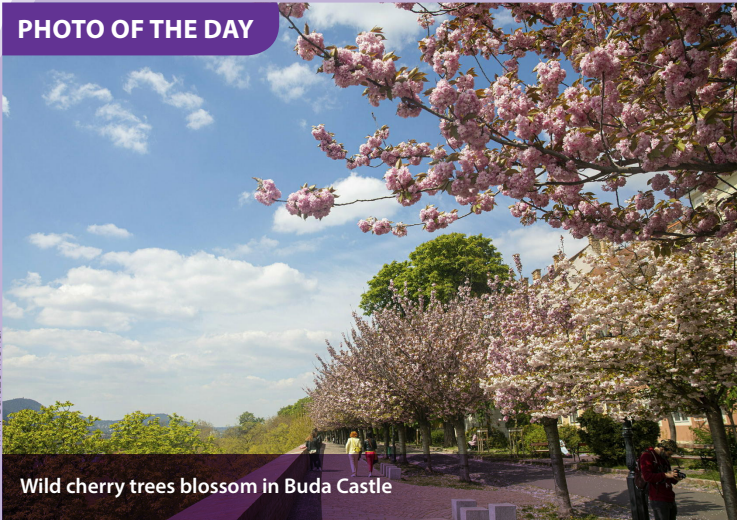


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Balázs Mohai

Wild cherry trees blossom in Buda Castle

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office employment figures for March

Plenary session of parliament

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

PART VOTES ON UNIS TRANSFER

Parliament has approved the transfer of several universities from the state to private foundations, paving the way for 70% of students to pursue their studies under the new model from this autumn.

The cardinal law submitted by Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics received 134 votes in support and 59 votes against. The law on public interest asset management foundations lists a total of 32 foundations, of which 21 will be in charge of running higher education institutions.

Tamás Schanda, a state secretary at the ITM, said in the general debate of the bill that a strategy already drafted in 2016 was being implemented. He said that a more independent and autonomous form of organisation would help universities integrate into the economy better, and, he added, their financial autonomy would be guaranteed. The universities of Szeged, Dunaújváros, Pécs, Nyíregyháza and Debrecen, the Hungarian Dance Academy, the newly formed Tokaj-Hegyalja University, the Budapest University of Economics, the University of Physical Education, Semmelweis University and Rudolf Kalman University of Óbuda will be run by foundations. Five additional foundations have been set up for additional purposes, and the Eszterházy Károly University of Eger will be transferred to the Catholic Church.

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PALKOVICS: FUDAN UNIVERSITY SITE WON'T ROB SPACE FROM STUDENT QUARTER PROJECT

The Southern City Gate project in Budapest will include plans both to build student accommodation quarter and a campus for China's Fudan University, László Palkovics, the innovation and technology minister, said. Palkovics insisted that the Fudan campus would not rob space from the student quarter. The development concept for the area had not fundamentally changed, the minister said at a ceremony awarding bidders in an international tender for designs for the area. Besides student hostels and community facilities, "associated development projects such as research institutes" were also part of the original plan, he said. Palkovics noted that the government had adopted a strategy for student hostel development worth 220 billion forints, back in 2017. The minister said that Fudan was considered the 34th best university in the world, adding that setting up a Fudan campus in Budapest would "benefit Hungary, benefit China, and benefit the community". Deputy state secretary Domonkos Schneller said that the Southern City Gate programme was aimed at revitalising brownfield sites at the northern tip of Csepel Island and adjacent areas in the 9th district, constructing the planned Galvani Bridge across the river Danube, as well as "adding a huge, green area" to the city.

GOVT SIGNS STRATEGIC DEAL WITH FUDAN UNIVERSITY

Hungary's Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics and Xu Ningsheng, the president of China's Fudan University, have signed a strategic agreement to facilitate preparations for setting up Fudan Hungary University. The document, signed in an online ceremony on Tuesday, outlines the main goals, training directions and locations of Fudan's new campus in Budapest, the ministry said in a statement. Signatories to the agreement confirmed that the campus project was in harmony with Budapest's municipal scheme of building a hostel complex for students, the statement said, adding that there was "no contradiction" between the two projects. According to the statement, Fudan could "contribute to improving Hungarian higher education through a healthy competition between universities and involving renowned foreign professors". The new campus could ensure "open and modern courses with a continuously widening spectrum to an increasing number of students". Fudan Hungary will have faculties of economy, arts and social studies, science, engineering and medicine employing 500 teachers and offering courses to some 6,000-8,000 students, the statement said. The university will promote joint research and educational projects with other European universities, it added. Fudan

is the world's 34th best university according to QS World University Ranking. Its central campus in Shanghai has 4,500 teachers and over 30,000 students. The new facility in Budapest will be the university's first foreign campus.

