

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

April winter in northern Hungary's hills

UPCOMING EVENTS

Regular govt presser

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

OUTDOOR CATERING TIED TO 3.5 M SHOTS

Bars and restaurants could again start serving customers outdoors when the number of Hungarians inoculated against Covid-19 reaches 3.5 million, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Facebook.

Orbán also announced that while kindergartens would reopen and the lower grades of primary schools return to their classrooms on April 19, 5-8 graders would stay at home and go on with their online classes until May 10. The government has decided "to proceed gradually and carefully," Orbán said, and asked parents for "patience and understanding". The prime minister welcomed the speed with which the national vaccination programme was being implemented and thanked doctors, nurses, as well as those involved in the procurement and distribution of coronavirus vaccines. He said "we are going well, we could be the fastest in Europe administering the shots". At the same time, he said that "political attacks against the vaccines have increased both internationally and at home", adding that those "attacks" are aimed at "creating havoc and uncertainty". He asked residents "not to heed those anti-vaccination voices" and argued that "shots could save lives". He advised that everyone should "accept the vaccine offered and get the shot".

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT GRANTS HUF 30 BN SUPPORT TO BOOST COMPETITIVENESS SCHEME

The government is granting an additional 30 billion forints support to a scheme to boost competitiveness, the foreign minister said. Péter Szijjártó said in a video on Facebook that Hungary, unlike many other countries, had successfully prevented mass unemployment as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. "This required the government to support companies carrying out developments worth over 800 billion forints (EUR 2.3bn)," he added. In response to the success of the scheme, the government is offering a further 30 billion forints to support investments that expand capacity, efficiency and productivity by companies that pledge to retain workers, he said. Companies can apply for up to 1.8 million euros, or one-fifth of the investment planned, he said. In underdeveloped regions, the amount of support can be up to one-third of the planned investment, he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO COMPLY WITH NATO DECISION ON AFGHANISTAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL

Hungary will comply with NATO's decision concerning a military pullout from Afghanistan, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's foreign minister,

told MTI before a special ministerial session of NATO. Szijjártó said he agreed with the approach that the simultaneous entry of NATO troops into Afghanistan should be followed by their simultaneous withdrawal. Hungary used to station 120 to 130 soldiers in Afghanistan while its present contingent has nine members, he said. Szijjártó said NATO should pass a decision which guarantees that the efforts of the past twenty years do not go to waste. He stressed the need of guarantees so that Afghanistan should not become once again a hotbed of terrorism and a source of massive migration. If Afghans are again exposed to the threat of terrorism, hundreds of thousands or even millions of them may leave their homeland, he said.

Szijjártó insisted that Afghanistan's neighbours willing to cooperate with NATO, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, should be assisted in defending their borders. He said NATO should cooperate with Iran so as to prevent the flow of migrants through that country to Europe. Afghanistan's security is more directly connected with European security than one may think, he said. The European NATO allies also need guarantees for preventing a growing threat of terrorism and new waves of illegal migration, he said. In a move to help maintain stability within Afghanistan, Hungary will continue to support the Afghan security and defence forces with half a million dollars a year up until 2024, Szijjártó said.

TRADE UNIONS: REOPENING SCHOOLS 'UNNECESSARY, DANGEROUS'

Five trade union confederations has published a statement, protesting against the government's plan to reopen primary schools and kindergartens on April 19, saying the measure was "unnecessary and dangerous for children". The statement was signed by leaders of the Confederation of Trade Unions (SZEZ), the Trade Union Association of Intellectuals (ÉSZT), the LIGA of trade unions, the National Association of Workers' Councils and the Hungarian Association of Trade Unions (MASZSZ). The unions welcomed the government decision to push back the opening of secondary schools to May 10. They said, at the same time, that reopening kindergartens and primary schools was "unnecessary according to experts and everyday experience". They noted that a recent survey by the Teachers' Union has shown that 81% of teachers did not feel their students would be safe at school, while 87% said they thought "it was very early" to reopen. Citing the human resources ministry, the statement said that only 6-8% of kindergarten children and 1% of primary school pupils were currently in need of supervision at the facility.

Further, "employees and parents are not separate entities," the statement said, and called for the coordination of pandemic protection measures in various sectors of society. Workers continue to face risks posed by the pandemic as well as striving to ensure

a safe and thorough education for their children while retaining their jobs, the statement said. The confederations therefore continue to argue that the state should take over the job costs of parents homebound with small children due to pandemic measures, the statement said.

HUNGARY RECORDS 285 COVID FATALITIES, 3,597 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 285 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 3,597 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday. So far 3,037,023 people have received a first jab, while 1,290,709 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has risen to 272,066, while hospitals are caring for 10,364 Covid patients, 1,204 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 43,992 people in official quarantine, while 5,011,794 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 731,675 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 24,265. Fully 435,344 people have made a recovery. So far, most infections have been registered in Budapest and Pest County, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Hajdú-Bihar.

