

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Deer on a snowy crop field on the outskirts of Zalaegerszeg, W Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

RESTRICTIONS TO STAY IN PLACE UNTIL FEB 1

The government will keep coronavirus-related restrictions in place until February 1, and secondary schools will continue digital education, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said.

In an interview with public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, Orbán said the restrictions will be maintained until enough vaccines are at hand. The doses delivered to Hungary so far are only enough to inoculate 80,000 people, Orbán said. That is why the operative body responsible for handling the epidemic had decided to keep restrictions in place, he said, adding that "although it feels like we have slowed the epidemic down, it is still a great danger." The vaccines are safe and necessary, Orbán said, adding that he will be inoculated "when it is my turn". So far, 42,549 health-care workers have received their first jab, Orbán said, adding that "initial objections seem to have subsided". Inoculation is ongoing in elderly care homes, and will start in all facilities with more than 150 residents over the weekend, he said. Currently, 80% of all residents and 50% of employees have registered for vaccination, he said. Unlike in the West, the Hungarian government is unwilling to change the regulations until there are enough doses at hand, he said.

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ORBÁN: HUNGARY VIRUS MORTALITY RATE LOWER THAN IN WEST

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió that the difference between the mortality rate in 2019 and 2020 -- "with small corrections" -- corresponded to the total number of coronavirus-related deaths in Hungary. In international comparison, that number puts Hungary ahead of states such as Belgium, Italy, Spain, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden and France, he said. "Although I would be wary of using the word 'success' in this context," he said. "Victory", the vaccine, is at arm's length. Rather than just waiting for it, Hungary is in talks with Israel, China and Russia as well as western suppliers, Orbán said. In the EU, negotiations are carried out by Brussels and "we are waiting for the vaccine to arrive", which is "frustrating", he said. Hungary had contracted 8.5 million doses of the vaccine, he said.

Orbán congratulated the United Kingdom, which negotiated vaccine procurement on its own after leaving the EU on January 1. "They are now in much better shape than we are, with our protection efforts going through Brussels." Orbán said he expected this to circle back to the question of only transferring powers to Brussels that

it can be guaranteed to exercise more effectively than member states. Member states should have control over significantly more areas than they currently do, Orbán said, adding that Brussels should give a portion of its powers back to nation states.

ORBÁN: HUNGARY JOBLESS RATE TO FALL AGAIN QUICKLY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said Hungary had lost just 26,000 jobs to the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. "There are few such countries in the world, not to mention that we will regain these jobs as well," the prime minister said, adding that the economy would eventually add even more jobs. "I want to do more than just avert the crisis; I want 2021 to be an outstanding year for Hungarians," Orbán said. "The first few months will be rocky, but the economy must hit the ground running afterwards." He said Hungary should emerge from the crisis having overtaken countries that had earlier been ahead of it in terms of competitiveness and economic output.

Orbán said the government's economic protection measures were focused mainly on supporting investments with a view to creating jobs, though emphasis was also being placed on wage subsidies. The prime minister said it was also important

that the government had been able to carry on with its family support and home creation programmes and the reintroduction of the 13th month pension. "Hungary's crisis management ... has an excellent chance of being classified among the most successful ones at the end of 2021," Orbán said. How successful those efforts will be, however, depended greatly on when the government will be able to lift restrictions, he added. "In other words, the vaccine will be a determining factor in how successful the economy will be this year," he said. Orbán said that if Hungary relied solely on the Covid vaccines developed in the West, it would have to keep restrictions in place for several more months. However, if a safe and effective vaccine is found elsewhere, this process can be speeded up, the prime minister added. Commenting on the storming of the US Capitol by President Donald Trump's supporters on Wednesday, Orbán expressed his sympathies to the families of those who were killed in the riot. "We don't like it when others put labels on us, therefore we won't label other countries, either," the prime minister said. "We're not going to interfere in what's going on in America right now, that's their own business. We're rooting for them and hoping that they'll succeed in solving their own problems." He added, however, that the left wing had "resorted to the use of violence in Hungary as well", saying that they had "besieged the Parliament building" together with opposition

politicians and the building had to be protected by a police cordon.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO SEND CONTAINERS TO EARTHQUAKE-HIT CROATIA

