

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Attila Kovács

Persian leopard cubs born in Budapest Zoo

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU ministers for international development projects meet

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

MASKS INDOORS TO BE COMPULSORY

From Saturday, the wearing of a mask in enclosed spaces will be compulsory, the prime minister's chief of staff announced.

Booster jabs also will be compulsory for health-care staff, while plans are afoot for the same in state administration, Gergely Gulyás told a government news briefing. Mask-wearing will be compulsory in shops, malls, museums, theatres, cinemas and in areas open to the public in government offices. Using masks on public transport will continue to be compulsory. Events with more than 500 people attending can still be attended with an immunity certificate. In schools, it will be up to head teachers to decide whether it is compulsory to wear a mask. Offices and sports facilities will continue to be mask-free, he said. Gulyás said modelling indicated that the fourth wave would peak in late November or early December, though, he added, making such predictions was risky. Expert were agreed, he said, that vaccination was the only truly effective protection against Covid, especially the delta variant, and he cited the examples of Israel and the United States where booster shots had proved effective. A booster jab is advised for everyone from the fourth month on, he added.

**GULYÁS: REFUSNIKS
PUTTING PEOPLE’S LIVES
AT RISK**

People who refused to be vaccinated put the health and lives of others at risk, Gergely Gulyás, the prime minister’s chief of staff, said, adding that the government had been forced to make mask-wearing compulsory for this reason. From Nov. 22 to 28, the government is rolling out a vaccination campaign with an increased number of designated vaccination points in hospitals, with no requirement for registration, he added. It was worth holding events that are accessible using an immunity card, adding that this would also send a message that inoculation is truly protective, he said. Asked about whether online education could make a comeback, he said: “If schools stop, everything stops”. Conditions are in place for classrooms to remain open, he said. Pending the decision of the European authorities, approval for vaccination of children under the age of 12 years could arrive in December, he added. Hungary, he confirmed, is sending ten doctors to Slovenia to help amid the serious epidemic there.

Meanwhile, Gulyás said that while the incumbent Fidesz government holds power, capped utility bills would be here to stay. Gulyás said it was welcome that the price of fuel at the pump had been capped throughout Hungary thanks to government intervention, and that all fuel stations

had complied. The tax authority will be checking fuel quality from Wednesday, he added. Small businesses will be given the opportunity to join a universal energy provider so as to benefit from lower bills, he said. Lower overheads and fuel prices will help to keep inflation in check, Gulyás added.

Commenting on the reports concerning alleged plans to sell Budapest’s City Hall, he insisted that the administration of Gergely Karácsony was in a state of “chaos” and, given the mayor had publicly rebuked a subordinate, the question of his credibility was hanging in the balance. Also, there was the question of whether he had been in possession of the relevant information, he added. Whereas Karácsony had promised to create a park in the courtyard of City Hall and renovate the building, it transpired that the courtyard would continue to serve as a car park, while the building was in a worse condition than ever, Gulyás said.

Commenting on statements made by Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition alliance’s prime ministerial candidate, who has cast doubt on the government’s scheme to regulate utility bills, Gulyás, referring to the former Socialist prime minister, said “Ferenc Gyurcsány’s candidate” had admitted to continue with policies pursued between 2002 and 2010 when the price of electricity doubled and the price of gas tripled. The average Hungarian household would pay 400,000 forints more each year if market prices were passed on to them.

Regarding the Stop Soros package of laws which the European Court of Justice ruled unlawful, Gulyás said the government was examining the ruling. He added the government considered the European Commission’s “stand in favour of migration taken within a single week of the court’s ruling” to be “a serious mistake”. Gulyás said the EC should follow the instructions of European government leaders and draft a clear set of rules to advance the protection of the EU’s external borders.

Commenting on the situation on the Poland-Belarus border, Gulyás noted that German Chancellor Angela Merkel was handling the diplomacy, and “Hungary knows what its weight is,” though if a request was received, he added, Hungary would not hesitate to step up. Every possible support for protecting the external borders should be provided, he said.

