

PHOTO OF THE DAY



A steam engine at the Budapest Transport Museum's exhibition

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU justice ministers meet in Slovenia

V4 house speakers meet in Hungary

Orbán gives interview to Kossuth Rádió

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

HUNGARY 'AMONG EUROPE'S SAFEST COUNTRIES'

Hungary continues to be one of the safest countries in Europe in terms of Covid-19, the head of the Prime Minister's Office has said.

Gergely Gulyás said that having evaluated the coronavirus situation in Hungary relative to the rest of Europe, the government had concluded that the situation in Hungary "continues to be the best". Hungary has retained second place in Europe in terms of the ratio of fully inoculated residents, while the country has sufficient reserves of coronavirus vaccines, he said, adding that "we are in the position to inoculate anybody at any time". "Those who register today may get any of their preferred vaccine in two days' time." The government will take steps to further increase Hungary's vaccination rate in the coming weeks, Gulyás said. "In many European countries there are clear signs that a fourth wave has begun, and he warned Hungarians against making trips abroad unless fully vaccinated. The government has discussed issues around a possible third coronavirus jab, mandatory vaccination, as well as increasing the vaccination rate of the elderly and of the 12-16 age group, Gulyás said, adding that the Delta variant may affect the elderly most acutely, so the over-60s must be vaccinated.

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GULYÁS: JABS MAY BE MADE COMPULSORY FOR DOING CERTAIN JOBS

Concerning the possibility of mandatory vaccination, the prime minister's chief of staff said that under the constitution "everybody is responsible for themselves". "Still, we must consider whether vaccination should be made compulsory for doing certain jobs" such as in health care, Gergely Gulyás told a press briefing. All Covid-19 vaccines in use in Hungary are effective and would provide protection in the event of a fourth wave, he said, adding that "those working to create distrust in vaccines" had the effect of discouraging people from getting inoculated, thereby putting them at risk of death. The government considers "efforts to create distrust in certain vaccines for political gain extremely harmful". "The benign assumption is that there are political interests behind these efforts, while the malign one is that it's about the business interests of pharmaceutical companies." Gulyás urged political players and journalists to accept the findings of science and not to exploit the issue of vaccines to help certain political parties. Citing research by Semmelweis Medical University, the minister said the finding had "clearly indicated that the efficacy of all vaccines licenced for use in Hungary is above 96%". The results also show that Russia's Sputnik vaccine "is the very best" since all 1,300 blood tests taken have come back positive, Gulyás added.

Asked about the chance of administering a third Covid-19 vaccine dose to those who have not developed enough antibodies after two shots, Gulyás said the government was set to announce a relevant decision on Friday morning. Most Hungarians will be protected in the event of a fourth wave of the pandemic, Gulyás said, arguing that all of the jabs in use in Hungary were effective against the Delta variant of the virus. Citing research by Semmelweis University, Gulyás said that focusing on the level of antibodies as a marker for immunity was beside the point. He said the Budapest municipality's antibody tests were therefore "pointless" and only served to create uncertainty around the vaccines and discourage people from getting inoculated.

Addressing reports that 700 Hungarians had travelled to Romania to receive a third jab, the minister explained this in terms of the 1.5 million Hungarians who live in Transylvania. Also, he said the government was working under the assumption that schools would be able to start the year in September under normal conditions.

GULYÁS SLAMS EU FOR LINKING RECOVERY MONEY TO CHILD PROTECTION LAW

Gergely Gulyás said that the EU's attempt to link the disbursement of recovery funds to the issue of Hungary's child protection law was

"an extremely negative development". The practice of linking unrelated issues would "bring the European Union to ruin", the PM's chief of staff said. Gulyás said Hungary and the EU had had disagreements in the past and would most likely have more in the future as well, adding that EU membership was in Hungary's best interest nevertheless. "There are more arguments to be made for EU membership than against it." He said talks on Hungary's post-pandemic recovery plan had been so advanced that the European Commission president had already put in an informal request to visit Hungary, "which always happens after the agreement is signed". "Hungary is prepared to discuss any further demands the EC may have, but this practice of linking unrelated issues will bring the EU to ruin because everyone will have some issue that someone else disagrees with and they'll enforce their opposition in some other area," Gulyás said. "That's exactly what we're seeing now, since the recovery fund has nothing to do with the child protection law." "Hungarians are entitled to the monies in the recovery fund," he said.

Concerning the contested legislation, Gulyás said that the government would not give up its position that sex education was up to the parents, adding that "when Brussels demands equality in sex education it actually means that we should allow LGBTQ activists into schools and kindergartens". He said the press and advertisers weren't allowed to depict content that could affect

children's sexual development. Gulyás said this debate was not limited to just Hungary, noting that the Vatican and the Italian state were also at odds over the curriculums of church-run schools. Europe will be seeing a lot more of these debates over the coming years, he said, adding that the Hungarian government was committed to protecting human dignity and did not want to interfere in the lives of adults.

