

PHOTO OF THE DAY



US vessel flying a Hungarian flag at the beginning of the Black Swan international exercise coordinated by Hungary

MTI/Zoltán Máthé

UPCOMING EVENTS

President Áder receives four newly assigned ambassadors

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

VACCINATION LEADS TO FALLING COVID CASES

The impact of Covid-19 vaccines can already be seen in Hungary's trend of declining daily new cases, the chief medical officer said, adding that the number of new cases recorded had fallen by 21% since last week.

Cecília Müller told an online press conference of the central coronavirus board that the average age of the patients was 45 years. More than 4,326,000 people have registered for a vaccine, and 69% of them have already received their first dose, Müller said. Fully 33.4% of the Hungarian population has been vaccinated, compared with the European Union average of 18.5%, she said. Public trust in the vaccine is rising thanks in large part to a flow of positive news and scientific studies on the jabs that are also in use in Hungary, Müller said. She said the arrival of new vaccine shipments in the country would accelerate inoculations and allow everyone who has registered to get their shot. Monday saw a delivery of 68,800 doses of Moderna, to be used as second jabs, Müller said. On Tuesday, 72,000 doses of AstraZeneca and 248,040 doses of Pfizer vaccines are scheduled to arrive, she said, as is a delivery of second shots of Sputnik V. A shipment of the Sinopharm vaccine is also scheduled to arrive in the coming days, she added.

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FINANCE MINISTRY SUBMITS BUDGET AMENDMENT TO PARLIAMENT

The finance ministry has submitted to parliament the amendment to the 2021 budget on continued allocation of funds for coronavirus protection and economic recovery measures, the ministry said in a statement. The bill also covers the home purchase scheme announced last autumn and increases in health-care, family support and local government funding, it said. Since the approval of this year's budget, the coronavirus pandemic warranted significant changes in economic measures and decisions, the ministry said. Under the amendment, Hungary's deficit target is at 7.5%. This will allow a reduction of state debt to 79.9% of GDP by the end of 2021 from 80.4% in 2020. The amendment projects a 4.3% economic growth in 2021. A parliamentary vote on the amendment is expected during the spring session, the ministry said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 100,000 2ND SPUTNIK DOSES ARRIVING IN HUNGARY

Fully 100,000 second Sputnik vaccine doses are arriving in Hungary on Tuesday evening, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, has said on Facebook. Also, a government freight plane will return from China in the second half of the week "packed" with the next

Sinopharm shipment. He said the plane's crew would also be busy next week. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said on Tuesday he will travel to Switzerland, "an important political and economic ally". Switzerland, like Hungary, has withheld its vote for the UN global migration compact, he said, adding that Swiss businesses employed thousands of Hungarians through multitudes of investments in the country.

ONE-THIRD OF HUNGARIANS PLANNING FOR VACATION

Around one-third of Hungarians say they are thinking of going on holiday this summer, Szallas.hu said, citing a survey conducted in cooperation with pollster Ipsos. According to Szallas.hu, Hungary's easing of coronavirus-related restrictions has had a noticeable impact on the figures, with reservations for the summer increasing daily. Szallas.hu PR manager Beatrix Trepass said that several times as many reservations have now been made as this time last year. Most respondents are planning to spend up to 100,000 forints (EUR 277) on accommodation for their holidays, calculating with four nights and 3-4 family members on average, compared with 2-3 nights last year. Fully 33% of the reservations are for apartments, and 25% for hotels. Two-thirds of the respondents are planning to stay inside Hungary, while 20% would go abroad. Some 11-12% of respondents would book holidays

both inside Hungary and in another country. One-third of respondents said they were not entertaining holiday plans at all. The most popular domestic destinations are Lake Balaton, Hévíz, Eger, Hajdúszoboszló, Lillafüred and Szilvásvárad.

MINISTRY: 60% OF KINDERGARTENERS, 75% OF SCHOOLCHILDREN ATTEND FIRST DAY OF IN- PERSON EDUCATION

Fully 60% of kindergartners and 75% of schoolchildren attended school on Monday, when in-person education resumed after months of lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Ministry of Human Resources (EMMI) said. Hungary's kindergartens and grades 1-4 of primary schools reopened on Monday, while grades 5-8 and secondary schools will reopen on May 10. Almost all teachers started working too, EMMI said, thanking public education employees for their work.