OPPOSITION PLEDGES TO PUT UNIVERSITIES UNDER STATE CONTROL IN 2022

The opposition parties have pledged that once in power after the 2022 elections, they would put Hungary's universities under state control again. Párbeszéd, Jobbik, the Socialists, the Democratic Coalition (DK), LMP and Momentum unanimously declared that the "stolen assets" would be returned to the nation. Earlier today, parliament approved the transfer of several universities from the state to private foundations.

Sándor Burány, deputy group leader of Párbeszéd, said that ruling Fidesz "seems to be fearing failure" in next year's elections and tries to gain control over as much public assets as possible.

Jobbik deputy leader György Szilágyi accused pro-government lawmakers of squandering public assets. He warned the board members of the foundations in question to take due care of the properties put under their control as "those causing damage to the nation and stealing our money" would be prosecuted after 2022.

Socialist lawmaker László Szakács said that while the country is focussing

on fighting the pandemic, Viktor Orbán's government transfers about one thousand billion forints worth of public assets to foundations led by "Fidesz soldiers". He noted that the foundations' board members could not be replaced or recalled.

DK deputy group leader Gergely Arató said universities would be privatised with a view to giving the private foundations access to the huge EU funds earmarked for developing higher education, and then enabling them to "distribute the money among cronies".

LMP group leader László Lóránt Keresztes said the law would put the universities' assets under political control. He noted that Europe's best universities are generally controlled by the state. He added that the opposition parties, once in power, would restore the autonomy of universities. Momentum board member Miklós Hajnal said "Orbán is preparing for a defeat but he is a bad loser because he would like to finance his defeat from taxpayer money." He accused the prime minister of seeking to build "an alternative state" and retain control over higher education, "landed property, castles and stocks", he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: SWEDISH-HUNGARIAN ECONOMIC, DEFENCE COOPERATION THRIVING

Hungarian-Swedish cooperation has been especially successful in the economy and defence sectors,

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, after talks with his Swedish counterpart Ann Linde. As both countries are members of the European Union and Sweden developed close cooperation with NATO, "it is not an exaggeration to call that country an ally of Hungary," he said. Regarding defence cooperation, Szijjártó noted that Hungary was using Gripen aircraft for its own air defence and to aid the Baltic states and Slovenia. Meanwhile, 23 Swedish troops are serving in an international cargo unit in Hungary, he added. Linde's visit is the first by a Swedish foreign minister to Hungary in nine years, Szijjártó noted. Bilateral talks are especially important since the two governments see certain issues differently, he said. Sweden is currently giving the presidency of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and Hungary will take over that of the Council of Europe (CoE) next month, Szijjártó said. The two positions will be especially important "at a time when tensions are growing between the East and the West," he said. The Hungarian CoE presidency will focus on the protection of national minorities, he said. Hungary supports Ukraine's territorial integrity but will not accept infringements to Hungarian minorities' rights during the fights in the eastern parts of the country, he said, and expressed hope that the OSCE will strive to ensure international rights.

Linde underlined the importance of open dialogue which enabled the two politicians to discuss issues

such as the rule of law, and the state of human rights and gender policy in Hungary. She noted the 100th anniversary of Hungarian-Swedish diplomatic relations last year. Linde praised strong business and defence ties between the two countries. She said that both the OSCE and the CoE were "vital" in preserving Europe's security and welfare, adding that the Treaty on Open Skies, which enables the joint unarmed aerial surveillance of its members, should remain in force. Linde said that the talks had also touched on issues regarding migration, climate change and the EU's enlargement policy. Linde is scheduled to meet representatives of civil organisations later in the day. "It is no secret" that the Swedish government sees certain issues differently from Hungary's, she said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: ERICSSON IN HUF 3 BN EXPANSION OF R&D HUB

Ericsson Magyarország is implementing a 3 billion forint (EUR 8.3m) expansion of its R&D hub in Budapest using a 600 million forint non-refundable government grant. The Swedish telecoms giant's development involving cloud-based multimedia systems will create 200 jobs, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, told a press conference. As a result, Hungarian engineers and IT experts will leave their mark on the global development of the IT and telecoms industry, he

added. Ericsson has been present at every first step taken in the history of Hungarian telecommunications, Szijjártó said. One of the company's globally important R&D hubs is in Budapest, employing over 2,000 people, he added. He also noted that Ericsson already operates 85 5G networks around the world and will soon start the initial phases of 6G network development. Some 80% of the company's revenues result from exported services, which shows that developments made in Budapest are internationally competitive, he added. Hungary-Sweden bilateral trade increased by 32% in the first quarter of this year, with over 700 million euros worth of Swedish capital invested in Hungary, he said, adding that the strategic and structural transformation of Hungary's higher education was under way, and some 1,500 billion forints will be spent on university development. Government spending on R&D is increasing an annual 25% this year, he added.

