

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Szigelevény

The 150-year-old Buda Castle Funicular

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Coronavirus updates**

**Stats office releases Dec 2019 retail figures, Jan industrial producer prices**

**Govt official addresses Óbuda University job fair**

**Presser on 40th Budapest Spring Festival**

## TOP STORY

# SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO PROTECT BORDERS

Hungary will protect its borders “under all circumstances” and will not let in any illegal migrants, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Serbian Interior Minister Nebojša Stefanović in Belgrade.

“For us the security of the country and the Hungarian people comes first,” he said. The talks focused on border protection as well as the situation in Turkey and Syria, Szijjártó said. He said that developments at the Turkey-Greece border were worrying and suggested that hundreds of thousands of migrants could soon arrive in the Western Balkans. Szijjártó said he had phoned his Greek counterpart and assured Greece of Hungary’s support. “Hungary knows what it is like when the country’s borders are under an organised attack ... while the international liberal media is churning out fake news”. The current situation also highlights the importance of the European integration of the Western Balkans, Szijjártó said, arguing that “the further south Europe’s defence lines are, the better”. He urged the EU to speed up its accession talks with Serbia, saying that the country was ready to open up five new chapters in those negotiations. Szijjártó called on the EU’s Croatian presidency to give its consent to the accession talks.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ IN TALKS WITH GREEK COUNTERPART**

Hungary has protected its borders and will continue to do so, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Facebook after speaking to his Greek counterpart Nicos Dendias by phone. Dendias briefed Szijjártó on the situation at the Turkish-Greek border and the crackdown by Greek border guards against violent illegal migrants. Szijjártó said he supported formally convening a special meeting of EU foreign ministers to discuss the situation. The EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, has proposed convening a special Foreign Affairs Council meeting next week at Greece's initiative. "We Hungarians know what it's like for our border to be systematically attacked ... while in parallel the international liberal media spread fake news," Szijjártó said. "We won't allow any migrants here. I assured my Greek colleague of this," he added. The UN says more than 10,000 migrants have gathered at the Turkish-Greek border after Turkey said it would no longer detain asylum seekers in the country. The Greek government has accused the Turkish authorities of actively helping migrants to reach the border.

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## **AUSTRIA TO SEND POLICEMEN TO HUNGARY- SERBIA BORDER**

Austria is sending 21 police officers and two police dogs to serve on the

Hungary-Serbia border in support of Hungary's fight against migration, Interior Ministers Sándor Pintér of Hungary and Karl Nehammer of Austria agreed in Nickelsdorf near the Hungarian-Austrian border. After the meeting, Nehammer said Austria will also support Greece and the countries on the Balkan route of migration. Austrian forces served at Hungary's southern border during the migration crisis in 2015, protecting both Hungary and Austria, Nehammer noted. A migration crisis like the one in 2015 "must be avoided", he said, adding that the Austrian authorities are much better prepared than they were then. Reacting to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's announcement that Turkey would no longer hold back migrants from Syria on their way to Europe, Nehammer said Turkey must honour its agreement with the European Union. "The EU, Austria and Hungary will not allow to be blackmailed," he said.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ, WANG YI DISCUSS CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK**

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and Wang Yi, his Chinese counterpart, discussed the latest developments of the coronavirus outbreak over the phone, Szijjártó said. Wang thanked Hungary for the solidarity in the fight against the new virus, "for being among the first to send bracing words and protective gear," Szijjártó said. He cited Wang

as saying that the number of new infections were now scarce outside Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, and patients recovered by their thousands every day. Szijjártó told the Chinese minister there were still no confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Hungary, and expressed his admiration for the Chinese doctors and nurses caring for the infected.

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## **CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER CHANGES CORONAVIRUS PROTOCOLS FOR GPS**

General practitioners have received new protocols in connection with a possible outbreak of coronavirus, the chief medical officer told a press conference. Cecília Müller said the new rules were necessary to minimise personal contact. Patients with symptoms of the new coronavirus, or people who have travelled to affected countries or had contact with infected individuals should not visit their doctor but make a phone call first, she said. If coronavirus infection is suspected, the doctor will call an ambulance and the patient will be taken to the nearest infectology department. A total 137 tests have so far been made, but none indicated presence of the virus, she added.

At a separate press conference, Colonel Tibor Lakatos, the leader of the call centre for coronavirus queries, said Hungarian authorities have so far tested 4,927 people for the new coronavirus at entry points into the country, 408 of which received

preliminary medical checks. There are currently 89,197 Covid-19 infections in the world, 2,217 of them registered in Europe, Lakatos said. The number of fatalities so far is 3,048, 36 of whom died in Europe, he said.

Meanwhile, Polish airline LOT has cancelled its Budapest-Seoul flights on March 3, 10, 17 and 24, Budapest Airport, the operator of Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International Airport, told MTI. Due to falling demand amid the new coronavirus outbreak, low-cost carrier Wizz Air last week announced to cancel its Debrecen-Milan flight and heavily reduce capacity on flights to Italian cities from Budapest until April 2.

