

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Gábor Kiss

New small bell of Tordaszentlászló church being replaced

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**State secretary Novák meets EU leaders in Brussels**

**LMP presser on green issue**

**National Election Committee meets**

**Presser for Francophone month**

## TOP STORY

# GOVT PLANS TO SUSPEND PRISONER PAYMENTS

The government will submit a proposal to lawmakers to suspend compensation payments to prisoners who sue the state over poor prison conditions, the justice minister said.

Judit Varga said the proposal which aims at ending the “unfair practice” will be submitted on Monday and discussed by parliament in an expedited procedure. Payments will be suspended while rules on compensation for bad prison conditions are being amended, she said, adding that a broad public consensus on the matter was needed. Appropriate new legislation will be drafted based on the results of a national survey now under way, she said. So far 12,680 court rulings have awarded 9 billion forints (EUR 27m) to plaintiffs, and 10% of that total has been paid out, she noted. New rules will aim to put the rights of the complainants, victims, and their families to the fore, the minister said, adding that in the future compensation would be paid directly to the plaintiffs rather than to their lawyers. Varga said the government is working to improve prison conditions and eliminate overcrowdedness.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ COMMENTS NEW EU PLAN TO COUNTERACT PEOPLE SMUGGLING**

The European Union is launching a new operation to combat people smuggling in the Mediterranean after the current operation, Operation Sophia, expires in March, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó noted. The new operation will focus on enforcing the arms embargo against Libya, Szijjártó said. It will make use of airborne, satellite and seafaring equipment, he said on the sidelines of a meeting of EU foreign ministers. Szijjártó said Hungary shares Italy's and Austria's view that the deployment of ships could end up aiding migration if operations branch off into rescue missions. The new operation must not be allowed to become an incentive to migrants, he added. Hungary insists on the policy of suspending the operation and withdrawing ships from the region if it appears that migration is increasing as a result, he said, adding that Hungary insisted that the decision to withdraw should be left with member states. This stance has been accepted in the debates leading up to future deployments at sea, he said.

Regarding the EU's Africa strategy, Szijjártó said African countries should be helped to retain their growing populations in their homelands. Hungary does not accept the approach that it is "inevitable and inescapable" that a growing population in Africa leads to

hundreds of thousands, "maybe millions" migrating to Europe, the minister said. "We have to boost the retention capabilities of African countries as their population grows. That takes investment, technological aid and training," Szijjártó said. Hungary is providing grants to 900 African students a year and has opened 80 million euros worth of tied aid, Szijjártó said. It has also raised the value of tech aid to the continent five-fold, to over 7 billion forints (EUR 21.0m), he added. The meeting of EU foreign ministers on Monday also touched on the situations in Sahel, Venezuela, the Western Balkans and the Middle East, as well as on relations with the African Union and India.

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## **ORBÁN IN PHONE TALKS WITH TRUMP**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had talks with US President Donald Trump by phone, the PM's press chief told MTI. Orbán and Trump discussed foreign policy issues such as the importance of combatting illegal migration and border protection, Bertalan Havasi said. The two leaders also touched on the situation in the Middle East, he said, adding that Trump had asked Orbán to relay his appreciation to the "successful and great Hungarian people".

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## **KÁSLER: GOVT HANDLING CORONAVIRUS CHALLENGE APPROPRIATELY**

The government has made timely preparations to meet the challenges

associated with coronavirus, Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler told parliament, adding that no cases of the viral infection have been reported in Hungary. The government set up an operative team on Jan. 31, heeding the advice of the World Health Organisation, Kásler said. The team established protocols for hospitals, rules of prevention and screening, assessed the equipment need for hospitals and has made purchases accordingly, the minister said. Passengers suspected of carrying the virus are being screened at border crossing stations and at Budapest's international airport, with a focus on people arriving from China, he added. The foreign ministry is in close communication with Hungarians in countries affected by the infection, Kásler said, adding that a group of seven Hungarians was helped return to Hungary and by now they have been released from quarantine.

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## **OFFICIAL: 'NATL CONSULTATION' TO ADDRESS ISSUES THAT HURT SECURITY**

The government's next "national consultation" survey to be launched next month will deal with issues that weaken Hungary's security and go against the public's sense of justice, a government official said. The issues to be addressed by the survey include the payment of compensation to prisoners complaining about poor prison conditions and probation

rules pertaining to violent criminals, Csaba Dömötör, a Prime Minister's Office parliamentary state secretary, told public Kossuth Radio. A common thread in these issues is the presence of foreign-funded organisations, Dömötör said.

