

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Tamás Kovács

Hungarian Kuvasz shepherd dogs in Budapest's City Park

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

FARM SECTOR TO RECEIVE OVER HUF 4,200 BN IN DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

The Hungarian government, through the European Union's common agricultural policy (CAP), will spend 4,265 billion forints (EUR 11.8bn) on the development of Hungary's rural areas, its agriculture and food industry until 2027, Agriculture Minister István Nagy said.

The government has decided to raise government co-financing to EU funds to 80% from 2021, tripling it from the 17.5% of previous years, to achieve such "historic amounts of funding", Nagy said. Within the framework of CAP's other pillar, aimed to provide income supplements, Hungary will receive a further 3,272 billion forints of EU funding, Nagy said. The total funding for the sector, including EU and domestic resources, will amount to 7,537 billion euros in the next financial cycle, the statement added. The "unprecedented" funding will be used to further improve infrastructure in villages and small towns, for market-oriented modernisation of the food industry and an environmentally friendly upgrade of Hungarian agriculture, Nagy said. "One of the greatest challenges of the next decade ... is to develop rural areas and the quality of life of the people living there, to create locally available jobs, infrastructure and services that are attractive for young people as well," the statement said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT HAS FINANCED OVER 1,400 INVESTMENTS SINCE BEGINNING OF PANDEMIC

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Hungary last March, the government has supported 1,434 investments at the total value of 1,676 billion forints (EUR 4.7bn), Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. Speaking at the inauguration of Hungarian-owned Merkbau's new plant manufacturing doors and windows in Kiskunhalas, southern Hungary, Szijjártó said the pandemic posed economic challenges as well as public health risks. The government has a duty to protect people's jobs as well as their lives and health, he said. In the spring, the government decided to fight unemployment rather than financing it, he said. The past decade's efforts have created a robust Hungarian economy, with Hungarian companies at its foundations which are becoming stronger and stronger, he said. Merkbau, an important construction company in southern Hungary, has invested 580 million forints to preserve long-term jobs for its 350 employees, Szijjártó said. The government has supported it with a 287 million forint grant, he added.

FINANCE MINISTER: GOVT TO CONTINUE CORPORATE INVESTMENT SUPPORT SCHEME

The government's support scheme for the investment projects of large

companies has helped generate more than 382 billion forints (EUR 1.06bn) worth of developments in Hungary since 2015, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. So far, the government has contributed 160 billion forints towards 180 corporate investments, Varga said. The scheme is set to continue in 2021 with a view to providing immediate support to large companies during the pandemic, he said, adding that this year's budget earmarks 25 billion forints for the programme. The government's goal is to make 2021 a year of economic growth for Hungary, the minister said. Finance ministry state secretary Balázs Rákossy said the scheme helped save 16,500 jobs last year and create more than 700 new ones.

CORONAVIRUS - 77 FATALITIES, 1,419 MORE INFECTIONS

Fully 77 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,419 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 343,656, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. The death toll has risen to 10,725, while 203,972 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections stands at 128,959, while there are 5,065 hospitalised Covid patients, 367 on a ventilator. Altogether 21,979 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,852,591. Most infections

have been registered in Budapest (64,603) and Pest County (42,880) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (19,586), Hajdú-Bihar (19,576) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (19,276). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (7,158).

HUNGARY TO GET SHIPMENTS OF PFIZER, MODERNA VACCINES ON TUESDAY

In addition to a new shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine sufficient to inoculate 39,000 people, Hungary will take delivery of 3,600 doses of Moderna's vaccine on Tuesday, a department head of the National Public Health Centre said. The new shipments will be used to continue the vaccination of Hungary's health-care staff and retirement home residents and employees, Ágnes Galgóczi told a press conference of the operative board coordinating Hungary's response to the pandemic. Meanwhile, health authorities are also preparing to begin vaccinating law enforcement personnel directly involved in the pandemic response, Galgóczi said. So far, 71,000 Covid-19 vaccines have been administered in the country, she said.

JUSTICE MIN SHARES CONCERN ABOUT TWITTER LOCKING TRUMP ACCOUNT

Justice Minister Judit Varga said she shared German Chancellor Angela

Merkel's view that the locking of US President Donald Trump's user account by Twitter was reason for concern.

"It is not my duty to comment on other states' internal policy but sometimes it can't be slipped over," she said on Facebook. "In the last few days, private censorship has reached a new level and has struck in an unprecedented way. In digital imperialism, it no longer matters whether one is an average user or the democratically elected president of the world's leading power, since it has become clear that both can be silenced at the touch of a single button," she added. Varga said this highlighted "how vulnerable we really are to global control of liberal social media".

