

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Attila Balázs

A restaurant terrace reopened on Saturday with 3.5m Hungarians vaccinated for Covid-19

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Plenary session of parliament

TOP STORY

HUNGARY AMONG FIRST TO SUBMIT RECOVERY PLAN

Hungary will be among the first countries of the European Union to submit their post-pandemic recovery plans to the European Commission, the head of the Prime Minister's Office told MTI.

Gergely Gulyás said that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had met Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the commission, to discuss issues around the future of the EU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, among other topics. Under the RRF, Hungary should get grants totalling 2,511 billion forints (EUR 6.9bn), and access to loans of a combined 3,384 billion forints, he added. Gulyás said that Hungary's preparations for its recovery plan were in an advanced stage and the plan would be submitted early. He quoted Orbán as saying that the plan was targeting RRF grants rather than loans. He said that the loans were available until the end of 2023, and the government would consider that option for certain projects if necessary, but added that the government wanted to restart the economy with the lowest possible foreign debt ratio. Citing information from von der Leyen, Gulyás said that the commission would evaluate reconstruction plans in two months' time, and pass an early decision concerning the applications.

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GULYÁS: HUNGARY TO USE EU RECOVERY FUND TO BOOST HEALTH-CARE DEVELOPMENT

Hungary will spend the lion's share of the European Union's coronavirus recovery fund on developments in health care, Gergely Gulyás, the prime minister's chief of staff, told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió. Gulyás noted that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had talks with European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen on Friday. The discussion touched on Hungary's plans regarding the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, among other topics, he said. Von der Leyen "has a clear picture of the situation", and knows that Hungary will use the funds in a transparent manner, he said.

The government will use the funding to cover its "new health-care system eliminating gratuity payments", and to raise the quality of health-care nationwide, he said. Projects funded with a view to reducing carbon emissions will include the modernisation of track-based transport, the boosting of higher education and the transition to circular economy, he said. Meanwhile, "Hungary would not want the recovery plan to be sacrificed to the [Budapest] mayor's prime ministerial ambitions," Gulyás said. The government is ready to engage with all constructive proposals if there is hope for a compromise with the municipality, he added. However, if the city council

takes its objections to the international stage, that will be seen as a sign that they want to "voice their dissent for dissent's sake" rather than reaching for compromise, Gulyás said.

On another topic, Orbán proposed at the talks that the EU should adopt strategies on handling its relations with Russia and China, Gulyás said. Cooperation with Russia should be along clear principles, Orbán said, adding, at the same time, that economic cooperation is indispensable, "if for nothing else, for the dearth of diverse energy resources", he said.

Regarding the ongoing rule of law procedure against Hungary, Gulyás said the "issue was barely touched on". "Hungary is a model democracy, we see the rule of law issue as important, but reject attempts to use it as a disguise for political attacks" against anti-migration countries standing up for traditional European values, he said. On criticism of the vaccination certificates voiced by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), Gulyás said Hungary's constitution allows endowing certificate holders with special rights if the decision is not arbitrary. Hungary will link the use of certain services to vaccination certificates to protect the health of its citizens, as do a number of EU countries, he said.

HUNGARY RECORDS 205 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, 2,328 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 205 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past

24 hours, while 2,328 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Sunday. So far 3,596,129 people have received a first jab, while 1,621,420 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections stands at 260,686, while hospitals are treating 6,284 Covid patients, 790 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 37,497 people in official quarantine, while 5,280,600 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 769,518 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 26,625. Fully 482,207 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.

KÁSLER VISITS HOSPITALS IN SÁRVÁR, SZOMBATHELY

Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler said he could "feel for the first time in a long time that doctors and nurses are relieved and very hopeful", after visiting two hospitals in Sárvár and Szombathely, in western Hungary. Kásler said he had visited several hospitals in Hungary over the past few weeks in order to get personal impressions about the hospital equipment and the way health-care staff are meeting the challenges during the pandemic. "I had the same impressions in Sárvár: according to the people working here, all the equipment needed is at



their disposal, and they believe that the pandemic has entered a declining phase," he said. He said the most important task of the Sárvár hospital is to perform vaccinations and to prepare to provide post-Covid care. He added that the Szombathely hospital will play a significant role in the national programme for the treatment of cardiovascular diseases.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR INCREASING SPENDING ON HEALTH, EDUCATION

"It took the coronavirus pandemic for everyone to understand that it is wrong to cut public spending on health care and education," Bertalan Tóth, co-leader of the opposition Socialists said. Tóth said his party's pre-election programme called for increasing public spending in these sectors. "Now we can see the consequences of neglecting health care for years," he said. Even after the recent increase in doctors' wages, Hungary still spends less than the EU average on health care, resulting in indebted hospitals, long waiting lists and a shortage of doctors and nurses, Tóth said.