On the topic of Ukraine's controversial education law, Dömötör said Hungary faced pressure concerning its vow to block Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO. He said Ukraine's new laws violated the right of the local Hungarian community to use its native language. He said it was possible to get all Ukrainian citizens to learn to speak Ukrainian while also allowing Transcarpathia Hungarians to preserve their native language. Hungary, he said, has an interest in having good relations with Ukraine as well as its Euro-Atlantic integration, but if the government did not stand up for the rights of the local Hungarian community, no one would.

### **TOP COURT EXPECTED TO RULE ON GYÖNGYÖSPATA CASE IN MID-APRIL**

Hungary's supreme court, the Kúria, is expected to rule ahead of schedule on the outcome of a lawsuit brought against the local government by plaintiffs in the Gyöngyöspata school segregation case. The Kúria said an open hearing will be held mid-April. The Debrecen Appeal Court in September 2019 ruled that Roma children in Gyöngyöspata, a village in north Hungary, were segregated

unlawfully at school and their right to equal treatment was violated. The court required the local authority and the school district to pay compensation of 100 million forints (EUR 297.700) to the children's families for each year spent in segregation. The local authority and the school district asked the Kúria to review the binding ruling last year.

### **MAGYAR PLEDGES EUR 250,000 AID FOR ALBANIA AT DONOR CONFERENCE**

Hungary will provide a 250,000 euro aid to Albania's Catholic Church in support of the reconstruction of churches damaged in last November's earthquake, a foreign ministry official said. The financial assistance will be sent to targeted local Catholic communities directly, state secretary Levente Magyar told reporters during the break of an international donors' conference convened to raise money for Albania, which was hit by the earthquake on November 25. Hungary will also help with reconstruction projects through its Hungary Helps humanitarian programme, Magyar said. The aid is a show of Hungary's solidarity with the Albanian victims, he said, adding that the Hungarian government trusted its support for the local Catholic community served the interests of local residents. Meanwhile, Magyar expressed Hungary's support for Albania's swift-possible accession to the European Union as well as for the launch of a direct flight between the two countries daily.

### **SURVEY: MOST HUNGARIANS SAY BIGGEST POLLUTERS SHOULD BEAR COSTS OF CLIMATE ACTION**

An overwhelming majority of Hungarians say the costs of the fight against climate change should be borne by the world's biggest polluters, according to a survey by the Századvég Foundation released on Monday. Fully 91% of respondents said the world's biggest polluting companies and countries should be made to cover the costs of climate action, with 77% saying the European Union should adopt a redistribution system to achieve this. Altogether 60% of respondents blamed corporations and their violation of environmental regulations for the pollution responsible for climate change. Concerning the government's environmental policy measures, fully 93% were in favour of supporting solar energy and the government's afforestation scheme. Altogether 89% of respondents backed the decision to ban single-use plastics and 85% agreed with government support for electric vehicles. Meanwhile, fully 81% of respondents disapproved of European Union proposals for a CO2 tax on residential buildings or tax hikes on fossil fuels, while 84% rejected a plan to raise utility prices. Altogether 83% of respondents expect the government to introduce stricter regulations for the biggest polluters. Fully 98% said the

government should take firm steps to eliminate illegal waste sites and 84% urged more substantial measures aimed at protecting Hungary's rivers. Századvég conducted the survey with a sample of 1,000 adults.

**OPPOSITION PARTIES  
TURN TO TOP COURT  
OVER CHANGES TO  
PARLIAMENTARY RULES**

Hungary's opposition parties are turning to the Constitutional Court with a request that it annul new laws governing the operations of parliament. Representatives of Párbeszéd, the Socialist Party, Democratic Coalition, Jobbik, Greens and Liberal Party told a news conference that the governing side's new rules were designed to intimidate and muzzle opposition MPs. Tímea Szabó, Párbeszéd's co-leader, vowed that the "united opposition" would not retreat but would continue to "represent the interests of the people". She said the constitutional concerns were grave as strict sanctions may end up disabling the work of lawmakers. It was problematic, she added, that the rules for imposing sanctions were arbitrary and the speaker could order penalties from his dais, while lawmakers had no option to appeal. The permanent restriction of voting rights was also a matter of grave concern, she added. Ágnes Kunhalmi of the Socialist Party vowed to staunchly oppose any changes to the law. "In 2022, Fidesz will be in

opposition," she insisted. Gergely Arató of DK said: "I want parliament to be a respected institution once again, but this requires the exercise of parliamentary rights ... and the government taking the work of parliament seriously."

