

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Theatre in Transcarpathia renewed with Hungary's help

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

President Áder leaves for V4 summit in Poland

LMP press conference on home care

TOP STORY

TURKEY LOOKS TO HUNGARY FOR JAB TESTING

Turkey would welcome help by Hungarian experts during the clinical phase of testing its coronavirus vaccine, Hungary's foreign minister said in Ankara after talks with his Turkish counterpart.

The Turkish initiative would enable them to examine if the vaccine can be added to the assortment of jabs deployed in Hungary against the disease, Péter Szijjártó told MTI. Turkey is developing 16 vaccines, he said, adding that the one in the most advanced stage is expected to reach phase 3 in the next three to four months. The minister said that Turkey will also produce Russian vaccines, and has purchased tens of million doses of Chinese vaccines.

"Let's not forget that the West has changed its approach to Chinese and Russian vaccines. Initially it showed contempt for them but now it is supporting their use, or has at least adopted a wait-and-see attitude," he said. The two ministers agreed that the pandemic can only be tamed through vaccination.

Szjijártó earlier held talks with Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan and Industry and Technology Minister Mustafa Varank.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: MEDICOR BUILDING PLANT IN TURKEY

Hungarian health industry producer Medicor has started building a plant in an industrial park in Ankara, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Mustafa Varank, Turkey's minister of industry and technology, in Ankara. The new 4,300sqm plant will produce medical aids for new-borns, Szijjártó said. The Hungarian government has provided a grant of 480 million forints (EUR 1.3m) for the project worth a total of 800 million forints. Szijjártó told a news conference that Hungary was a "winner of a new epoch in the global economy", through its policy of supporting investments both by foreign companies in Hungary and Hungarian companies in other countries. Hungary's production of export goods, he added, could only be increased appreciably if some of that production was transferred to locations closer to the consumer markets. Szijjártó noted Medicor's 100 year-old legacy and its dominance in central Europe as a manufacturer of neonatal medical products. The company's products are sold in over 100 countries and they are involved in UNICEF and WHO programmes, he added.

Earlier in the day, Szijjártó had talks with Turkish Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan and was present at the signing of an agreement on fostering health industry developments between the two countries' Eximbanks worth

100 million dollars. Under the deal, Hungarian and Turkish companies will jointly equip 7 oncology hospitals in Ghana with radiotherapy equipment. The Hungarian bank will provide the financing and its Turkish counterpart will undertake loan guarantees, Szijjártó said, also noting that despite 2020 being a "black year" in global trade, Hungary and Turkey increased their bilateral trade by 6%, its turnover exceeding 3 billion dollars in late November, more than the 2019 total.

ÁDER: CLIMATE CHANGE SET TO BE KEY ISSUE

Climate change is expected to be among the most important issues on the agenda of the new US administration headed by President Joe Biden, President János Áder said on his "Blue Planet" podcast. Discussing the new administration's climate policies with environmental economist Gábor Bartus, Áder noted that the 2020 presidential election had been the first in which climate change was a major issue. Among his first acts in office, Biden moved to pull the US back into the Paris climate accord, cancelled the long-disputed Keystone XL oil pipeline, halted oil drilling in a pristine part of the Arctic and set up a working group to assess the social cost of greenhouse gases, Áder noted. Bartus said that although the new administration's first measures were noteworthy, US presidents had so far had minimal influence on the country's greenhouse gas emissions. The biggest changes have come from technological

and business advancements like the use of shale gas and rulings by the Supreme Court, he said.

Áder added that because the US and China account for more than one-third of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, no climate policy would be effective without their participation.

Bartus said the world should strive to enact climate policy measures that "fit environmental protection into the logic of the economy", noting the European Union's Emissions Trading System as an example. He said that if countries put a price on environmental pollution in the form of taxes or other levies, a free-trade area could be set up, and those outside it would eventually be forced to invest in environmental protection. If the US, China and the EU all thought like this, the rest of the world would eventually have to adapt as well, he added.

V4 ANNIVERSARY SUMMIT TO ADDRESS POST- PANDEMIC RECOVERY

The upcoming summit of the Visegrad Group marking the alliance's 30th anniversary will address post-pandemic recovery measures and energy security issues, according to the event's schedule. The meeting of the presidents of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia will be held behind closed doors due the coronavirus pandemic on February 9-10 at the Polish presidential residency in Jurata on Hel Peninsula on the coast of the Baltic Sea, the Polish president's office said on its website.