NÉMETH: VACCINATION, BORDERS 'NOT POLITICAL ISSUES'

Vaccinations and border reopenings are issues for epidemiologists to decide and are not political questions, Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, said in an interview published by Russian daily Izvestia. Németh said Hungary could not have conducted a successful drive without Russian and Chinese vaccines.

"Vaccination cannot be considered an ideological issue," he said. "Any politician looking at it geopolitically exposes their compatriots to a great risk." Answering a question concerning Hungary-Russia ties, Németh said Hungary, a country situated between Germany and Russia, "knows that it had better be on good terms with both", adding that it was "important that both those countries should be interested in a prosperous [central European] region". "It follows that our policies are focused on cooperation, primarily in commerce, but also in such areas as culture," he said. "The EU has a different approach to Russia, rooted in the misbelief that the EU has grown to be a global player," he said, also slamming "certain politicians" who "maintain a campaign against Russia to promote their own domestic goals." Answering a question about energy, Németh said Russia "has been a reliable gas supplier", while "we have had excellent experiences in nuclear energy, too". He insisted that Paks, in central Hungary, will see "a modern, Russian reactor" built, adding that "nuclear energy is a clean and modern source of electricity" despite its loss of popularity in some western European countries.

HUNGARY RECORDS 183 FATALITIES, 1,253 NEW INFECTIONS

Fully 183 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,253 new infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.

hu said on Tuesday. So far 3,679,730 people have received a first jab, while 1,711,723 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections stands at 254,103, while hospitals are treating 6,360 Covid patients, 753 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 34,785 people in official quarantine, while 5,308,624 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 772,707 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 26,984. Fully 491,620 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.

SOCIALIST MEP: ORBÁN SEEKING TO 'BLACKMAIL' EU

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is "again trying to blackmail the European Union while holding Hungary to ransom", Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi said. Ujhelyi quoted Orbán as suggesting earlier that if the EU insisted on applying the rule of law mechanism and controlling details of Hungary's using recovery funds from the community, the Hungarian parliament could fail to pass legislation under which the country would grant its approval to other members' obtaining community loans. He noted that the bill had been tabled in parliament on April 8 and the assembly discussed the proposal, but a final vote was pending. "The government has thus adopted a position to blackmail

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the EU," Ujhelyi said. He added that it was "no coincidence" that "according to reports the government would not apply for the full funding of 5,800 billion forints", a combination of a grant and the loan, just the grant part totalling 2,500 billion forints.

GOVT MULLING BOOSTING PENSIONS MID-YEAR DUE TO PANDEMIC

The government is considering bumping up pensions in the middle of the year in light of the situation caused by the pandemic, a finance ministry official has said. Inflation is now 3.6% instead of the planned 3%, so a supplementary increase of 0.6% may appear in the budget law amendment, András Tállai, parliamentary state secretary, told the daily Magyar Nemzet. The hike would cost the budget 26 billion forints (EUR 71.5m). Another hike may be introduced in November, depending on the course of inflation,

Tállai added. The extra money in retirees' pockets would amount to 10,000 forints a year on average. He noted that pensions rose by 3% at the start of the year and the phased revival of the 13-month pension is under way.

LMP: TODAY 'DARK DAY' IN POST-1990 HUNGARIAN POLITICS

The opposition LMP party has branded Tuesday -- the day the government is asking lawmakers to approve a bill seeking to transfer various state assets to private foundations -- as a "dark day" in post-1989/90 Hungarian politics. László Lóránt Keresztes, LMP's group leader, noted MPs are scheduled to vote to "outsource" about 1,000 billion forints (EUR 2.75bn) in public assets and to bring "almost all" of Hungarian higher education under political control via foundations that, he said the ruling Fidesz party planned to control. The LMP politician

also slammed a move to import "a Chinese Communist Party university" to Hungary, putting Hungary even further into China's debt. "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is ... proud to make decisions contrary to Hungarian national interests," he added. Some of Europe's best universities are state-maintained, Keresztes said, adding that placing Hungarian institutions under private foundations would harm their autonomy. Hungary's opposition parties, he said, agreed on restoring universities and outsourced public property restored to the state should they win the 2022 general election.

CBANK LEAVES BASE RATE ON HOLD AT 0.60%

Hungarian rate-setters decided to keep the base rate on hold at 0.60% in a regular meeting. The Monetary Council also left the rate corridor unchanged, the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) said.