Regarding education, Tóth said the government's reorganisation of the public education sector has resulted in a tragic decline in students' academic performance, and it deepens social disparities rather than eliminating them. Therefore, MSZP is proposing a radical transformation of health care and public and higher education, Tóth

said, calling for a caring, opportunity-creating state and a well-developed municipal system. In health care, the Socialists would improve services, drastically reduce waiting lists, employ more GPs and paediatricians and raise wages in the sector to the EU average by 2024, he said. Tóth said they would provide opportunities for further education to all talented young people, raise the compulsory school age to 18 years, reduce the number of compulsory lessons per week for teachers, and "return privatised universities to public ownership and reinstate their freedom".

SZIJJÁRTÓ: ECLIPSE PRINT TO INVEST HUF 200 M AT NE HUNGARY PLANT

Eclipse Print's investment of 200 million forints (EUR 550,000) at its printing plant in Edelény, in north-eastern Hungary, will save 64 jobs, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. The government is supporting the investment with a 100 million forint grant, the minister said. Referring to the printing company's Czech ownership, Szijjártó said he welcomed seeing increasingly close economic cooperation among central European countries in addition to their political ties. All signs point to central Europe remaining the European Union's engine of growth after the pandemic is over, he added. Whereas global investments were down 42% last year, the Hungarian government supported a record 1,436

investments, Szijjártó said. Hungary now ranks 11th in terms of exports as a percentage of GDP, he said. While global trade turnover was down 9% last year, Hungarian exports once again increased to exceed 100 billion euros, Szijjártó added.

INNOVATION MINISTER: RESEARCH COOPERATION WITH FRAUNHOFER TO BE EXPANDED

Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics discussed the possibility of expanding bilateral research cooperation with Reimund Neugebauer, the president of Germany's Fraunhofer Society, an applied research organisation. Palkovics and Neugebauer identified areas of prospective cooperation in the sectors of defence, quantum computers, artificial intelligence and food safety, the innovation and technology ministry said in a statement. They explored the possibility of including Fraunhofer in defence industry and security research activities in a bilateral project under which Germany's Rheinmetall is building a plant for making Lynx infantry fighting vehicles in Zalaegerszeg, in western Hungary, next to the ZalaZONE vehicle test track for autonomous vehicles under construction. Fraunhofer, which operates a computer science research platform with IBM near Stuttgart, could also be included as a partner in a Hungarian-German supercomputer

development project, under which a 5-petaflop supercomputer would be built at the Debrecen University, in eastern Hungary, in cooperation with a Stuttgart-based university centre by early 2022.

BUDAPEST MAN JAILED FOR KNIFING SUPPORTER OF STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENT

A Budapest man who earlier this year knifed a passenger on a bus for wearing a face mask expressing support for the students of Budapest's University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) was sentenced to six years in prison in an expedited procedure. Budapest's 20th, 21st and 23rd district court also banned the man from participating in public affairs for a period of seven years, a spokeswoman of the Budapest chief prosecutor's office said. According to the non-binding verdict, the victim was travelling on a bus on Feb. 25 wearing a face mask expressing support for the students and staff members protesting against recent changes introduced at SZFE when

she was confronted by the defendant. The defendant first got into a verbal altercation with the victim over the mask and then stabbed her in the face with an 8cm knife. He then got off at the next stop and fled the scene. In his court testimony, the defendant partially confessed to the crime and apologised to the victim, who accepted the apology. The court found the defendant guilty of violence against the member of a community, arguing that he had been motivated by his sentiments against a group represented on the victim's mask. Both the prosecution and the defence have appealed the sentence.

ATHLETE OF NATION SAROLTA MONSPART DIES

Sarolta Monspart, a Hungarian orienteering competitor, Athlete of the Nation, has died at the age of 76. Monspart was the first non-Scandinavian female runner to win the World Orienteering Championships, back in 1972. "All through her life, she emphasised the importance of sport and promoted exercise, an active lifestyle," state

secretary for sport Tünde Szabó said. "Thanks to her, hundreds of thousands took up sport and began to exercise. Her death is a great loss to Hungarian sport and the whole of Hungary," she added.

HUNGARIAN-POLISH INITIATIVE AGAINST ISTANBUL AGREEMENT GARNERS 60,000 SIGNATURES

A Hungarian-Polish initiative protesting against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention has garnered 60,000 signatures, and possibly contributed to the European Commission dragging its feet on ratifying the agreement, the head of the Polish Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture said on Sunday. Karolina Pawlowska said the initiative by Ordo Iuris and Hungary's Alapjogokért Központ should be expanded to other countries as well. The Istanbul Agreement promoting protect women's rights and gender equality, which the organisations say is designed along principles of gender ideology, was adopted by the European Parliament in January but is yet to be ratified.