Hungarian oil and gas company Mol is sending 50 living and 6 sanitary containers to serve as temporary accommodation for those whose houses were damaged in recent earthquakes in central Croatia, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. Speaking in Petrinja, the city nearest the epicentre of several quakes that have shaken the country since December 29, Szijjártó offered Hungary's solidarity and sympathy to Croatia, and condolences to the families of the victims. The containers, which can accommodate up to fifty families, are worth a total of 45 million forints (EUR 125,000), Szijjártó added. The minister noted that Hungarian church and civil charity groups, Hungarian companies with a presence in Croatia as well as government aid agencies had all rushed to send aid to the country's earthquake-hit areas immediately after the disasters had struck. The first two living containers have already arrived at their destination, with the rest due to arrive sometime next week, Szijjártó said. As the biggest investor in Croatia, Mol feels an obligation to help those devastated by the disaster, he added. Also, Hungarian lighting company Tungsram will donate 50 lamps to those most affected by

the earthquakes and the Hungarian government will contribute to the reconstruction of one church and one school building, he said. Mol Group CEO József Molnár said in a statement that the company considered it critically important to help the people of Croatia after the disaster. As Croatia's largest investor, Mol feels a responsibility for everyone affected by the earthquake, particularly those in the Sisak (Siszek) region, the statement said, noting that more than 1,000 of Mol's employees live in the area, as the company operates a logistics centre there.

Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić-Radman thanked Hungary for the help it had provided to the country amid the coronavirus epidemic and after the earthquakes last March and in December. Grlić-Radman said Szijjártó had been the first foreign minister to visit his country's earthquake-hit areas. At least seven people died and 28 were injured in last week's 5.2 and 6.3 magnitude earthquakes in Croatia.

SZIJJÁRTÓ INAUGURATES HONORARY CONSULATE IN CROATIA

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó inaugurated a Hungarian House and an honorary consulate in Croatia's port city of Rijeka.

The roughly 500 Hungarians living in the area, the large number of Hungarian tourists who regularly visit the city as well as the importance of the port of Rijeka

for the Hungarian economy were key factors in the government's decision to reopen the consulate, Szijjártó said. The relationship between Hungary and Croatia is based on a shared heritage, an 800-year friendship and mutual respect, the minister said, adding that the two countries were keen to continue developing their ties in the future. Croatia is the second most important investment destination for Hungarian businesses, Szijjártó said. In spite of the pandemic, the bilateral trade volume in the first ten months of 2020 exceeded 2 million euros, he added.

RMDSZ LEADER: HUNGARY-ROMANIA TIES 'FULL OF UNTAPPED POTENTIAL'

Bilateral ties between Hungary and Romania are "full of untapped potential" that could include cross-border interregional cooperation, economic and energy cooperation as well as cooperation with the central European Visegrad Group, Hunor Kelemen, the head of Romania's ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party, told the daily Magyar Nemzet. Romania's government should recognise that cooperation with Hungary would also benefit its own citizens, including Transylvanian Hungarians, Kelemen told the paper. "We'll be working to help this process along," he said, adding that many of his "Romanian

colleagues” and the Hungarian government were also open to improving bilateral cooperation. He said the two countries should likely wait to hold a joint government session until they have a specific joint programme to announce. Kelemen said it was doubtful that “this’ll happen from one month to the next”, noting that Hungarian-Romanian relations had often been tense in recent years. The interests of RMDSZ and Transylvanian Hungarians have always lay in close cooperation between the Hungarian and Romanian governments “and our ability to play a connective role in that”, Kelemen said. “We can’t promise any miracles in this regard but what we can say is that the start of cooperation will improve trust.”

CORONAVIRUS - 115 FATALITIES, 2,907 MORE INFECTIONS

Fully 115 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 2,907 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 337,743, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday. The death toll has risen to 10,440, while 186,449 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections stands at 140,854, while there are 5,297 hospitalised Covid patients, 372 on a ventilator. Altogether

20,865 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,798,939. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (63,738) and Pest County (42,135) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (19,376), Hajdú-Bihar (19,368) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,989). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,827).