## **MI HAZÁNK HOLDS HORTHY COMMEMORATION IN BUDAPEST**

The non-parliamentary Mi Hazánk Movement held a torchlight march in Budapest on Sunday to mark the centenary of Miklós Horthy's election as regent. Representatives of the Miklós Horthy Society, the Trianon Society, the Independent Smallholders Party, MIÉP and the Sixty-four Counties Youth Movement, among others, took part in the march, which followed the same route that Horthy took from Gellért Hill to Parliament, crossing Liberty Bridge. László Toroczka, Mi Hazánk's leader, declared at the march: "We are the heirs to the Horthy era." "We believe Hungary belongs to Hungarians." He also called for the

law that ratified the Treaty of Trianon to be repealed. Reformed Church minister Lóránt Hegedűs, president of the Miklós Horthy Society, called for the rehabilitation of Horthy's social policies. He said it was important to fight "accusations against Hungarians" in connection with Adolf Hitler, which he insisted were the result of the falsification of history.

Hundreds of torchbearers marched from St. Gellért Square, across Liberty Bridge, to Martyrs' Square near Parliament, led by a white horse symbolising the regent. "They were met by around 60 anti-fascist demonstrators who played loud music and chanted: Horthy's crimes! White Terror! Fascist state! Anti-Jewish Law! and Nazis go back home!" Police kept the peace and separated the Horthy marchers from the protesters with cordons.

## **BAKONDI: 'MASSIVE INCREASE' IN ILLEGAL MIGRATION SINCE JAN 1**

The number of attempts for illegal entry along Hungary's southern borders "showed a massive increase" in the first two months of the year, György Bakondi, chief security advisor to the prime minister, said. Bakondi said that 6,597 people had been apprehended at the Hungary-Serbia border since January 1, compared with 1,315 in the same period of 2018 and 1,534 last year. The advisor noted that 465 illegal migrants attempted to cross the Hungary-Romania border in

the same period, up from a mere 12 in 2018 and 33 in 2019. Bakondi added that at present there were 321 migrants in Hungary's transit zone, while legal proceedings were under way against 86 suspected people smugglers.

## **LMP CALLS FOR 60% WAGE INCREASE FOR TEACHERS**

Opposition LMP has called for an immediate 60% wage increase for teachers, amendments to strike laws in order to improve teachers' interest representation options and adjusting the calculation of teachers' wages to reflect the increase in minimum wages, party lawmaker Krisztina Hohn said. Hohn told a press conference that LMP supports teachers trade union PDSZ's demand for a wage increase, adding that a career-starting graduate would make less than the minimum wage under the current calculation rules. This is because the minimum wage has been gradually increasing in recent years but the formula for teachers' wages remained unchanged, she said. She called the government's announcement of a 10% wage hike for teachers a "joke" compared to the recent "brutal price increases". At the same time, the wages of school directors and their deputies did increase, which has resulted in a wage gap with regular teachers, she said. Hohn said the changes are needed to reduce the current shortage of teachers and to prevent teachers from changing jobs.

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## **DK PROPOSES COMPENSATION FOR ISOLATED CORONAVIRUS SUSPECTS**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has proposed legislation in line with which Hungarians quarantined due to a suspicion of coronavirus should be compensated from central coffers. DK deputy leader Ágnes Vadai said that the virus could appear in Hungary and suspected cases may need to be isolated, adding that labour regulations applying to people quarantined were not clear.

Under DK's proposal, they should be paid their full wages from the central budget, and it should be prohibited to dismiss them from their jobs during the time spent in quarantine and 30 days afterwards. Such people should be allowed to postpone their public utility bills, mortgage or tax payments during the same period, she said.

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## **ANOTHER MP QUILTS JOBBIK**

MP Tibor Bana said he had quit the conservative Jobbik party, citing a "completely indefensible" path

pursued by its new leadership. In a Facebook entry, Bana, who represents Vas County, said he had wanted Jobbik to function as "a centre-right, civic and European force". Instead, he said, "[party leader] Péter Jakab and [deputy leader] Márton Gyöngyösi's leadership has brought nihilism, populism and internal retribution to the party". Bana vowed to continue working as an independent MP and contribute to a joint opposition election campaign in 2022. According to parliament's website, Bana had served as the deputy head of the assembly's European affairs committee since 2018. Last month, MP János Bencsik announced his decision to quit Jobbik and its parliamentary group.

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## **DIGITAL FREEDOM CTTEE HOLDS INAUGURAL SESSION**

The justice ministry's digital freedom committee aimed at improving the transparency of tech firms held its inaugural session, Justice Minister Judit Varga said. The committee has been tasked with looking into the impact technology companies have on the rule of law, the enforcement of individual freedoms and basic

democratic norms, Varga told MTI. The committee will involve stakeholders in looking into existing regulations concerning online activities. The white paper published in connection with the committee covers topics like the right to freedom of expression, privacy protection, the protection of personal data, media regulation, taxation, intellectual property rights, criminal justice, child protection and the digital sovereignty of tech firms, she said. At the session, Varga said Budapest will this year host the Budapest Forum on Digital Freedom, an international conference on the topics in question. Hungary will also initiate a meeting of the Visegrad Group justice ministers in the matter, she added.

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## **PUSKÁS ARENA TO HOST 2022 EUROPA LEAGUE FINAL**

The 2022 Europa League final will be held in Budapest's Puskás Arena, UEFA said. The UEFA executive committee's landmark decision means Hungary gets to host its first-ever single-match final of a men's international cup tournament. The 2022 Europa League final will be held either on May 18 or May 25.