

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zoltán Balogh

Soldier working in a Budapest hospital getting Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine

UPCOMING EVENTS

KSH releases wages (Oct), industrial prices (Nov)

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

MÜLLER: VACCINES AVAILABLE FOR ALL HEALTH-CARE STAFF

Hungary now has enough vaccines to inoculate all health-care staff against the coronavirus, and 15,000 have already received their first jab, the chief medical officer said.

Hungary currently has enough of the vaccine to inoculate 78,875 people, now being rolled out to city hospitals besides the 25 vaccination points, Cecília Müller told a press conference of the operative body responsible for handling the epidemic. General practitioners, pharmacologists and dentists can now receive the vaccine, Müller said, adding that appointments can be made over the phone or via email. In the next step, workers and residents of elderly care homes will be inoculated, she said. Law enforcement officials directly involved in the protection efforts also have priority in the vaccination plan, she said. Those who received the first jab will also be given a certificate containing the date of the second injection, Müller added. Meanwhile, Hungary received the third shipment of the vaccine, 39,000 doses, public television M1 reported. 5,000 doses of the vaccine were taken directly to Semmelweis University's central pharmacy, where around 2,000 health employees have already been vaccinated.

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CORONAVIRUS - 103 FATALITIES, 870 MORE INFECTIONS

Fully 103 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 870 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 329,721, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday. The death toll has risen to 10,080, while the number of people who have made a recovery has increased to 176,576. The number of active infections stands at 143,065, while there are 5,760 hospitalised Covid patients, 394 on a ventilator. Altogether 20,272 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,272,896. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (62,695) and Pest County (41,258) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (18,974), Hajdú-Bihar (18,901) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,682). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,569).

OPERATIVE BODY: UK PLANES ALLOWED INTO HUNGARY FROM MIDNIGHT

The Hungarian government has decided to lift the ban on passenger flights arriving from the United Kingdom from midnight on Tuesday, a member of the operative body

responsible for handling the epidemic response said.

Róbert Kiss told a regular press conference on Tuesday that Hungarian passengers will be subject to restrictions already in force and will be required to enter mandatory self-quarantine. The government will soon make further decisions on other restrictions such as the night-time curfew, mask-wearing, and limits on shopping and attendance of events, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ IN PHONE TALKS WITH BULGARIA DEP PM

Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, on Tuesday had talks by phone with Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister Marijana Nikolova.

Hungary-Bulgaria economic ties are strengthening as top Hungarian companies boost their investments in Bulgaria, Szijjártó said on Facebook.

Wizzair, which has bases in Sofia and Varna, is launching new flights despite the epidemic, helping to restart tourism in Bulgaria, he said. Also, OTP Bank has become the second largest player in the Bulgarian banking market after acquiring a local bank. Both governments are focused on the Hungary's Bulgarian community, and the Hungarian government has increased its support thereof by thirty times. Bulgaria's government, meanwhile, is making a large contribution to the construction of a

new Bulgarian educational and cultural centre in Budapest, the minister noted.

UNEMPLOYMENT RISES TO 4.4% IN SEPT-NOV

Hungary's three-month rolling average jobless rate was 4.4% in Sept-Nov, rising 0.9 of a percentage point from twelve months earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. In monthly comparison, unemployment edged up 0.1 of a percentage point. In absolute terms, there were 203,800 unemployed, 1,600 more than in the previous month and up 40,500 from a year earlier. The rate covers unemployment among people between the ages of 15 and 74.

Continuing a practice started months earlier because of the coronavirus crisis, KSH released data for the month of November alone showing the average number of jobless stood at 190,000, bringing the jobless rate to 4.1%. In absolute terms, the number of jobless fell 9,000 from October and rose 34,000 from the same month a year earlier. The unemployment rate for the month was down 0.2 percentage point from October and up 0.7 percentage point from the same period a year earlier. The three-month rolling average number of employed stood at 4,476,400 in Sept-Nov, 40,600 fewer than in the same period a year earlier. The employment rate was 60.4%, down from 60.9% a year earlier. The number of employed included 90,600 Hungarians in

fostered work programmes and 93,200 working abroad. The number of those employed on the domestic primary labour market edged up 0.2% to 4,292,700, while the number of fostered workers dropped 19.2%. The number of those working abroad fell 22.6%.

Commenting on the data, Sándor Bodó, state secretary for employment policy of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, said in a statement that once again almost 4.5 million people had jobs in Hungary, which he attributed to the government's measures to protect the economy. The number of employed, he added, increased in the autumn period, as 8,000 more people entered the primary labour market in the year to Sept-Nov. Since 2010, the primary labour market has seen an increase of 712,000 jobs, while the number of employed overall has risen by almost 800,000, the statement said.

