

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Szilárd Koszticsák

Ferencváros wins the Hungarian soccer championship for the 32nd time

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Events marking Earth Day

TOP STORY

FM: 1.5M VACCINES EXPECTED FROM RUSSIA, CHINA

Some 1.48 million doses of vaccine are scheduled to arrive in Hungary from Russia and China in the next ten days, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said.

After consultations with WHO Europe Regional Director Hans Kluge, Szijjártó told a joint press conference that 600,000 doses of vaccine are scheduled to arrive from China on Saturday, which will be the largest shipment since the start of the pandemic. Early next week, some 280,000 doses of the second-component Sputnik vaccine are scheduled to arrive from Russia, he added. In the second half of next week, an additional 400,000 doses of the Chinese vaccine will arrive, in addition to a shipment of 100,000 doses bought for Georgia, he said. Additionally, 200,000 first-component Sputnik vaccine is also scheduled to arrive in the second half of next week, he said. Hungary will have received 2.1 million Chinese jabs by the end of April, some 600,000 doses more than originally contracted, he said. This will help address the situation resulting from the withdrawal of a Western supplier, he added. Deliveries of the one-dose Janssen vaccine were halted due to concerns regarding blood clotting, a rare but dangerous side-effect.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ IN TALKS WITH WHO REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó met Hans Kluge, the World Health Organization’s regional director for Europe. Szijjártó told a press conference after the talks that Hungary had been regularly consulting with the WHO during the anti-pandemic efforts and acted in line with the organisation’s standards. He added that Hungary was at the front of the European list in terms of the percentage of vaccinated population. He expressed thanks to health workers and everyone involved in the logistics of vaccine supplies and added that sufficient volumes were available to continue the vaccination drive. Szijjártó also thanked the WHO for “staying fair and correct throughout the period and not rising to politically motivated attempts to provoke sentiments, handling vaccines as the most important means to save lives, with the only concern kept in mind that they are safe and effective”. “Hungary has made its decisions in the same spirit,” he added.

Kluge welcomed Hungary’s measures and its “exemplary” vaccination drive. He said the government’s measures were designed to protect both individuals and businesses. Vaccination is considered a life-saving measure in Hungary and it “surpasses geo-political interests”, he said. He noted that Hungary’s

vaccination rate was well above the European average and added that by the end of May all registered Hungarians could be inoculated.

V4 PARLT SPEAKERS ADDRESS PANDEMIC, DIGITAL SECURITY AT VIDEO CONFERENCE

The parliamentary speakers of the Visegrad Group countries discussed the fight against the coronavirus pandemic as well as digital and information security, among other issues in a video call. Elżbieta Witek, speaker of the Polish Sejm, Tomasz Grodzki, head of the Polish Senate, Radek Vondráček, speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, Miloš Vystrčil, head of the Czech Senate, Boris Kollár, speaker of the Slovak National Council, and László Kövér, speaker of the Hungarian parliament, were in agreement that learning from the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic could help countries be better prepared to deal with any potential future pandemics, the press chief of Hungary’s parliament said. Kövér told his counterparts that Hungary’s vaccination rate was high compared with the European Union average, with more than 33% of the country’s population having received at least one vaccine dose. Hungary has also done a good job mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic, he said. The government has earmarked 16.5 billion euros towards managing the economic crisis caused by the

pandemic, which is mainly being used to save jobs, he added. “We trust that Hungary will emerge from the crisis caused by the pandemic with an advantage,” Kövér said. Concerning attacks against digital infrastructures and phishing attacks, Kövér said Europe had an interest in tackling the problem together. Kövér underscored the need for agreements that could constrain states and private entities whose powers rival those of states, which he said posed a security threat. The speakers also adopted a resolution declaring their support of a joint statement issued by the V4 foreign ministers earlier this week in which they stated their solidarity with the Czech Republic, which has recently expelled 18 Russian diplomats over suspicions of espionage.

C EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE MINISTERS HOLD TALKS ON EU FARM STRATEGY

Agriculture ministers of the Visegrad Group held a videoconference with their counterparts in Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia on the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy and its Farm to Fork strategy. Sándor Farkas, a state secretary of the Hungarian agriculture ministry, told the meeting that Hungary supported the sector’s contribution to the fight against climate change and preserving biodiversity. He added, at the same time, that those

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objectives should be achieved by setting realistic, achievable goals. Farkas said the EU's strategies were developed without conducting impact studies on their possible effects. Regarding the Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food production, Farkas said digitalisation could play an important role in increasing effectiveness and reducing food waste. Farkas said Hungary was committed to reducing the use of pesticides, but also called for "moderation" in the drastic reduction of their use to avoid the spread of harmful invasive species as well as "black technologies".

HUNGARY RECORDS 207 COVID FATALITIES, 2,527 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 207 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 2,527 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday. So far 3,363,596 people have received a first jab, while 1,425,124 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections stands at 266,823, while hospitals are caring for 8,097 Covid patients, 925 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 42,068 people in official quarantine, while 5,179,517 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 757,360 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 25,787. Fully 464,750 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.