TOURISM AGENCY HEAD: SECTOR MAY RE-START IN SUMMER

Hungary's tourism industry, which generated more than 13% of the national economic output before the coronavirus pandemic, could restart in the summer, but will take at least ten months to recover to pre-pandemic levels, the head of the Hungarian Tourism Agency said. A fundamental goal in the present situation is to ensure that companies are ready to welcome back tourists when they do come back, Zoltán Guller said in a video posted on the agency's Facebook page. Government support for the tourism industry, which has been hard hit by the pandemic, adds

up to 800 billion forints (EUR 2.21bn) which is an outstanding amount in European comparison, he said.

HUNGARY POSTS EUR 811 M TRADE SURPLUS IN NOVEMBER

Hungary posted a trade surplus of 811 million euros in November, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Annualised exports rose for the third month in a row, while imports increased for the first time since the start of the pandemic, KSH said. Exports climbed 6.9% to 10.140 billion euros and imports rose by 1.9% to 9.329 billion euros. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 78% of exports and 70% of imports. For the period January-November, exports fell by 5.5% to 95.951 billion euros and imports dropped 6.9% to 90.581 billion euros. The trade surplus reached 5.370 billion euros.

DK DEMANDS PM'S EXPLANATION OF HIGH STATE DEBT

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) called on the prime minister to explain the high level of state debt. "The amount accumulated in state debt is almost twice the amount held in 2010. The figure in terms of the country's GDP is also worse, 81.2%, compared to 80.2% ten years ago," deputy party leader László Varju said. He called it "outrageous and shameful" that the government of Viktor Orbán

"has pushed the country into a debt service for several years for the sake of the opportunity to steal [public monies] and make luxury investments". "What we have instead of crisis management, job protection and state wage subsidies is the construction of sports stadiums, a hunting expo and the Budapest-Belgrade railway line," Varju said.

LMP CALLS ON GOVT TO VERIFY PAKS PROJECT EARTHQUAKE SAFETY

The opposition LMP party has called on the government to verify that the upgrade of the Paks nuclear plant was safe in terms of possible earthquakes in the area. LMP group leader László Lőránt Keresztes noted that Slovenia had shut its nuclear facility down in the wake of recent earthquakes in Croatia, and demanded that the government should reconsider its position concerning the upgrade project. Keresztes also demanded that preparations for a new nuclear waste depository in southern Hungary should be halted.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: SUGO FOOD TO INVEST HUF 5.4 BN AT S HUNGARY BASE

Belgian vegetable processing company Sugo Food is investing 5.4 billion forints (EUR 15.0m) at its base in Baja, in southern Hungary, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign affairs and trade minister, said. The first phase of the investment will

see the construction of a tortilla chips plant, Szijjártó said, adding that the government is supporting the project with a 1.7 billion forint grant. Szijjártó praised Hungary's food industry, saying the sector had held its own during the coronavirus pandemic. Hungary faced no food supply shortages and the sector even increased its output by 8% during the first ten months of 2020, the minister said. Food industry companies employ some 147,000 people in Hungary, he added.

JOBBIK REPEATS CALL FOR DIRECT ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

The opposition Jobbik party has again proposed electing Hungary's president by a direct vote, saying it would strengthen civic democracy. Jobbik lawmaker Koloman Brenner said that though his party had no intention of changing Hungary's political system, a president elected directly by popular vote could provide a useful counterbalance to the prime minister in office. The only change Jobbik would make when it comes to the powers of the head of state, he said, was requiring a two-thirds majority for passing bills sent back to parliament by

the president. Brenner said that unlike parliamentary elections, presidential election campaigns would be about choosing the candidate best capable of embodying the unity of the nation, rather than political divisions.

ÁDER DISCUSSES DANUBE OIL POLLUTION IN PODCAST

President János Áder in his podcast discussed an oil spill on December 12, when some 6,500 litres of oil spilled into the Danube near Szigetszentmiklós, south of Budapest. In his podcast, Kék bolygó (Blue Planet), Áder talked to Gabriella Siklós, the spokeswoman of the General Directorate of Water Management (OVF), who said damage control had started quickly thanks to early reports of the spill. The authorities have isolated a 1,830 square meter area within the Danube and successfully stopped the pollutant from spreading further. Even so, the ecosystem of the area is expected to take decades to regenerate, she said. Damage control and protection efforts have consumed at least 300 million forints (EUR 833,000), Siklós said.

GOVT SPOKESMAN: 'TWITTER BLOCKED 200 OF MY FOLLOWERS'

Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, said Twitter had in an "arbitrary move" blocked 200 of his followers "overnight" without any explanation or notification in advance. There have been numerous news reports and commentaries published about "this most recent hobby of tech giants of blocking or suspending mostly right-wing conservative voices they don't like," Kovács said on Facebook. He noted a similar move by Twitter in September last year, when it blocked the Hungarian government's official account "without any explanation" just on the same day EU Commissioner Věra Jourová, "a Soros ally", presented its rule of law report on Hungary. "While these tech giants keep preaching about the importance of diversity, their moves over the recent weeks and months go to show that they are far not that supportive when it comes to the diversity of opinions," Kovács said.