resources in the acquisition of vaccines and "we are there at every vaccine development that looks promising, regardless of whether it is west or east of us", he added. The government will make every effort to ensure that any safe vaccine developed anywhere in the world is available to Hungarians without delay, he said.

"We will continue protecting ourselves against illegal migration both on the southern borders and in Brussels," Szijjártó said. In addition to the pandemic, illegal migration will most certainly be the most significant challenge this year, he said. Brussels will continue its migration-friendly policies and preparations must be made for another wave of migration pressure, he added. Migration now carries not only cultural and security risks but also epidemiological ones,

he said. The Hungarian government will therefore continue making every effort against illegal migration, protecting the southern borders and the government's position in Brussels, he said. Not a single illegal migrant will be allowed to enter Hungary and the cabinet will also make every effort to protect jobs, he added.

"We are currently competing for 78 investments by large companies and loans totalling more than 300 billion forints (EUR 830m) will be made available to Hungarian companies that try to tap the possibilities resulting from global economic and market changes," he said. "We know precisely well" that Hungary's economy is export-oriented and the more Hungarian companies are able to export, the better the economy can perform, Szijjártó said. For the economy to perform well, people need to be working and their health and work must be protected, he added.

TEACHER UNION WANTS EDUCATION WORKERS ADDED TO GOVT'S VACCINATION PLAN

Hungarian teacher union PSZ has called for teachers to be added to the government's Covid-19 vaccination plan. PSZ said in a statement that it was "shocked" to see that the official vaccination plan "fails to make it clear" which category of vaccine recipients teachers fall into. The union also criticised Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "apparent announcement"

that if Hungary were to suddenly have access to millions of vaccines, the shots would be administered at the regular electoral polling stations. Many of these, PSZ noted, are in schools, which not even parents are allowed to enter right now.

PSZ said it believes teachers should fall within the same category in the vaccination plan as people over the age of 60 who are considered vulnerable to Covid-19. According to the website of the National Public Health Centre, people within this group will be eligible to receive the vaccine after health-care workers and social sector workers. The union said the vaccination plan contradicts past remarks by the chief medical officer, who had said "those working on the frontlines", such as health-care workers, would be the first to be vaccinated, followed by those most vulnerable to the virus and public service employees, like teachers.

PSZ also cited United Nations children's agency UNICEF as saying that those working in the education sector should also receive priority in the Covid-19 vaccination campaigns. The union demanded that teachers be placed in a priority category within the vaccination plan and for vaccination points not to be set up in schools.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Trade Union of Teachers (PDSZ) has called on the government to arrange the swift vaccination of teachers against Covid-19 and to introduce an online work schedule in the education sector. In a letter addressed to the prime

minister, the human resources minister, the innovation and technology minister and the state secretary for public education, PDSZ has demanded that teachers be among the first to be inoculated against Covid-19 with a vaccine approved by the European Union. The union argued that both Education International and UNESCO have said teachers should be a high-priority group when it comes to Covid vaccinations in order to safeguard the right to education.

CORONAVIRUS - 93 FATALITIES, 856 MORE INFECTIONS

Fully 93 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 856 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 328,851, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. The death toll has risen to 9,977, while the number of people who have made a recovery has increased to 174,070. The number of active infections stands at 144,804, while there are 5,667 hospitalised Covid patients, 400 on a ventilator. Altogether 18,794 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,700,631. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (62,579) and Pest County (41,179) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (18,950), Hajdú-Bihar (18,847) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,651). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,521).

SOCIALISTS DEMAND SECURE FINANCING FOR LOCAL GOVTS

Socialist MP Sándor Szabó has demanded that the central government ensure secure financing for municipalities, which "had a black year in 2020 and cannot expect much good this year, either". Szabó said on Facebook that the government had "started systematically dismantling the municipal system, stripping local governments of most of their revenues". He insisted that municipalities could no longer perform their tasks appropriately.

AGRICULTURE UNIVERSITY TO BE RUN BY FOUNDATION

The Szent István University of Agriculture in Gödöllő, near Budapest, will be taken over by a foundation on February 1, the innovation and technology ministry said. The ministry said in a statement that the new management model would ensure "more effective and higher level education", adding that the foundation's five-member board was composed of persons "committed to uplifting Hungary's agriculture sector" who would "add their significant business and managerial skills to the [university's] academic knowledge". According to the statement, OTP Bank chief

Sándor Csányi, Agriculture Minister István Nagy, Academy of Sciences members Péter Horn and Zoltán Bedő, as well as MP János Lázár will take seats on the foundation's board. In its statement, the ministry said that "ensuring uninterrupted food supplies is a fundamental requirement for national sovereignty and for economic and social stability", which requires "practical experts with skills matching local conditions and demand". "Providing new, strategic foundations for the university's competitive operations and future development will serve that end," the document said.

CROATIA LNG TERMINAL STARTS DELIVERY

The state-owned Hungarian Electricity Works (MVM) on Monday said the Croatian unit of its gas trading company MFGK took its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) delivery from the newly commissioned LNG terminal off the Croatian island of Krk. The first LNG tanker docked at the Krk terminal on January 1, 2021. MFGK has booked regasification capacity for 6.75 billion cubic metres of gas at the Krk terminal over a period of almost seven years starting in 2021. MVM said the commissioning of the terminal opens "a new age" in Hungary's gas supply, giving the country direct access to sources and market players previously unavailable on Hungarian and regional markets.

LMP CALLS FOR PENSION HIKE

The government is “cruelly letting old people down” by keeping the minimum pension low and indexing pensions below inflation, Erzsébet Schmuck, co-leader of the opposition LMP party, said, and called on the government to raise pensions by 4% in January, as well as increase the minimum pension “two-and-a-half-fold to above a monthly 71,000 forints (EUR 197)”. Schmuck said that pensions would currently be indexed by 3%, whereas, for example, the price of motorway vignettes had gone up by 3.9%, with regard to inflation. In addition, she said, pensioners would only be given the increase at the end of 2021, with the government “using their money for free” all year long.

Schmuck slammed the government for not planning to increase the minimum pension, which had been the same 28,500 forints a month for the past 13 years. She said that

giving pensioners an extra one-fourth of a month’s pension this year was “eyewash”, and suggested that the measure was hardly suitable to prevent the elderly from being impoverished. The lawmaker also urged the government to reduce the VAT on fundamental food products from 27% to 5%.

DK CALLS FOR PUBLIC NATIONAL VACCINATION PLAN

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on the government to prepare and release to the public a national Covid-19 vaccination plan. “Whereas mass vaccinations are either already under way or are about to begin in most European countries, no similar action whatsoever has been taken in Hungary just yet,” Zoltán Varga, a lawmaker of the leftist party, told an online press conference. “The draft, a cheap sketch posted on the National Public Health Centre’s website, is nothing but empty notes

without real information or content; it can hardly be called a vaccination plan,” Varga said. He said DK was demanding the “panic government” to explain why it had not been able to release to the public a comprehensive vaccination plan which he said should advise Hungarians about the exact date and place of getting inoculated against Covid-19.

Ruling Fidesz in response said DK was again “telling lies, as it has been doing ever since the coronavirus broke out”, calling on the party “to stop lying and confusing the public”. Hungary started vaccinations against Covid-19 on December 26 with health-care workers in the front lines getting the first shots, Fidesz said in a statement, adding that their inoculation is ongoing at 21 hospital vaccination points. Next in the line are residents and staff in elderly care homes, law enforcement staff working in epidemic defence, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses, to be followed by the general public as the country takes further deliveries of vaccines, the party said.