JUSTICE MINISTER: TECH GIANTS SHOULD BE TRANSPARENT, RESPECT RULE OF LAW

Big technological companies should be transparent and respect the rule of

law, Justice Minister Judit Varga told an online discussion hosted by the 21st Century Institute. "If we are unable to control the activities of the tech giants that are building a pseudo legal system, they will rule our life and force us into a bubble", she said. Varga said the tech giants are quoting community guidelines adopted arbitrarily and enforced onto their users. "It is also a question whether these guidelines are in tune with the principles of the rule of law," she said.

The minister said that as someone with conservative views she had reservations about the community sites but felt obliged to use them as a platform for expressing her opinion seeing how active her liberal and left-wing opponents are.

The tech giants get everybody to be addicted to "this drug" so that they can then influence the public, she said. Varga expressed concern over "Facebook's move to reduce political content", adding she was curious to see how the community site would simultaneously ensure equal treatment and the exclusion of double standards.

FIDESZ BUDAPEST: KARÁCSONY 'COUNTS ON FAR RIGHT'

Ruling Fidesz said that Gergely Karácsony, Budapest's mayor, "counts on far-right support when it comes to his desire to become prime minister".

Fidesz's Budapest organisation on Facebook said the nationalist Jobbik party lacked deputies in the

metropolitan assembly because Budapest voters "did not want of them" in the 2019 municipal elections.

"But Gergely Karácsony and his advisors think that Jobbik's votes in certain parts of the country will be needed" for him to become prime minister, Fidesz said, referring to an event in which the Budapest mayor "embraced" a Jobbik candidate who had "made anti-Semitic remarks in a local election".

Fidesz insisted that under the coronavirus-related special legal order, "the mayor is making unilateral decisions on behalf of the metropolitan assembly and committees" regarding appointments of people linked to Jobbik.

REFORMED CHURCHES TO RE-OPEN ON MAY 2

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary issued a decree, asking communities to re-open churches to the public on May 2. Reformed churches have not held public services since March 8 due to the coronavirus epidemic. In its statement, the synod warned congregations to observe epidemic regulations and to open churches "soberly, cautiously" and gradually.

HUNGARY FEB INDUSTRY OUTPUT UP 1.9% YR/YR

Hungarian industrial output grew an annual 1.9% in February after declining by 6.7% in January, the Central Statistical

Office (KSH) confirmed. Working day-adjusted output in February rose by an annual 3.9%, while month on month it grew by 4.8%, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data. Output of Hungary's automotive sector dropped by an annual 6.6%. The contraction in the sector, which accounted for 30% of total manufacturing output in February, slowed from a 27.5% drop in the previous month. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment, accounting for 12.5% of manufacturing, increased by 9.8%. Output of the food, drinks and tobacco segment, which made up 10% of manufacturing sector output, fell by 2.9%.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY TO DRAW EUR 17 BN FROM EU RECOVERY FUND FOR ENERGY EFFICIENT SOLUTIONS

Hungary plans to draw 16-17 billion euros from the European Union's 750 billion euro pandemic recovery fund to fund household solar systems and energy efficient heating systems, a government official told a conference.

At a conference organised by the association of solar system distributors, Attila Steiner, the state secretary responsible for the development of circular economy, energy and climate policy, said the government aimed to modernise 80,000 households, with 100 billion forints (EUR 278.4m) available in total.

CONSTRUCTION OF BUDAPEST'S NEW METRO LINE STARTS WITH EXPLORATORY DRILLINGS

The construction of the first section of Budapest's metro line 5 has started with exploratory drillings at Kálvin Square, the Budapest development centre (BFK) said. The new facility will connect two southern suburban railway lines with metro lines 3 and 4, it said. The tunnel will arrive under the two Kálvin Square metro stations, in the depth of fifty meters. Balázs Fürjes, state secretary for developments in the capital and its agglomeration, said on Facebook that nearly 100 test holes would be drilled along the line, at a distance of 50 metres from

one another. In the second phase of construction, Kálvin Square will be connected with the destination of the northern suburban rail at Batthyány Square through a tunnel under the Danube, he said. Fürjes said that the project was supported by Budapest mayor Gergely Karácsony and the Metropolitan Council.

WOLFGANG PUCK TO OPEN A SPAGO IN BUDAPEST

The celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck will open a Spago, his flagship California cuisine restaurant, in Budapest's Matild Palace, a hotel set to open in a landmark building near the Danube early in the summer. Matild Palace said the Michelin-star chef will direct the hotel's full range of culinary services under a strategic partnership agreement signed with Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group, including its cafe, rooftop bar, catering and room service. Spago by Wolfgang Puck will open early in summer. The Matild Cafe + Cabaret, a reimagining of the Belvárosi Kávéház, established in 1901, will open in September.