Asked about recent legislation on changing address rules for voters in the general election, Gulyás said the new rules did not offer any greater room for manoeuvre than those up to now. Neither did they connect with the right to vote, he insisted. The government estimates that 1.5-2 million people live somewhere other than at their declared address, he added. During the five-week parliamentary session, no objections to the amendment were made, he said. A debate emerged only later, when an organisation linked to George Soros complained about the new law, Gulyás added.

Responding to a question on the economy, Gulyás said the government



considered it important that certain sectors of the economy should be in Hungarian hands to a sufficient degree, and more must be done to achieve this in the food industry and retail.

Regarding the possible redrafting of next year's budget, he said the government awaited the central bank's 2022 inflation forecast to be published in December. He said the government concurred with the consensus that inflation would not fall back to around three percent before the second half of next year.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EC POSITION ON MIGRATION 'BIZARRE, SHAMEFUL'

The European Commission's position on migration -- encouraging tens of thousands of migrants to approach Europe from the south-east and the east -- is "bizarre and shameful", Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Sarajevo. "Brussels is prepared to finance anything that increases migration pressure but fails to support anything that would protect European citizens from this threat," Szijjártó told a regional ministerial conference of Sarajevo Migration Dialogue. The Western Balkans is in a special situation, with migrants arriving there from one European Union member state and heading for other member states, he said. "It is high time that the European Commission supports Western Balkans countries in defending themselves -- hence us, too -- from migration pressure," he said.

Szijjártó called for advances in the EU accession process of the countries in question, saying that "lack of stability and security in the Western Balkans runs counter to our national security interests."

Hungary continues to insist on its right to decide whom it does and does not allow to enter its territory, the minister said. One of the greatest achievements of Visegrad cooperation, he said, was that the four countries had unanimously rejected the mandatory migrant resettlement quotas. Szijjártó said that the Hungarian authorities have registered about 100,000 attempts to cross the country's border illegally this year. He warned that migration pressure would probably increase as 30,000 to 35,000 Afghan citizens a day leave their homeland.

PALKOVICS: SECURE SUPPLY, REGULATED PRICES CONCOMITANT WITH CLEANER ENERGY USE

Attending consultations with the leaders of top German companies, Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics emphasised the importance of expanding nuclear and renewable capacities, as well as green transport, to meet climate goals. "Hungary was among the first European Union countries to set the goal of turning climate neutral by 2050," he said. A ministry statement noted that Palkovics reiterated the Hungarian government's standpoint that the costs of the green transition

must not be passed on to individuals and families but should be paid by large polluters. Hungary is insistent on retaining the results of its scheme to reduce household utility bills, he added. Thanks to officially regulated prices, bills for natural gas are the cheapest in the EU, while electricity is cheaper only in Serbia, he said.

Palkovics said that by 2030 more than a fifth of the energy mix was expected to come from renewables. Increasing solar energy capacities to 6,000 megawatts will help in achieving this by the middle of the decade, he said. In December, a tender with more than 200 billion forints (EUR 55m) available will be opened for supporting Hungarian households to introduce solar and energy-saving electrical heating systems, he added. Also, Hungary's Climate and Nature Action Plan aims to promote green transport. The government has so far provided 20 billion forints for the promotion of purchasing electric vehicles, he noted. In addition, electric buses are being introduced in settlements with a population of more than 25,000, he said. The integration of hydrogen into the network will also help to speed up this process by replacing the use of diesel in heavy vehicles, Palkovics added.

MÁRKI-ZAY: OPPOSITION WOULD RETAIN BORDER FENCE

Hungary's opposition, if it wins next year's election, will retain the fence along the country's border with



Serbia, Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition alliance's prime ministerial candidate, said at Röszke border station. The opposition "seeks to retain what works; not only family support and low taxes but the fence protecting the border, too", he said. "The fence is an effective tool in preventing illegal migration," he said. A new government set up by the opposition would fully cooperate with Frontex, with Hungarian police and EU officers controlling the borders together, he said. Márki-Zay slammed the government for "settling in Hungary 55,000 migrants in 2019, and 43,000 in 2020, during the pandemic". The opposition, he added, intended to resolve a labour shortage by luring home Hungarians working abroad.