Asked about the EC's fresh infringement procedure against Hungary over the child protection law, Gulyás said the government would have to read it carefully before responding. He insisted the law was in line with the government's goals and the interests of children, adding that child protection was a national competence. Gulyás said the government expects the law to provide better protection against paedophiles, adding that the planned register of paedophile offenders could be up and running by the autumn. He cited the EC's 2020 LGBTIQ strategy as evidence that LGBT rights organisations wanted to send activists to schools and kindergartens. Gulyás said that because the child protection law also pertained to the depiction of heterosexual content, it could just as well be called "heterophobic".

GULYÁS: FIT FOR 55 'UNACCEPTABLE IN CURRENT FORM'

Hungary considers the European Commission's "Fit for 55" catch-all climate change plan to be

"unacceptable in its current form", Gergely Gulyás, the PM's chief of staff, has said. The EC's plan would make households rather than polluters bear the costs of the fight against climate change, and would also "destroy" the achievements of the government's policy of reducing household utility fees, he told a press briefing. Hungary is prepared to support a more ambitious climate plan, Gulyás said, adding, however, that most European Union member states were not even honouring the commitments they had made so far. He also underscored the importance of making climate protection and emissions reduction a global issue. The EU is responsible for just 7% of the world's pollution, Gulyás said, adding that while the bloc should aim to reduce its own pollution, it would have little effect if major polluters like China and the United States did not join the relevant accords. He said the EC's climate plan should only be approved with the unanimous consent of member states.

GOVT TAKE NEW STEPS TO AID RECOVERY

Concerning the steps taken by the government to aid Hungary's economic recovery, Gergely Gulyás noted that the operative board overseeing the recovery had approved more measures this week. These include Hungary's Eximbank opening a 100 billion forint (EUR 279m) credit line with 0.1% interest to boost SME investments, steps to accelerate public procurements, and

allowing foreign companies in Hungary to employ foreign workforce up to 20% of their headcount, the PM's chief of staff told a press briefing. Asked about the potential introduction of more tax cuts, Gulyás said the government would wait to assess the results of the National Consultation public survey before starting talks with employers and employees.

Meanwhile, he said the government wanted to see Liszt Ferenc International Airport in state hands and at the very least under Hungarian ownership. He noted that in a 2005 televised debate, Viktor Orbán had asked then-Socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány not to sell the airport. However, the left-wing government sold it anyway, causing "serious damage", Gulyás said, adding that the Fidesz government was now in talks on buying it back.

On another subject, Gulyás said it had been long expected that if the Americans withdrew from Afghanistan the region would destabilise, and this was likely to trigger a new wave of migration. Meanwhile, he said if Poland were to leave the EU, the bloc itself would be worse off. Poland, he added, had an interest in asserting its interests within the EU, and the Visegrad countries, including Poland, benefited from mutual help. Commenting on government measures to control the price of construction materials, he said price rises were expected to plateau soon and prices would decrease within a few months' time. On the subject of pay in the education sector, he said

lecturers in state-run colleges and universities would get a 15 percent wage rise in early September and another 15 percent in January. Regarding “traffic chaos” in Budapest, Gulyás derided the capital’s “badly thought-out traffic rules” and “unused cycle lanes” which caused “huge traffic jams for motorists”. He suggested that the mayor, Gergely Karácsony, should spend more time doing his day job rather than concentrating on his bid to become the next prime minister. On the subject of the possible withholding of EU recovery money, he said the European Commission would have to “find its legal footing”. The Hungarian government’s responses to its proposals, he added, had always been well-intentioned, and it would continue to respond accordingly. Commenting on infringement proceedings launched against Hungary because the commission objected to the Hungarian authorities obliging a publisher to carry a content warning in the case of a children’s book portraying non-traditional gender roles, Gulyás insisted the proceedings lacked a legal basis and, moreover, were unconnected to the child protection law. The government office decided to sanction the publisher on the basis of Hungary’s consumer protection law, he added.

EC TAKES LEGAL ACTION AGAINST HUNGARY OVER VIOLATION OF LGBTQ RIGHTS

The European Commission has launched infringement procedures

against Hungary over its child protection law as well as the insistence by the authorities that a children’s book with LGBTQ content should carry a content warning. The EC sent Hungary letters of formal notice, the first step of an infringement procedure, saying that the two cases concerned violations of European Union rules and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In a statement, the commission noted that under Hungary’s new child protection law it is forbidden to carry content aimed at youth below the age of 18 portraying gender identity at variance with gender at birth. It said the legislation was in breach of the EU’s directive on the free provision of cross-border audiovisual media services and contained “unjustified restrictions that discriminate against people based on their sexual orientation and are moreover disproportionate”. The EC said Hungary had failed to explain why the exposure of children to LGBTQ content would be detrimental to their well-being or not in line with their best interests.

