

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Lános Vajda

Covid-19 vaccinations get under way at Hungary's four largest elderly care homes

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on Nov industrial output

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TOP STORY

JABS ROLLED OUT IN CARE HOMES

Coronavirus vaccinations have got under way in Hungary's four largest elderly care homes.

The vaccinations are in line with the government's inoculation plan, the government's coronavirus press centre said in a statement. Of the four facilities, two are in Budapest, one in Pécs and one in Miskolc. In the four institutions, altogether 447 employees and 779 residents have registered for the vaccine administered by "mobile inoculation teams". The care home in Budapest's 17th district is home to over 500 people, with over 200 employees. There are 160 workers and 376 residents in the 15th district facility, and 237 workers and 480 elderly in the one in Pécs, in southern Hungary. In the home in Miskolc, northern Hungary, 165 employees help 437 residents.

The Pesti Road care home in Budapest's 17th district -- which became a major virus cluster during the first wave of the epidemic -- were scheduled to receive the vaccine on Thursday, M1's correspondent said. Botond Sára, head of the Budapest government office, noted that more than 300 of the home's residents were hospitalised with Covid-19 and 55 died from the disease in the spring.

OPERATIVE BOARD RECOMMENDS EXTENDING DIGITAL EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The operative body responsible for handling the coronavirus epidemic has proposed to the government the extension of digital education in secondary schools after the expiry of the current deadline on Jan 11, the state secretary in charge of public education said on Thursday. Zoltán Maruzsa told the operative board's online press conference that the government's decision on this issue and other restrictions is expected to be announced on Friday. He asked schools to make preparations for the extension of digital education beyond Jan 11.

MODERNA VACCINE IN PIPELINE

Just over 1.7 million doses of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine will soon be delivered to Hungary, the chief medical officer told an online press briefing on Thursday. Cecília Müller said the delivery will be sufficient to vaccinate 872,000 people. The European Commission gave Moderna's vaccine the provisional go-ahead on Wednesday, and the EU has ordered 160 million doses.

LOCAL COUNCILS OFFER GOVT COOPERATION IN VACCINATION EFFORTS

Local council organisations have offered their help to the Hungarian government

in developing and implementing an inoculation plan against the coronavirus, in a letter sent to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán by the Budapest municipality. The letter was signed by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, György Gémesi, the mayor of the city of Gödöllő near Budapest, and László Kiss, the mayor of Budapest's third district as the heads of the alliances of Budapest and national municipalities. The signatories said that developing and distributing the vaccine was a top priority. "Besides guaranteeing the health and security of Hungarians, an efficient vaccine and an effective inoculation scheme could help the Hungarian economy leave the crisis behind and so serve the interests of Hungarian employees and entrepreneurs," the letter said. Local governments are key to an effective plan, it added, proposing cooperation "despite ongoing disputes and differences, to boost public trust". The public's trust can be won only by "dispensing credible information without political propaganda," they said. Local governments will be instrumental in fine-tuning the inoculation plan, as the care of many vulnerable groups falls under their purview, the letter said.

Meanwhile, Budapest Deputy Mayor Erzsébet Gy. Németh told the media that the Pesti Road care home had only been notified that it would be receiving the vaccines at midday on Wednesday and therefore had less than 24 hours to prepare for the inoculations. She said that in the future, care facilities should be notified on time before receiving their vaccines.

JOBBIK CALLS FOR 80% WAGE SUBSIDY

The opposition Jobbik party has proposed providing an 80% wage subsidy to workers affected by the coronavirus crisis. Daniel Z. Kárpát, a deputy leader of the nationalist party, told a press conference on Thursday that Jobbik's scheme would give people who have lost their jobs because of the epidemic a guaranteed income "under all circumstances". "All of the opposition parties are able and willing to support this solution," he said.

Z. Kárpát said some 850,000 people in 29 sectors were at risk of losing their jobs due to the economic impact of the spring lockdown, adding that the government had "barely helped five percent of them". Despite having set up an economic protection fund worth trillions of forints, the government gave these sectors "peanuts" in aid, he said, arguing that most of the funds had gone to projects like a hunting exhibition, space research and the upgrade of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line. Z. Kárpát said a reallocation of 65 billion forints (EUR 181.1m) within the central budget would be enough to finance 80% wage subsidies for those who need it.

CORONAVIRUS - 127 FATALITIES, 3,068 MORE INFECTIONS

Fully 127 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past

24 hours, while 3,068 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 334,836, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday. The death toll has risen to 10,325. On Wednesday, the number of people who have made a recovery stood at 179,541, with new data available on Friday due to technical reasons, the website said. The number of active infections stands at 144,970, while there are 5,387 hospitalised Covid patients, 367 on a ventilator. Altogether 21,627 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,774,915.

Most infections have been registered in Budapest (63,438) and Pest County (41,880) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (19,225), Hajdú-Bihar (19,205) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,884). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,702).