In response, ruling Fidesz said that Márki-Zay represented the policies of Democratic Coalition leader Ferenc Gyurcsany and his left-wing allies. Fidesz accused Márki-Zay of regularly taking a stand for migration, speaking about its benefits and stressing the need to allow migrants into the country and integrate them. "The left wing would obey the instructions of Brussels without further ado and settle migrants in Hungary," Fidesz said.

SÜLI: V4 COUNTRIES BACK NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION IN JOINT STATEMENT

The Visegrad Group countries have signed a joint declaration that achieving climate goals cannot happen without nuclear energy,

according to government website kormany.hu. The combined use of nuclear and renewable energy is vital for energy sovereignty and security, keeping energy prices affordable and decarbonising energy production, János Süli, the minister without portfolio responsible for the Paks nuclear plant upgrade project, said, speaking alongside representatives of the Czech, Polish and Slovak governments in Paks, in southern Hungary. The V4 calls for greater energy efficiency and, as well as increasing the share of renewable energy sources, meeting the 2030 and 2050 carbon targets would require the development of electricity transmission networks and the use of gas-fired power plants in the medium term, as well as the flexible use of carbon quotas, it added. The V4 welcomed the European Commission's statement that nuclear energy is a safe technology and in full compliance with EU environmental standards. Brussels, the declaration added, should treat nuclear energy as a sustainable energy source, also from the point of view of financing, it added.

BENKŐ: GEORGIA'S EURO-ATLANTIC ACCESSION 'A PRIORITY FOR HUNGARY'

Backing Georgia's EU and NATO accession endeavours is a priority for Hungary, Tibor Benkő, the defence minister, told a press conference on Thursday after meeting Georgian counterpart Juansher Burchuladze.

He said the Georgian and Hungarian governments represented similar European values as well as the goal of contributing to efforts to stabilise the fragile global situation, including the security and stability of the Caucasus region and the Western Balkans. The two officials also underscored an extant agreement on the joint training of each other's soldiers.

Benkő expressed thanks for cooperation under which Hungarians can study in Georgia, and praised the joint meetings of experts from the two countries. Burchuladze thanked the Hungarian government for its support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Hungarian soldiers are present in Georgia helping them in this, he noted with appreciation.

On Thursday, a cooperation agreement will also be signed with the NATO Military Medical Center of Excellence (NATO KEKK) in Budapest, he noted.

The two ministers also attended the opening of a professional conference in Budapest's Stefánia Palace. Benkő in his speech said Hungary was in the crosshairs of threats emanating from the south and east. Hungary's National Security Strategy sets the goal of making Hungary among the five safest countries in Europe and the ten safest countries in the world by 2030, he noted, adding that Hungary had taken big steps in this direction under its Defence and Armed Forces Development Programme. The Hungarian Armed Forces, he said, is also ready for challenges such as mass illegal migration and Covid.

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MATOLCSY: CENTRAL BANKS SHOULD PROMOTE GREEN, DIGITAL SWITCHOVERS

All central banks must promote and support changes aimed at making the economy “green and digital”, National Bank of Hungary governor György Matolcsy said on Thursday, opening a conference held online under the auspices of the Eurasia Forum. The conference, attended by participants from South Korea, China, Singapore, the UK, Norway and Poland focuses on ways central banks can support those changes, Matolcsy said, adding that a mix of Asian and Western models was needed because “there is no single solution”. Societies and economies turning digital, carbon-dioxide-free and more open is “a challenge and an opportunity at the same time”, he said. The opportunities can be harnessed by expanding partnerships “across Eurasia and beyond”, he added.

Balanced and sustainable economic growth requires “a new kind of balance” in the public finances, which required the coordination and integration of new technologies, he said, adding that welfare structures also required a stable and sustainable equilibrium.