HUNGARY RECORDS 199 COVID FATALITIES, 1,645 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 199 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,645 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday. So far 3,317,052 people have received a first jab, while 1,400,703 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections stands

at 268,072, while hospitals are caring for 8,602 Covid patients, 980 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 43,841 people in official quarantine, while 5,157,082 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 754,833 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 25,580. Fully 461,181 people have made a recovery. So far, most infections have been registered in Budapest and Pest County, followed by the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Hajdú-Bihar.

SZIJJÁRTÓ NEGOTIATES SWISS DEALS AIMED AT JOB CREATION IN HUNGARY

Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade has signed deals in Switzerland concerning investment projects in Hungary worth a combined 14 billion forints (EUR 38.8m), expected to create 220 new jobs. Péter Szijjártó said the three Swiss companies involved will expand their operations in Hungary as well as launching new projects "in three different industries and in three different cities", according to a foreign ministry statement. One company will expand its capacities for railway carriage production in Szolnok, and another is planning to increase its plant producing toothpaste tubes in Debrecen, while the third one will start making ceramic dental implants in Székesfehérvár, the statement quoted him as saying.

Switzerland is one of Hungary's key political and business allies, Szijjártó said, calling on the European Union to build even closer ties with Switzerland and form an institutionalised framework agreement with the country. "The EU could clearly benefit from closer cooperation with such an economically strong country as Switzerland," he said. Concerning bilateral ties, Szijjártó said that Swiss investors had a "very important role" in the Hungarian economy. There are nearly 900 Swiss companies in the country, employing 33,000 people, he added.

TRÓCSÁNYI: TRANSNATIONAL EU ELECTION LIST WOULD WEAKEN NATIONAL PARTIES

The European Parliament's idea of creating a transnational election list, supported mainly by left-liberal EP parties, would weaken national parties and skew election clout in favour of large member states, Fidesz MEP László Trócsányi said in an interview broadcast on Tuesday. "This is a dangerous idea ... I personally cannot support," the MEP said. Trócsányi argued such a move would put a vast gap between the voter and elected officials. He told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió that the idea of creating a transnational electoral roll was gaining traction, and Emmanuel Macron, the French President, supported it based on

the belief that European democracy could be strengthened through joint European lists. Hungarian citizens would end up "voting for people they don't even know," he said. Brussels, he said, believed centralisation, "a move towards a kind of federal state system", was the best way to tackle Europe's multitude of problems, but this, he added, would go against the principles of Europe's "founding fathers".

INTL MILITARY EXERCISE STARTS IN HUNGARY

Hungarian, Austrian, Croatian, Slovak and Slovenian soldiers are participating in the Black Swan 2021 military exercise aimed at launching the regional special operations command in the Hungarian city of Szolnok. The exercise is assisted by US trainers and troops as well as trainers from Germany, and is being carried out on Hungarian, Croatian, and Slovak territory, with the Hungarian command coordinating the operations. The manoeuvres involve 800 troops, 14 aircraft, and Hungarian military technology. As part of the exercise, US armed boats will operate along the Budapest section of the Danube in the coming days. Other exercises taking part in several areas of the country involve military vehicles taking to the country's public roads and sonic booms due to aircraft manoeuvres, Tamás Sándor of the Hungarian Armed Forces Command, told a press briefing. He mentioned the areas outside Kecskemét, Sárospatak, Nyíregyháza, and Kisvárd, where

increased traffic on the roads and aircraft noise could be expected. Black Swan is being organised in connection with the US Trojan Footprint-South 2021 and Blue Sky exercises, and is part of the Defender Europe 2021 series of exercises. The exercise is being held as planned but also with regard to coronavirus-related restrictions.

NOVÁK: FAMILY KEY VALUE OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

Katalin Novák, Fidesz's deputy leader, addressing an international conference on the future of Christian democracy in Europe, called the family the central value of Christian democracy, according to Tuesday's edition of Magyar Hírlap daily. At the Political Network for Values online conference attended on Monday by lawmakers and leading politicians, Novák, who is also the minister responsible for family policy and the international organisation's head since autumn 2019, called for the preservation of traditional family values and that marriage was defined by the union of a man and woman and the parent-child relationship. Novák said the state, which provides order and security, was another key plank of Christian democracy. The minister also stressed the importance of equality between men and women, explaining that while this did not mean they should be considered the same, they should have equal opportunities while respecting their differences. Novák insisted that

many European Christian democratic parties had let their traditional values fall by the wayside and had given into left-liberal media pressure.