**OPPOSITION PARTIES  
REACT TO PM'S ADDRESS**

Opposition parties gave their reactions to the prime minister's state-of-the-nation address in which Viktor Orbán laid out in detail his government's climate protection action plan and its goals to continue developing the country, on Sunday.

Nationalist Jobbik said that the prime minister "has left Hungarians workers and pensioners on their own". "In the green policy unveiled, the country's first man seems to be interested in the so-called green government bond," the leader of the party said. Hungarians are, however, more interested to know how the government plans to protect their families from the effects of an economic crisis, but heard nothing from the prime minister about that, Péter Jakab said.

Socialist leader Bertalan Tóth called Orbán "a one-man fake news factory". Orbán gave an outline of "a parallel world he has envisioned and created; a world that is about his own achievements," Tóth said in a video message.

Ferenc Gyurcsány, a former Socialist prime minister and the leader of the Democratic Coalition, said "democratic

Hungary has never been as divided as it is now". He said the country is "now dictated by party state and party logic rather than nation or national governance". "In the past ten years Hungary became a loser and lost its friends in the community of European nations."

The Párbeszéd party said in a statement that the prime minister had no answer to Hungary's health-care, education or housing problems, insisting that instead of finding solutions, Orbán had diverted attention from what was important with a national consultation survey "again costing billions".

The Greens said the climate protection measures announced by Orbán should have been taken a long time ago and were not in line with current challenges. Greens co-leader Erzsébet Schmuck called for a ministry of climate and sustainability to be set up and for funds in the central budget to be allocated towards those two areas.

**PÁRBESZÉD TO PROTEST  
'FIDESZ HATE-MONGERING  
AGAINST ROMA'**

A lawmaker of the opposition Párbeszéd party said the party would act against "Fidesz and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's hate-mongering campaign against Roma". Bence Tordai told a news conference that Párbeszéd will take part in a demonstration in Budapest on Sunday against "Orbán's policies" that he said victimised the

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Roma minority and harmed Hungarian society as a result. Párbeszéd, he added, resisted “the hate-inciting propaganda” and Fidesz’s “fear-based campaign” against Roma children in Gyöngyöspata and against the Hungarian Roma in general, he said. Párbeszéd has also invited officials of Gyöngyöspata’s Roma minority council to attend parliament’s session on Monday, Tordai said. Géza Csemer, the head of the northern Hungarian village’s Roma minority council where the segregation of Roma children took place, said Sunday’s demonstration was being called because “the Hungarian state does not acknowledge justice for a Roma person, even when a court of law has already ruled in their favour.”

László Horváth, a lawmaker of ruling Fidesz for the region, said in response that “the foreign-funded foundation” that sued the Hungarian state for compensation was exploiting the Gyöngyöspata school segregation case, as well as the Roma families and their children, to achieve its political goal of “filing a report against Hungary in Brussels and Strasbourg over Roma persecution, racism and mass segregation to squeeze out some sort of a criminal procedure.” Sunday’s demonstration was “one stop in that procedure”, Horváth told a press conference. Horváth accused Tordai of visiting Gyöngyöspata purely for a photo-op with Csemer in front of the segregated school, and he “regretted” that Tordai “had no time” to listen to the views of local officials, teachers and residents.

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### **DK: DUNAÚJVÁROS BY-ELECTION WIN ‘BOOSTS OPPOSITION UNITY’**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has hailed Sunday’s by-election victory by joint opposition candidate Gergely Kálló in Dunaújváros, in central Hungary, saying it had helped unify the opposition parties. Sunday’s by-election was the first time the opposition parties had united behind a single candidate for a parliamentary seat, DK deputy group leader Ágnes Vadai told a press conference. “This election is the start of a new period in parliament because the government is not prepared for how this victory will further unify the opposition parties,” she said. Vadai said that in the future the opposition would not only be able to run joint candidates and campaigns but they would also be more united in representing the interests of the Hungarian people. Asked about her party’s cooperation with nationalist Jobbik, she said unity was the key to the opposition’s ability to unseat the government.