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó noted the “fundamental change” in ties between East and West caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The health systems of strong and rich countries were severely strained, global trade suffered a 5% recession, global

investments plummeted by 42%, and over 110 million people lost their jobs, he said. By now, however, the “East” has seen rapid development and has closed the gap with Western countries in terms of digital development, he said. Eastern countries currently have similar financial resources as the West, Szijjártó said, adding that while 50 years ago 80% of global investments were financed from Western funds, now the ratio of Eastern investors was 70%. He added that 50 years ago the West used to head global exports with 52%, but that ratio has now dropped to 46%, while exports from the East account for 44%. Hungary considers the development of the East as an opportunity, and “supports free and fair global trade”, Szijjártó said. “Rather than seeking a new Cold War, partnerships should be built,” the minister said, calling the Hungarian government’s strategy of opening up to the East a “success story” in which exports to countries involved had increased by 24% and trade turnover approaching 30%. Szijjártó called for cooperation “based on mutual respect and trust” in ties between Europe and Asia, adding that “bridges must be built” within the EU as well.

KÖVER: HUNGARY-CYPRUS FRIENDSHIP OLDER THAN ALLIANCE

“We were friends with Cyprus earlier than we became allies in the European Union,” Speaker of Parliament László Kövér told a press conference during a

visit to Cyprus, where he had talks with Cyprian counterpart Annita Demetriou, Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides, representatives of the Hungary’s Friends group in the Cyprian parliament, as well as committee members.

In her address in the parliament building, Demetriou highlighted the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties with Hungary. She said Cyprus sought closer bilateral ties not only at the level of speakers but among parliamentary friendship groups and committees, too. Demetriou thanked Hungary for its assistance in efforts to resolve Cyprus’s territorial and border issues.

Kövé said Hungary and Cyprus were “reliable allies” in the European Union and underlined ties that went back to times before Hungary’s EU accession. Many Cypriots that had studied in Hungary still maintained contacts with Hungarian friends and “consider Hungary as a second, honorary homeland”, he added.

Concerning economic cooperation, Kövé called for “shared opportunities in areas offering mutual benefits”, mentioning water purification and farming. Negotiations between the agricultural committees of the two parliaments to promote cooperation are ongoing, he noted. Kövé also noted the two countries’ shared position that “Europe can only be made strong thanks to strong nation states”, and called for a continuous coordination of positions with regard to current disputes concerning the future of Europe. Kövé extended an invitation to Demetriou to continue the talks in Hungary, which she accepted.

SZIJJÁRTÓ ATTENDS S.E.G.A. HUNGARY PRODUCTION HALL INAUGURATION

Chinese-owned automotive industry company S.E.G.A. Hungary inaugurated a production hall in Szirmabesenyő, in north-eastern Hungary, and announced a new R+D project on Thursday, in a ceremony attended by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó. S.E.G.A. Hungary will make starters and generators at the base near Miskolc. In his address, Szijjártó said the state was supporting the 4.5 billion forint (EUR 12.4m) investment programme, which would create 40 jobs for engineers as well as preserve the company's 1,426 workplaces, with a 1.3 billion forint grant. Szijjártó said that the

government's eastern opening strategy had "clearly proved a success", making Hungary a primary target for Chinese investments in central Europe. He said that while in 2019 South Korea had been Hungary's greatest investor, China took over in 2020 and "so far this year there has been a tie in the competition". He said that "Hungary and the Hungarian people have profited and will profit considerably" from those relations, adding that China was Hungary's 5th largest trading partner, the turnover of bilateral trade having increased by 21% in the first eight months of 2021.

CORONAVIRUS - 131 DEATHS, 10,767 NEW INFECTIONS

Altogether 131 patients died of a Covid-related illness during

the past 24 hours, while 10,767 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Thursday. So far 6,013,007 people have received a first jab, while 5,784,958 have been fully vaccinated. Fully 1,714,000 Hungarians have received a booster jab. The number of active infections stands at 121,138, while hospitals are treating 5,969 Covid-19 patients, 606 of whom need respiratory assistance. Since the first outbreak, 987,199 infections have been registered, while the number of fatalities has risen to 32,645. Fully 833,416 people have made a recovery. There are 54,312 people in official quarantine, while the number of tests taken stands at 7,954,654.