The employment rate rose from 54.1% to 70.2% in that period, while compared with a year earlier, it fell by just 0.1 percentage point, it added. Hungary's labour market showed resilience at the start of the second wave of the epidemic, with the number of employed reaching 4.5 million by November, analysts told MTI. András Horváth of Takarékbank said there was a strong rebound after the epidemic's first wave, coming within reach of historical highs, suggesting Hungary's jobs market has withstood the pressures of the second wave. The jobless rate last year likely averaged

4.3%, and this may fall to 3.9%, he said. Gábor Regős of the Századvég Institute said the employment data bucked expectations of a decline on the back of the second wave and associated restrictions, with employment rising compared with the previous month, while the annual rate of decline slowed somewhat. Whereas the number of employed was still lower than a year earlier, the impact of the coronavirus on the jobs market was subdued, thanks in part to government wage subsidies, he said.

GOVT SPENDS 2,000 BILLION FORINTS ON MODERN CITIES SCHEME

The government's Modern Cities programme, aimed at financing development projects in Hungary's large cities outside Budapest, had used a total 2,000 billion forints (EUR 5.6bn) by the end of last year, the government commissioner in charge of the programme told MTI on Tuesday.

Alpár Gyopáros said the whole programme was aimed to facilitate developments worth a total 4,000 billion forints. Gyopáros added that the programme would continue uninterrupted in 2021, with projects to promote the economy and create jobs, as well as projects in the areas of culture, health, urban development, sports and recreation, and infrastructure in Hungary's 23 cities with county rights.

Modern Cities was launched in 2017.

OPPOSITION PARTIES LAY DOWN JOINT GOVERNMENT PRINCIPLES

Parties of the parliamentary opposition on Tuesday signed an agreement concerning principles of a joint government should they win the next general election in 2022.

Signatories of the document pledged efforts to build a "democratic, socially equitable, environment- and climate conscious, cooperative Hungary". The document was signed by leaders of conservative Jobbik, Momentum, green LMP, Párbeszéd, the Socialist Party, and leftist Democratic Coalition.

FORMER NAV DEPT HEAD CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION

A former deputy director of Hungary's tax and customs authority (NAV) has been charged with accepting bribes in exchange for turning a blind eye to irregularities during customs procedures, the investigative branch of the public prosecutor's office said. According to the charges, the former NAV deputy head accepted a petrol card from a representative of a company managing customs procedures for goods arriving from outside the European Union. He used the card to obtain fuel for his private car worth 850,000 forints (EUR 2,300) between

October 2016 and June 2017. Also, the same representative is alleged to have bribed a customs officer to steer importing companies to him, and to omit unexpected inspections at those companies, the charges state. The customs officer and his partner have been accused of accepting 285,000 forints as a bribe. The former deputy director and the company representative have confessed to the crime, while the officer and his partner have denied wrongdoing, the prosecutor's office said. Under Hungarian law, the former NAV leader's crime is punishable by 5 to 10 years in prison.

OFFICIAL: GOVT WORKING TO KEEP LOCAL COUNCILS FUNCTIONING

Helping Hungary's local councils stay operational is in everyone's interest, Balázs Orbán, a state secretary of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, wrote in a letter to György Gémesi, head of the alliance of local governments MOSZ. Municipalities with fewer than 25,000 residents will be automatically compensated for lost revenues, Orbán wrote,

adding that the government was open to negotiations with larger cities. Also, Hungary's permanent representative office in Brussels is prepared to help local council leaders whose cities are in need of financial support from the European Union, the state secretary added. Orbán noted that Gémesi in the past had criticised the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic on multiple occasions, particularly its financing of local councils. The state secretary said the burdens that come with Hungary's response to the pandemic were being shared fairly by the whole of Hungarian society. Due to the pandemic and its effects on the economy, Hungary's GDP is projected to contract by 6.4% in 2020 compared with expectations of a 4% growth rate at the beginning of last year, Orbán said. And in a situation like this, he added, "hardly anything can be more important ... than protecting jobs". The key to this is to reduce the burdens on Hungarian small and medium-sized businesses, such as the business tax, he said, arguing that SMEs employed the most people in the country. Orbán said that "contrary

to claims by certain opposition city leaders", the government was not taking "a single cent" away from local councils by halving the local business tax payable by SMEs. Instead, the businesses will be keeping that money and the measure is actually an expenditure for the government, he added. "The government believes that instead of raising taxes in a time of crisis, the burdens on people and business should be reduced," Orbán wrote. The government spent more than 1,000 billion forints (EUR 2.75bn) on health-care measures in response to the pandemic in 2020, 3,700 billion on rebooting the economy and close to 3,000 forints on supporting workers and businesses, the state secretary wrote. The moratorium on loan repayments has saved families and businesses 2,000 billion forints, he said, noting that the government has also begun reintroducing the 13th month pension. Also, this year alone, it will spend over 197 billion forints on wage hikes for health-care workers, Orbán added. He also noted that the 2021 budget allocates 865 billion forints in state support to local councils, 17% more than last year's budget.