Kálló, the joint candidate of the opposition Jobbik, Democratic Coalition, LMP, Socialist, Momentum and Párbeszéd parties, was elected MP with 56.29% of the vote on Sunday. Tibor Molnár, an independent candidate backed by ruling Fidesz, came second with 37.72%. Voter turnout was 28.87% in the city with 67,471 eligible voters.

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### **MI HAZÁNK PROTESTS FOR ‘ORDER’ IN N HUNGARY**

The non-parliamentary Mi Hazánk party demanded “order in the country” at a protest attended by several hundred supporters in front of the local government office in Miskolc, in north-eastern Hungary, late on Sunday. Addressing the event, the radical nationalist party’s head László Toroczkai referred to Roma people as a minority with “tribal organisations”, which posed a threat to the majority. At the same time, he said “decent working Roma must be respected”. He referred to “no-go zones”, citing a recent case when ambulance staff could not reach a patient in time because they needed police support. Mi Hazánk’s deputy leader, Előd Novák, called for an end to “Roma crime”. After the demonstration, a torch-lit march was held in Sály, a nearby village where a 61 year-old woman was recently killed by a Roma man.

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### **NÉMETH: FORMER AMBASSADOR’S ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN PAEDOPHILIA SCANDAL ‘SHOCKING, REGRETTABLE’**

Parliament’s foreign affairs committee discussed press reports suggesting the involvement of Gábor Kaleta, Hungary’s former ambassador to Peru, in a child pornography case behind closed doors. Zsolt Németh, the head of the body delegated by ruling Fidesz, told a press conference after the meeting

that the case was “shocking and regrettable, casting a shadow on the whole of Hungary’s diplomatic corps”. Németh called Hungary’s handling of the case “exemplary”, saying that the Hungarian authorities had not hesitated to withdraw the ambassador from his post after they were alerted to the allegations against him last March. Following an investigation between March and November last year, charges were pressed against Kaleta and his case will be heard in court next month, Németh said.

He said that the case had “negligible” political implications, arguing that the former ambassador had been screened several times and his appointment had been backed by all political parties. Németh said, however, that the system of national security screening needed updating, adding that the National Intelligence Office was preparing a proposal to that end.

### **SERBIAN PEOPLE SMUGGLER CAUGHT AFTER EVADING INSPECTION AT BORDER**

A Serbian national who attempted to smuggle five Syrians into Hungary was

arrested near the border after evading inspection by border agents earlier on, the police said on its website. The authorities say the 48-year-old man had offered to smuggle the illegal migrants across the Hungarian border so that they could move on to Austria. The five passengers who claimed to be Syrian citizens were unable to provide any documents verifying their legal status to the authorities, and were escorted back to Hungary’s border fence. Police launched criminal proceedings against the driver on suspicion of people smuggling and initiated his pre-trial detention.

### **OTP AGREES TO SELL SLOVAKIAN UNIT TO KBC**

OTP Bank on Monday said it agreed to sell its Slovakian unit to Belgian peer KBC Bank. The transaction is expected to be closed “in the coming months” subject to regulatory approval. OTP Banka Slovensko confirmed in January that talks on its sale were underway. The lender has a market share of about 3%. OTP booked after-tax profit of 1.98 billion forints at its Slovakian unit for the period Q1-Q3, the lender’s latest earnings report shows.

### **HUNGEXPO TO OPEN TRAVEL 2020 EXPO FEB 27**

Budapest exhibitions operator Hungexpo will host the Travel 2020 show between February 27 and March 1. Hungexpo’s executive in charge of strategy, Klára Tihanyi, said some 250 exhibitors from 40 countries will show at this year’s fair. Italy is the foreign guest of honour this year. Hungexpo expects Travel 2020 to draw as many as 40,000 visitors.

### **INSURERS PAY OUT ALMOST HUF 2.2 BN ON STORM DAMAGE CLAIMS**

Hungarian insurers have approved almost 2.2 billion forints in claims by homeowners whose property was damaged by recent storms, the Hungarian Insurers Association (MABISZ) said. Policy holders filed more than 32,000 claims for damages from the February storms. MABISZ members expect to pay out another 750 million forints on claims from corporate and institutional policy holders.