

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tibor Illyés

WWII photographs on show in windows of Budapest Museum of Military History

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

NBH presser on Commercial Real Estate Market Report

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: OUTDOOR VENUES TO OPEN FROM SAT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in a radio interview on Friday announced that 3.5 million people have been vaccinated in Hungary, paving the way for outdoor venues to open from Saturday morning.

Orbán told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió that by the middle of next week around four million shots will have been administered, and a wide range of services will be available for people with vaccine certificates.

Venues open to people with certificates will include theatres, cinemas, museums, dance and music venues, circuses, gyms, zoos, spas and swimming pools, sports venues and adventure parks, the prime minister said. It will also be possible to use the indoor areas of hotels and restaurants, he added.

The country, he said, will be opened up gradually. Meanwhile, a sufficient amount of Pfizer jabs will be allocated for 16-18 year-olds, the prime minister said. Currently, 12-16 year-olds are not eligible to be vaccinated in Hungary, and further testing must be carried out for that age group, Orbán added.

Some regulations need to be adjusted: since terraces will be allowed to stay open until 9.30pm from Saturday, the night-time curfew will start at 11pm, the prime minister told public radio.

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ORBÁN: REOPENING OF SCHOOLS WENT SMOOTHER THAN EXPECTED

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said the reopening of schools went smoother than expected earlier this week, with well above 50% of children returning to kindergartens and schools. The prime minister told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio that the efficacy of vaccines was still under debate, but experience suggested that after receiving the first shot, only around 1% of people fall ill. This means that this group can be considered to be essentially protected, he added. Vaccination continues to be vital, he said, adding that more than half of the adult population will be protected by the middle of next week. He said a new online surface is now available where it is possible to reserve a time for vaccination.

Orbán said anti-vaxxers had “a strong voice”, insisting that “the whole of the opposition” belongs to them. Yet, all vaccines are equally effective, he added. A large volume of vaccines are scheduled to arrive in the upcoming days, so most probably everyone who has registered will have been vaccinated by mid-May, he said. Once that happens, vaccines will be offered to any Hungarian from any part of the world who travels to Hungary, he added.

Commenting on the extension of the state of special legal order, he said

the pandemic was not over yet and the country must maintain operability during parliament’s summer recess, with the government having to make all the requisite decisions. Orbán also said the number of deaths was not a political matter and he asked everyone to “show more respect” when talking about fatalities. The European Union offers an information website where the number of current deaths can be compared with the pre-Covid period. Hungary belongs to the better-performing countries, according to this website, he said. In Hungarian statistics, however, the number of people who died as a result of Covid is not separated from the number of people who died while having Covid, he added.

The prime minister said vaccines were bedeviled by business and geopolitical interests, and in Europe in particular, politics had overtaken humanitarian considerations. He added that the reason why Hungary’s vaccination programme was successful because no one could “tell the country what to do”.

Orbán said decisions in Hungary were taken solely according to the national interest. Meanwhile, the planned amendment to the 2021 budget and the 2022 budget are all about relaunching the economy, he said, noting the roll-out of a massive housing renovation scheme and the allocation of hundreds of billions of forints to businesses, among other government support measures. Referring to talks in Brussels later on

Friday, Orbán said financial issues were already settled, so he preferred to focus on issues connected with the future of the European Union. Topics for discussion include how the bloc should prepare for a similar pandemic, lessons learned, and how relations with the new US administration are developing, he said.

The prime minister also paid tribute to Hungary’s police, saying that those who keep order “defend our freedom” in a democracy. Order, he said, had been maintained, “and this is thanks to the police”.

JUSTICE MINISTER SLAMS ‘WESTERN DOUBLE STANDARDS’

Justice Minister Judit Varga slammed “hypocritical Western double standards” on Facebook on Thursday. Varga said in her English-language post entitled “Double standards from Berlin” that during a panel discussion on Wednesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and leader of the European People’s Party in the European Parliament, Manfred Weber, had criticised countries that had authorised Eastern vaccines. She said these countries had done so due to the “slow and obscure verification process of the European Medicines Agency”.

Even if we ignore the fact that these vaccines, which have been tested by the best Hungarian experts, are just as effective and safe as their Western counterparts, we must still not forget that in March, Mrs. Merkel herself

said that if there will be no EU-level procurement of Sputnik vaccine, Germany “will have to take the path alone.” “What’s going on? Hungary cannot take its own path, only Germany?”

Varga also said that “the really big twist in the story is that today, CDU-member Saxon Minister President Michael Kretschmer paid a visit to Russia and announced that Germany plans to buy 30 million doses of Sputnik V vaccine this summer.” At the same time, more than a third of the Hungarian population has received at least the first dose of the coronavirus vaccine, which would not have been possible “if we had waited for Brussels”, she said. “The Hungarian vaccine procurement’s success is confirmed by the fact that more and more Member States, including Germany, are opening up to vaccines produced on the Eastern side of the world,” she added.