She also insisted that the European People's Party had shifted to the left. Novák added that this is the reason why Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Italian politician Matteo Salvini and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki were in the process of forming a new alliance. Novák said liberals of today refused to accept any opinions at variance to their own, and they stigmatised and excluded anyone who did not think exactly the same as them.

NÉMETH: EUROPE'S FUNDAMENTAL VALUE LIES IN NATL MINORITIES

Europe's fundamental value lies in its "indigenous national minorities", Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, said. The Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is of key importance when it comes to safeguarding minority rights, Németh told MTI by phone on the sidelines of a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg. National minorities make up a special group in Europe and their members deserve special treatment, Németh said, stressing that national minorities should not be conflated with members of other minority groups. Németh said Elvira Kovács, an ethnic Hungarian

politician from Serbia's Vojvodina region, had presented to the assembly a comprehensive report on minorities aimed at monitoring compliance with the CoE's minority protection convention more effectively. The document contains specific recommendations and proposes the creation of an online platform for reporting violations of minority rights. Kovács's report also covers the situation of minorities in Ukraine and expresses concern over the rise of nationalism in the country, he said.

Speaking about her report, Kovács told MTI that the preservation of Europe's cultural diversity was a guarantee of peace and stability on the continent. Concerning the situation in Ukraine, she said it was "unacceptable" to curb minority rights on the pretext of needing to improve public proficiency in the national language.

Hajnalka Juhász, an MP of Hungary's co-ruling Christian Democrats, said in her address to the assembly that it was "regrettable" that the European Union "doesn't devote enough attention" to the issue of protecting minorities. The protection of minority rights should not be seen as a threat to national security, she said.

SOCIALISTS SUBMIT BILL ON MAKING MINIMUM WAGE TAX-EXEMPT

The opposition Socialist Party said it has submitted a bill to parliament that would make the minimum wage tax-exempt and reduce the income tax

for low earners. Under the proposal, minimum wage earners would be eligible for a tax credit equal to the 15% personal income tax, Imre Komjáthi, the party's deputy leader, said on Facebook. The tax credit would decrease for each higher wage bracket up to the median monthly wage of 321,000 forints (EUR 888) before tax, he said. The measures would help some 2.3 million people earning less than the median wage, Komjáthi said. He said Hungary had the lowest minimum wage of the Visegrad Group countries, adding that the Hungarian minimum wage also had several taxes totalling over 30% levied on it. Komjáthi said the push to make the minimum wage tax-exempt would be a key element of his party's upcoming opposition primary campaign.

PRO-GOVT GROUP PROPOSES MAKING JUNE 19 NATIONAL HOLIDAY

June 19, the anniversary of the withdrawal of the last Soviet troops from Hungary in 1991, should be declared a national holiday, according to the pro-government Civic Union Forum (CÖF) and associated CÖKA foundation. Member of CÖF's board of trustees Tamás Fricz told a

press conference on Tuesday that the significance of June 19 was comparable to the anniversaries of the 1848 war of independence and the anti-Soviet revolt of 1956.

V4 FOREIGN MINISTERS EXPRESS SOLIDARITY WITH CZECH REPUBLIC IN RIFT WITH RUSSIA

The foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group expressed their solidarity with the Czech Republic, which has recently expelled 18 Russian diplomats over suspicions of espionage, in a statement released late on Monday. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said earlier the Russian diplomats were suspected of having had a hand in explosions in an ammunition warehouse in Vrbeice, in southeast Czechia, in 2014. In retaliation, Russia expelled 20 Czech diplomats. The foreign ministers of Hungary, Poland and Slovakia said in the statement published on the Polish foreign ministry's website that they "condemn all activities aimed at threatening security of sovereign states and its citizens". "We stand ready to further strengthen our resilience against subversive actions at both national level and together with our NATO allies and within EU. The Foreign

Ministers of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary express solidarity with recent steps taken by our close partner, ally and neighbor, Czechia," the statement said.

HUNGARIAN CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES SEND CONTAINERS TO EARTHQUAKE-HIT C CROATIA

Hungarian construction companies have funded a delivery of 120 containers to central Croatia, which was hit by an earthquake last December. The containers are equipped to serve over 200 people as their homes and will be sent to the towns of Petrinja, Sisak and Glina, said László Lehel, head of the Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA), which organised the delivery of the containers. The value of the donation came to one million euros. The bill was footed by 24 construction companies, at the initiative of the Mészáros Group. Croatian Deputy Prime Minister Tomo Medved thanked Hungary and Hungarian companies for the aid, and noted Hungary's earlier contributions to the reconstruction of a school and a church in the region.