The programme opens on Tuesday with a panel discussion addressing the topics of European and Transatlantic cooperation and the Visegrad Group's current status in relation to EU policy, the US elections and developments in Russia. In another panel, the presidents will discuss economic recovery measures and energy security in the post Covid-19 pandemic period. The Visegrad Group was formed on February 15, 1991, at a high-level meeting in the Hungarian town of Visegrad. Its six-month rotating presidency will be taken over by Hungary from Poland on June 30.

LAWMAKERS SET TO APPROVE DECLARATION TO MARK V4 ANNIVERSARY

Hungary's lawmakers are scheduled to approve a declaration to mark the 30th anniversary of cooperation between the Visegrad Group countries -- Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia -- on Feb. 15, Zsolt Németh, head of the foreign affairs committee, told MTI. The committee approved the draft unanimously, indicating that Hungarian lawmakers are capable of finding consensus regarding Hungary's foreign policy, Németh said. This is all the more important as V4 and central European cooperation is a priority for the government, he said. Németh said the V4's great advantage was that it operated flexibly, eschewed being institutionally hidebound, and favoured pragmatism on matters of common interest. The four countries' presidents, prime ministers and

foreign affairs committee members are scheduled to meet, and the other three parliaments are slated to approve a similar declaration in the coming days, he said.

The Visegrad Group, he said, sought to deepen central European and Euro-Atlantic cooperation, and it showed no interest in aggravating conflicts.

Németh noted Hungary will hold the group's rotating presidency from July.

Jerzy Snopek, current V4 president Poland's ambassador to Hungary, said the group had strengthened over the past three decades, with shared interests and values.

HUNGARY RECORDS 65 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, 1,160 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 65 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,160 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 377,655, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. The death toll has risen to 13,155, while 281,839 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections has declined to 82,661, while there are 3,717 hospitalised Covid patients, 295 on a ventilator. Altogether 15,847 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 3,275,582. Hungary began rolling out the coronavirus vaccine in December. So far, 289,042 people have received their first jab, and 107,592 have been fully inoculated. The

government has extended coronavirus-related restrictions until March 1. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (70,078) and Pest County (47,074) so far, followed by the counties of Hajdú-Bihar (21,310), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (21,131) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (21,009). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (8,323).

HUNGARY TO BEGIN VACCINATING UNDER-60S WITH CHRONIC ILLNESSES

Hungary this week will continue inoculating people in the oldest age group against Covid-19 and will begin the vaccination of people under the age of 60 with chronic illnesses, a government official said. So far, 35,299 senior citizens have received their Covid shots at hospitals or at home from their general practitioners, István György, a state secretary of the prime minister's office, told an online press conference of the operative board coordinating Hungary's response to the pandemic. This week, GPs will be using new deliveries of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines to inoculate the elderly, while those opting to get vaccinated at hospitals will be receiving the Russian Sputnik V jab, he said.

NEW ENTRY RULES TO APPLY TO AUSTRIA FROM FEB. 10

Austria is introducing new entry rules from Feb. 10, a deputy leader of Hungary's operative board

responsible for handling the coronavirus epidemic said. Under the new rules, anyone wishing to enter Austria must register online in advance, Lieutenant Colonel Róbert Kiss said. Those who have entered the country must go into home quarantine for ten days and have the option of getting a free PCR or antigen test for Covid-19 from the fifth day of quarantine, he said. Those exempted from the new rules include cross-border commuters, seasonal farming and forestry workers, international passenger and cargo transit, and people travelling to Austria for emergency medical treatment, Kiss said. Meanwhile, freight carriers are having to wait around two hours at Hungary's Rösztke and Tompa crossing stations on the Serbian border, he said. As regards Hungary, Kiss noted that police have started proceedings against 35,554 people for breaching the overnight curfew since its introduction in late November.

BUDAPEST PREPARES 'TOURISM REOPENING PACKAGE' TO HELP HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The Budapest municipality is preparing a "reopening package" to help the hospitality industry after the lifting of coronavirus-related restrictions, which is expected in the spring, a deputy mayor said. The municipality will expand areas available for restaurant terraces and ease red tape on tourism-related

requests, Erzsébet Németh Gy said. Budapest will also "reduce the lease on terrace space by almost 100%," widen the use of public spaces and expand discounts on leases, Németh Gy said. Meanwhile, red tape on organising events will also be cut, she said. When reopening the economy, the city leadership will work to consider experts' opinions and to preserve people's safety, she added.