MEDICAL OFFICER: NEW SHIPMENT OF PFIZER VACCINE TO ARRIVE NEXT WEEK

Hungary is scheduled to receive a new shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine next Tuesday that will be sufficient to inoculate another 39,000 people, the chief medical officer has said. Hungary will also take delivery of a smaller shipment of Moderna’s vaccine next week, Cecília Müller told an online press briefing of the operative body responsible for handling the epidemic, on Friday. So far, 42,549 health-care workers have been inoculated and vaccinations are under way at Hungary’s four largest retirement homes, Müller said, adding that more elderly care homes will receive the vaccine over the weekend. “We’re doing everything we can to make sure that those most vulnerable to the virus have access to the vaccine as quickly as possible,” she said.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT GROWS 3.5% IN NOV

Hungary’s industrial output grew by an annual 3.5% in November, expanding for the third month in a row and accelerating from 0.6% in October, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. KSH said output of the automotive segment and the computer, of electronics and optical equipment increased, but output of food, drink and tobacco products declined along with most other segments. Adjusted for workday effects, output rose by 1.6%. In a month-on-month comparison, output declined a seasonally and workday-adjusted 1.2%. For the period January-November, output fell by an annual 7.0%. Senior analyst Gergely Suppan of Takarékbank said the industrial sector could continue to gradually pick up in the coming months. He said the sector could show annual growth in the fourth quarter of 2020 -- partly due to the weaker base and also to calendar effect -- so it could make a positive contribution of up to 1 percentage point to GDP after deteriorating economic growth in the previous two quarters. Takarékbank’s analysts expect industrial output to have contracted 5.5-6% in 2020 and show 14-15% growth in 2021. Senior analyst Péter Virovác of ING Bank attributed the month-on-month decline to a slowdown at some major manufacturers. Looking ahead, the question is whether the usual

December maintenance period would have a negative effect on output, he noted.

GOVT OFFICIAL: CITY PARK TO BECOME CAR-FREE, NEW OVERPASS TO BE BUILT

A new overpass will be built in Budapest's 14th district in order to improve the capital's traffic flows and allow for the banning of cars from City Park and the extension of the city's tram 3 line, the state secretary in charge of development projects in and around Budapest said. The overpass will have bicycle paths and sidewalks and will link Budapest's 13th and 14th districts, Balázs Fürjes told MTI. It is meant to reduce traffic on Hungária Boulevard, which will in turn help make City Park car-free, he said. According to the plan approved by the government and the municipal public development council, Kós Károly Avenue and Heroes' Square will be closed entirely to traffic and a P and R parking lot capable of accommodating 1,500 vehicles will be available at a nearby underground station. The European Union call for public procurement tenders for the project was issued on Friday, Fürjes said. The government's aim with the project is to turn City Park into a

more liveable and cleaner area and create more suitable traffic conditions for those commuting via the M3 motorway, the state secretary added.

AUDIT OFFICE: 2020 'BREAKTHROUGH YEAR' FOR TELECOMMUTING IN HUNGARY

The coronavirus epidemic and its impact on the Hungarian economy and society brought about a "breakthrough" in telecommuting in 2020, the State Audit Office (ÁSZ) said. Citing Central Statistical Office (KSH) data, ÁSZ said that whereas between 2010 and 2019 only 2.9% of employees telecommuted full-time or occasionally, their share within the labour force rose to 17%, or around 750,000 people, by May 2020. Following the first wave of the epidemic, the share of telecommuters stabilised at around 7%. The statement said a rise in telecommuting could increase employment among groups disadvantaged by housing conditions or a lack of transport opportunities. It could also diminish the importance of location when it comes to the housing market and ease the strain on transport infrastructure, ÁSZ added. The office said that a

balance between the monitoring of employees working from home and the protection of their private data could result in greater acceptance for telecommuting. At the same time, ÁSZ also emphasised the importance of devoting special attention to the effect of telecommuting on workers' mental health, saying that the long-term optimal work model could be a combination of home and office work.

HUNGARY HEADS EU NOTARIAT COUNCIL IN 2021

Hungary has taken over the rotating presidency of the Council of the Notariats of the European Union (CNUE) for 2021. The body has elected Ádám Tóth, the head of the Hungarian chamber of notaries, as its president, the chamber's press office said. Tóth is the first president of the body representing a country that joined the EU as late as 2004, the council said. The council represents some 40,000 notaries in 22 EU countries. The Hungarian presidency's priority will be to spread the use of electronic documents in everyday notarial work, the chamber said. The aim is long-term, digitally supported cooperation and constant modernisation, they said.