It added that some of the law’s provisions also violated the bloc’s e-commerce directive, namely the so-called country-of-origin principle, as well as the right to data protection laid down in the EU’s GDPR privacy and security law. The commission said the Hungarian law was in violation of the EU’s principles of the freedom to provide services and the free movement of goods.

The other infringement procedure concerns the consumer protection

authority’s decision to oblige the publisher of a children’s book portraying LGBTQ people to include a content warning to the effect that the book depicts forms of “behaviour deviating from traditional gender roles”. The commission said such an obligation restricted the right to freedom of expression and the right to non-discrimination as enshrined in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights. The move also violates freedom of expression on the part of authors and publishers, and “discriminates on grounds of sexual orientation in an unjustified way”, the EC said. It added that Hungary had failed to justify the restriction of these fundamental rights or explain why the depiction of LGBTQ content would be detrimental to children’s well-being. The EC has given the Hungarian authorities two months to respond to its concerns.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION SUES HUNGARY OVER REFUGEE RULES

The European Commission has filed a lawsuit with the Court of Justice of the EU against Hungary for what the commission sees as Hungary’s unlawfully restricting the access of migrants to refugee procedures. In a statement, the commission said that under a European directive concerning refugees, member states should ensure that citizens of third countries staying within or at their borders can physically submit an application for international protection even if they do not have documents to

identify themselves. Under Hungarian law, citizens of third countries are first required to submit a letter of intention at a Hungarian embassy across the EU and must obtain a special entry visa for Hungary. The commission considers that requirement as an unlawful restriction since it prevents migrants in Hungary or at its borders from submitting an application for asylum in the country. According to the commission, the Hungarian law's declared aim to stem the coronavirus pandemic cannot justify such restrictions.

Commenting on the announcement, the Government Information Centre (KTK) said: "Brussels wants us to allow migrants into Hungary so they can submit their [asylum] requests here." Once in the country, however, asylum seekers will not leave, the statement insisted. The government "will protect Hungarians who do not want their land to become an immigration country," the KTK said. The statement also noted the recent case of a migrant from Yemen who has been charged with sexually assaulting a woman in broad daylight.

VARGA: EC ADMITS ITS OBJECTION IS TO 'LGBTQ LOBBY' NOT BEING ALLOWED INTO SCHOOLS

The European Commission has admitted that its real objection to Hungary's child protection law is that the "LGBTQ lobby" is not allowed into Hungarian schools or kindergartens, Judit Varga, the minister of justice, wrote on Facebook on Thursday.

"The cat's out of the bag," she said, adding that the commission had initially denied that the problem with the law was its prohibition of the dissemination of all forms of sexual propaganda, including the activities of LGBTQ organisations and activists in Hungarian kindergartens and schools. But the commission, she said, had made clear in its letter of formal notice that "the problem [with the law] ... is that we shan't allow the LGBTQ lobby into our public education institutions." Varga said the commission considered that the ban on education regarding sexual culture, sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual development in terms of promoting different gender identities, gender changes or popularisation of homosexuality violated the free movement of EU services. She insisted that the commission found the fact that this kind of "propaganda" was banned "painful". She said the commission's complaint was that practices that were already established in western Europe were "not possible in Hungary". "We don't allow LGBTQ activists into schools," said Varga. "Based on all this, I hope the domestic and international press will amend yesterday's widespread fake news."

HUNGARY REGISTERS 49 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS

Fully 49 new coronavirus infections were registered over 24 hours, while there were zero fatalities, koronavirus.

gov.hu said on Thursday. So far 5,552,859 people have received a first jab, while 5,250,459 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has declined to 36,378, while hospitals are treating 83 Covid patients, 9 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 1,544 people in official quarantine, while 6,229,508 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 808,661 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 30,013. Fully 742,270 people have made a recovery.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OUTPUT REBOUNDS FROM LOW BASE IN MAY

Output of Hungary's construction sector rose by an annual 18.7% in May, recovering from a double-digit decline in the base period, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Thursday. Output of the civil engineering segment edged down 0.8%, but building segment output jumped 38.6%. In absolute terms, output reached 405.2 billion forints (EUR 1.1bn). The building segment accounted for 58% of the total.

SZIJJÁRTÓ VISITS HUNGARY SUZUKI PLANT

Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, on Thursday visited Magyar Suzuki's plant in Esztergom, in northern Hungary, marking the company's 30th anniversary this year. Suzuki, which was one of the

first large companies to become a strategic partner of the Hungarian government, turns out over 150,000 vehicles a year, Szijjártó said. Its investments are expected to total at 60 million euros this year, creating new jobs, he said. In line with government policy, Suzuki is putting increasing emphasis on electromobility, Szijjártó said. Esztergom mostly produces hybrid cars and, as Suzuki's only plant in Europe, plays a major role in the mother company's green strategy, he said.