OFFICIAL: MEASURES TO PROTECT ECONOMY 'SUCCESSFUL'

The government's action plan to protect the economy introduced last spring has successfully helped Hungarian businesses withstand the coronavirus pandemic, a state secretary of the innovation and technology ministry said.

László György told an online press conference that thanks to the government's measures the scenario of mass bankruptcies and mass unemployment had been averted. The focus has now shifted to relaunching the economy with a range of government support and incentives for domestic businesses, he said. Before the pandemic emerged, Hungarians had enjoyed a three-year sweep of high employment and wage hikes, allowing "families and businesses to accumulate reserves which has made them less vulnerable to the pandemic compared with the 2007-2008 economic crisis," György said.

OMBUDSMAN ORDERS PROBE INTO CONDITIONS AT S HUNGARY ORPHANAGE

The ombudsman for fundamental rights has ordered a review of conditions at a children's home in Kalocsa, in southern Hungary, based on media reports and lawmaker accounts of "serious concerns" and allegations regarding the institution. Independent MP Bernadett Szél announced that she was turning to the ombudsman and the human resources ministry over reports of child abuse at the Kalocsa orphanage in August last year. The ombudsman's office said in a statement that it had conducted an unscheduled inspection of the children's home last Thursday, interviewing children and staff. Ákos Kozma, the ombudsman for fundamental rights, will release a report of the investigation's findings, including on the operations of the orphanage and the enforcement of children's fundamental rights, once the review is concluded, they added.

EXPORT, IMPORT GROWTH PICKS UP IN DECEMBER

Hungary's exports and imports grew at a faster pace in December, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Exports rose by an annual 11.8% to 8.4 billion euros and imports climbed by 9.2% to 8.1 billion euros, both accelerating from the previous month. The trade

surplus stood at 310 million euros, growing from 99 million in the base period. Exports rose for the fourth month in a row and imports for the second, after contracting for months early in the coronavirus crisis. For the full year, exports fell by 4.3% to 104.4 billion euros and imports dropped by 5.7% to 98.7 billion. The trade surplus came to 5.7 billion euros from 4.3 billion a year earlier.

BUDGET SHOWS JAN SURPLUS; FULL-YEAR GAP EXPECTED AT 6.5% OF GDP

Hungary's cash flow-based based budget, excluding local councils, had a 198.8 billion forint (EUR 556.8m) surplus at the end of January, the finance ministry said. The ministry said the January surplus is "not uncommon" and attributed it to seasonal effects. The central budget had a 180.5 billion forint and the separate state funds a 22.4 billion forint surplus, but the social insurance funds were 4.1 billion forints in the red. The ministry added that the budget is expected to finish the year with a deficit equivalent to 6.5% of GDP, calculated according to the European Union's accrual-based accounting rules.

DK: GOVT MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS TO FUNCTION

The government's cuts to funding for local councils is making it difficult for them to function, the opposition Democratic Coalition's László Varju, the head of parliament's budget committee, said. Following a committee meeting that lacked quorum due to a no-show by ruling party representatives, Varju said that the government's remarks about the activities of local councils "is often totally divorced from reality". Lawmakers present at the meeting had been unable to discuss a bill on support for the additional responsibilities local councils have had to take on during the coronavirus epidemic, Varju said. The government, he said, had promised to compensate localities for their reduced funding, "yet nothing's being done, even though the deadline for submitting the draft budget expires on February 15", he said. "The cabinet has made life very difficult for local council leaders who want to observe the laws but receive no help from the government,"

Varju said. DK lawmaker Anett Bósz said that elsewhere in Europe, the management of the coronavirus crisis had been most effective when the central government listened to local leaders. Monday's committee meeting was also attended by György Gémesi, head of the alliance of local governments MOSZ.

PALOZNAK JAZZ PICNIC TO FEATURE CANDY DULFER, MARIO BONDI

The Paloznak Jazz Picnic near Lake Balaton is set to be held between July 29 and 31 and feature saxophonist Candy Dulfer, singer Mario Biondi and groups MF Robots and De Phazz, organisers said. The artists were scheduled to play at last year's festival, cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 9th jazz picnic, held in the village of Paloznak north of Hungary's most popular holiday resort, will feature jazz, funk and soul greats such as English jazz-funk band Level 42, Dutch singer Caro Emerald and Dutch group Kraak+Smaak, organisers said earlier. The three-day festival will also feature Hungarian jazz performers, local wine and cuisine.