KARÁCSONY: METROPOLITAN COMPANIES TO GIVE DAY OFF TO EMPLOYEES GETTING JOB

Employees of metropolitan companies who receive a vaccine shot will get a day off, Gergely Karácsony, Budapest’s mayor, said. In a Facebook post, Karácsony noted that he had asked company directors in Budapest to provide a day off as a way of motivating employees to get the jab. He noted that a poster campaign in Budapest

has been ongoing since February to encourage residents to register for vaccination. Also, the metropolitan council has repeatedly offered the government its help, he said, adding that “now is the time to cooperate.” “What’s most important is that as many people as possible get inoculated as soon as possible,” he said. The mayor also said that people working or living in a facility maintained by the capital will receive a coronavirus test within the next few days, adding that the Budapest administration was committed to helping anyone vulnerable to the virus. In his Facebook post, Karácsony encouraged people to register for vaccination. “That’s the only way we can return to our old way of living”.

HUNGARY RECORDS 207 FATALITIES, 3,427 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 207 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 3,427 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday. So far 3,508,846 people have received a first jab, while 1,490,478 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections stands at 264,039, while hospitals are treating 7,177 Covid patients, 844 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 42,182 people in official quarantine, while 5,233,530 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 764,394 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to

26,208. Fully 474,147 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.

OPPOSITION ACCUSES GOVT OF ‘TURNING STATE ASSETS INTO PRIVATE FORTUNES’

Hungary’s opposition parties have signed a statement protesting against what they called the government’s “steps to preserve the regime and channel public funds and taxpayer money into [ruling party] Fidesz cadres’ pockets”. “At the same time, we also vigorously protest all decisions that go against the interests of the Hungarian people,” the statement signed by the Democratic Coalition, Jobbik, LMP, Momentum, the Socialists and Párbeszéd said. The statement said the Orbán government “is about to enshrine into law the turning of public funds into private fortunes and the theft of public monies.” The opposition insisted that a package of bills submitted to parliament by Andrea Mager, the minister responsible for managing state assets, proposed setting up a company to “manage residual assets”, with the sole purpose of “removing non-strategic assets from the public domain swiftly, cheaply and efficiently”.

“Orbán et al are carrying on with the privatisation wave they started during the second wave of the pandemic,

which already involves hundreds of billions of forints -- they are ready to take everything they can move," the statement said.

Referring to next year's elections, the parties pledged to "take back the country from the ruling elite ... restore democracy, the rule of law and the independent judiciary, and give public assets back to Hungarians!"

CYBER SECURITY CENTRE ISSUES WARNING OVER BLACKMAILING EMAILS

The Hungarian cyber security centre NKI has renewed its warning over masses of blackmailing emails sent to Hungarian state offices, local municipalities, public institutions and private individuals. NKI said the emails inform the recipient that his or her computer has been infected by a trojan which has copied their data, including video recordings of their activities while visiting adult websites. The sender of the email threatens the recipient with forwarding the compromising recordings to friends or publishing them on public media unless payment is transferred. The

centre has advised all recipients of such emails to mark them as scam and neglect the threats.

MINISTRY: 'HORROR CARAVANS' FINED OVER HUF 15 M TO IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY

The operators of dangerous semi-trailers hauling western European used cars to the East, also dubbed "horror caravans", have been fined a total of 15.5 million forints for violating road safety regulations, the Innovation and Technology Ministry said. The transport authority has been given improved powers since January 31 to act against the dangerous vehicles, the ministry said in a statement.

Under the regulations extended to include additional vehicle categories, a fine of up to 500,000 forints (EUR 1,400) can be imposed on trailers used above their capacity or inadequately securing their cargo. Police and the transport authority can also seize their licence, it added.

State secretary for transport policy László Mosóczy said in the statement that in the recent period, some

21 fines were issued as a result of excess load and 17 fines for other irregularities, including inadequate documentation.

MASS MEDICAL VENTILATOR PROTOTYPE FINISHED AT ÓBUDA UNIVERSITY

The development of a prototype mass medical ventilator has been completed at Óbuda University. The machine could potentially save the lives of many critically ill Covid patients. The university said in a statement that the mobile mass ventilator can also be used outside of a hospital setting and it can be adjusted to fit individual needs. The project dubbed MassVentil was launched by the university last year with the involvement of engineers, medical doctors, physicists and mathematicians. The prototype fits into an easily transportable container and adds new functions to individual ventilators. It enables the simultaneous monitoring of several patients while protecting health-care staff by automatically filtering the air exhaled by the patients, the statement said.