GOVT GRANTS SUPPORT HEALTH-CARE SUPPLY PRODUCTION CAPACITY

Three companies have completed a combined 2.5 billion forints' (EUR 7m) worth of investments supported by government grant money earmarked for projects to boost Hungary's self-sufficiency in the production of health-care supplies, the finance minister said. F-Team spent 825 million forints on an automated production line for disinfectant at its base in Jásztelek, in eastern Hungary. The investment was supported with 782 million forints in grant money, Mihály Varga said on Facebook. Karsai Alba invested close to 1.2 billion forints in capacity to make masks and packaging for immune system fortifying vitamins, supported with 1.1 billion forints, at its plant in Székesfehérvár, in western Hungary. Prement spent 520 million forints on capacity to 3D print medical equipment at its factory in Győr, in north-western Hungary. It was matched with 489 million forints in grant money. Varga noted that investments supported in the framework of the scheme, launched during the early phase of the pandemic, have made Hungary self-sufficient in surgical mask production.

PÁRBEZÉD WANTS INCREASED ORPHAN SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN OF COVID VICTIMS

Opposition Párbeszéd has submitted a draft resolution to parliament on increasing orphan support for children whose parents have died from Covid-19. The party is proposing that orphan support should be increased to at least 100,000 forints (EUR 277) retroactively from Jan. 1 for children who lost a working age parent to coronavirus, Bence Tordai, the party's deputy group leader, said. The party is also proposing a one-off "reverence contribution" of 500,000 forints for families who have lost someone to Covid-19, he said. Tordai also said that the jobseeker's allowance should be doubled and the period of eligibility for it should be extended to nine months. He also called on the government to "repeal measures that have made access to health care stricter" and to introduce a so-called crisis managing basic income.

JUSTICE MINISTER: RULE OF LAW DEBATE SHOULD NOT CREATE DIVISION WITHIN EU

The "hypocritical" debate about the rule of law should not serve to create divisions between European Union member states at a time when they are busy fighting against the coronavirus epidemic, Justice Minister Judit Varga

said in an interview with daily Magyar Nemzet. "The current period should be dedicated to building alliances, so that common efforts enable us to leave behind the coronavirus," Varga said after a video meeting of EU justice ministers. The ministers assessed the rule of law in Germany, France, Spain, Ireland and Greece. Varga said that even though such "big shot" states had been under review, "this type of dialogue on the rule of law is hypocritical and primarily serves to enable the European Commission to pressurise member states with views that deviate from the mainstream". She added that EU treaties do not authorise the EC to assess the rule of law in member states and it is the EU Court of Justice that should rule over such debates. Additionally, neither Hungary nor Poland have approved the launch of a debate on the rule of law in the General Affairs Council, she said. Commenting on the upcoming group of rule of law reports scheduled for July, she said that based on her experiences so far, these reports tend to rely on the opinions of NGOs that "share a common backing". Varga also said that an Article 7 procedure launched against Hungary was a political witch hunt that was "obviously not meeting the expectations that had been attached to it".

HUNGARY'S GREEN BOND WINS CBI AWARD

Climate Bonds Initiative, a non-profit organisation appraising sustainable financial solutions, has awarded Hungary for its green bond, first issued last year, the finance ministry said. At the virtual award ceremony, Hungary was recognised as a sovereign green market pioneer, the statement said. The award shows an appreciation for Hungary's efforts to curb climate change, the statement said. The bonds were issued in euros in June 2020 for a 15-year term, to be used exclusively for green investment, the ministry cited state secretary Gábor Gion, the head of the steering committee supervising the Hungarian Green Bond Programme, as saying. The programme is a "watershed" measure in the fight against climate change and the loss of biodiversity, Gion said.

RADICALS PROPOSE SEIZING ILLEGAL ENTRANTS' ASSETS

The extra-parliamentary Mi Hazánk party has suggested that Hungary's authorities should have the power

to seize cash carried by migrants entering the country illegally. Party leader László Toroczkai, who is mayor of Ásotthalom, near the Hungary-Serbia border, told a press conference that the migrants recently apprehended were "nearly all young, strong men with large sums in their pockets". He added that "migrants pay people smugglers many thousands of euros to help them to Austria" and "people smuggling has become one of the most profitable businesses". Toroczkai also insisted that "migrants owe the Hungarian state this much" because "Hungarian taxpayers have spent a lot of money on protecting the country's southern borders". He argued that if Hungarian authorities could seize their money, migrants "would probably choose other routes or they would not come at all". The party leader also called on the government to "follow the example of Denmark" and "expel all asylum seekers from the country". Toroczkai said that the refugee status should only be granted in individual cases because "there is no war in neighbouring countries" and migrants from other countries "have already passed a safe country".