KSH: HUNGARY BIRTHS UP IN 2020

Carrying on from the trends seen in the 2010s, Hungary saw a rise in the number of births in 2020 in spite of the novel coronavirus epidemic, Gabriella Vukovich, the head of the Central Statistical Office (KSH), told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió. Vukovich attributed the rise in births to the policies targeting demographic growth implemented by the government in recent years. Hungary's fertility rate also increased over the past decade, Vukovich said,

noting that it had risen from 1.23 in 2011 to 1.56 in 2020. She added, however, that the country's population has been steadily declining since the 1980s. This, she said, could only be remedied by combinations of policies designed to promote demographic growth. Vukovich praised the family policies introduced by the government in recent years, saying they were designed to help families find the best ways to have as many children as they want.

RETAIL SALES DOWN 0.3% IN NOV

Retail sales in Hungary edged down an annual 0.3% in November as vehicle fuel and non-food sales dropped, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The decline slowed from a 2.4% year-on-year fall in October. Adjusted for calendar-year effects, retail sales declined by 0.8%. In monthly comparison, seasonally and calendar-adjusted retail sales were up 1.1%. Adjusted food sales rose by 1.8%, but non-food sales dropped by 1.0% and vehicle fuel sales fell by 9.4% as an evening curfew to contain the spread of the coronavirus came into force.

SANGSIN HUNGARY TO INVEST HUF 10.5 BN TO EXPAND E HUNGARY BASE

The Hungarian unit of Korea's Sangsin is investing 10.5 billion forints (EUR 29.2m) to expand its base in Jászberény, in eastern Hungary, with

a 3.15 billion government grant, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó announced. The investment will multiply output of the plant that manufactures battery components and create 150 jobs. Electric vehicles will be a driving sector of the post-pandemic era, and the government has supported investment in the sector to secure its place in emerging industrial sectors, he said. Sangsin's expansion is the 30th similar investment in the past 5 years. Hungary has become one of the largest battery manufacturers thanks to those investments, he said, adding that trade between the countries grew by 24% in 2020 despite the coronavirus pandemic.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: JAPANESE COMPANIES KEY TO HUNGARY ECONOMIC GROWTH

Japanese companies play a key role in Hungary's economic growth, with 19 Japanese companies having invested 21 billion forints (EUR 58.5), creating over 13,000 jobs since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook, noting he had met Japanese Ambassador Masato Ohtaka for an introductory meeting. He thanked Japan for giving Hungary the opportunity to buy 2 million favipiravir pills to help the recovery of coronavirus patients. "Hungary has a vested interest in open and free global trade and we support the signing of

an EU-Japan investment protection agreement," he said. He added that Hungary "observed with admiration" a free-trade agreement signed by China, Japan and Korea which he said created the largest free trade zone in the world.

Szijjártó said it was an important development that Hungarian pork products could return to Japanese markets after a ban due to African swine fever had been lifted for specific regions. He also said that Hungary was looking forward to the Tokyo Olympics, and noted that agreements had been signed with five Japanese cities to provide opportunities for the preparation of Hungarian athletes.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: PORTUGAL ROTATING EU PRESIDENCY STARTS IN 'DIFFICULT TIMES'

Portugal has taken over the rotating presidency of the European Union amid "difficult times", when the joint European procurement of the coronavirus vaccine is "falling short of expectations", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. Meanwhile, the EU continues to promote migration into the bloc at a time when further waves would bring serious epidemiological risks

along with security and cultural ones, Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary had a vested interest in a strong EU, and the key to a strong EU were strong nation states. Hungary, he added, still rejected "all reasoning leading to a United States of Europe".

ITM: SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HINGES ON SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE, WORK- BASED ECONOMY

Last year's achievements in innovation, higher education and vocational training form the foundations for strengthening Hungary's knowledge and work-based economy, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM) said in a statement. RDI spending has been increasing steadily and reached 703 billion forints in 2019, and funding last year was more than twice the amount spent in 2010, the statement said. The jobs of 23,000 highly qualified professionals were saved thanks to an ITM scheme to provide a wage subsidy in the RDI sector, and new employees can apply for wage subsidies from January this year. The ITM has provided 10 billion forints (EUR 27.9m) for R&D projects that underpin health protection,

the statement said. More focus is on putting scientific research to practical use and intensifying university-business cooperation, it said. Fully 17 national laboratories and a research centre started to get off the ground last year. Also, the government is promoting conditions conducive to a more competitive and modern education and vocational training system, the ITM said.

OFFICIAL: BULGARIAN CULTURAL CENTRE TO BE BUILT IN BUDAPEST

A centre for ethnic Bulgarian local government, education and culture will be built in Budapest with support of 3 billion forints (EUR 840m) from the governments of Hungary and Bulgaria. State secretary for church and ethnic relations, Miklós Soltész, told a press conference that the Hungarian government is providing 2.6 billion forints and the Bulgarian government 1 million euros for the project to be built in Vágóhíd street, in the city's 9th district, next to the Saint Cyrill and Saint Method Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The ethnic Bulgarian community has in exchange agreed to return their right to use a state-owned property in Bajza Street.