BUDAPEST DEMOGRAPHY SUMMIT TO BE HELD IN SEPT

The fourth Budapest Demography Summit will be held on September 23-24, Katalin Novák, the minister for family affairs, announced on Thursday. Novák said that over 50 lecturers from 16 countries will participate, while six presidents and prime ministers, including Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, are expected to address the event. The conference is aimed at addressing demographic changes, with special regard to a sustainable life, which "hinges on the family and children", Novák said.

V4 CENTRAL BANK HEADS HOLD CONFERENCE ON GREEN TRANSITION

Governors of the central banks of the Visegrad Group countries and the region's leading financial experts on

Thursday held a conference on green transition in the region, organised by the National Bank of Hungary (NBH). The Gradual Transition into a Greener Economy – Challenges and Opportunities conference was opened by NBH governor György Matolcsy, NBH said. The alliance of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia is prevalent in several policy areas, including cooperation between the countries' central banks, the statement said. NBH is committed to supporting regional cooperation and strengthening ties within the group, it said.

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown into relief the importance of the green transition, a task seen as a priority by the region's central banks, the statement said. Matolcsy said in his address that gradual transition to a green economy was key to a successful Visegrad Group. While the pandemic has opened new opportunities to such a transition, the process is most effective in international cooperation, the panellists said.

COMPETITION OFFICE SUSPECTS CARTEL ACTIVITY BEHIND BUDAPEST BOAT PROCUREMENT

Hungary's Competition Office (GVH) has launched an investigation into a public procurement tender concerning boat services on the River Danube as part of Budapest's

public transport system under suspicion of cartel activities between the bidders. The authority said it had received a report suggesting that participants had had talks "concerning their quote prices and to determine the winner". The GVH has searched bidders' premises and obtained data which are currently being assessed, it said.

RHEINMETALL INAUGURATES PHASE I OF COMBAT VEHICLE TEST TRACK

German defence industry company Rheinmetall inaugurated the first phase of a combat vehicle test track at ZalaZone, in western Hungary, on Thursday. The three track modules will test the vehicles' handling in mud and on inclines as well as gauge their durability. Rheinmetall Hungary, a joint venture of Rheinmetall and the state of Hungary, is building a 60 billion forint plant that will manufacture Lynx infantry fighting vehicles next to the track. The factory is expected to be inaugurated in 2023.

INTL VOLUNTEERS TO CLEAN UP BUDAPEST JEWISH CEMETERY

An international group of young volunteers will visit Budapest next week to help clean up the Kozma Street Jewish cemetery, an NGO dedicated to the maintenance of the

cemetery told MTI. The visit by the 20 volunteers is being organised by the Jewish Agency foundation and Israel's ministry of diaspora affairs, the Friends of Kozma Street Jewish Cemetery organisation said. Their main job will be to begin putting up the cemetery's new section signs, but their tasks will also include weeding and repainting work. The volunteers, aged between 18 and 28, will work a total of 25 hours each in the cemetery. Their travel expenses, including their accommodation and kosher meals, are covered by the project's organisers. The volunteers will also get to take part in cultural programmes, synagogue visits, community meet-ups and visit the city's baths. The Kozma Street cemetery is the resting place of more than 250,000 Jews, the statement noted.

LISZT FERENC PASSENGER NUMBERS CLIMB AS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS EASE

Passenger numbers at Liszt Ferenc International reached 266,481 in June, tripling from a month earlier as travel restrictions eased amid increasing Covid immunisation coverage, operator Budapest Airport said on Thursday. Passenger numbers jumped 257% year on year in the second quarter and reached 603,585 for the first half. Airline capacity nearly doubled in Q2, while the number of seats on flights to some popular destinations rose as much as 500%. Passenger numbers averaged around 10,000 a day in June and are "expected to grow significantly" in July and August, Budapest Airport said. Passengers could fly to 90 destinations from Liszt Ferenc

in June, still well below the 153 offered before the pandemic, but that number is expected to climb to 120 in the coming months, the operator added.

TOURISM AGENCY PROMISES 'BIGGEST EVER' AUG 20 FIREWORKS SHOW

Hungary's tourism agency hopes that as many people as possible will be in Budapest on the August 20 national holiday to witness the "biggest ever" festive fireworks display, Zoltán Guller, the head of the agency, said on Thursday. More than 40,000 shots will be fired during the 25-minute show, which is eight to nine times as many as in previous years, Guller told a press event. The government is preparing to organise four days of festive programmes in the capital to mark St Stephen's Day this year, he noted.