

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Gergő Rácz (C) and Reni Orsovai (L), winners of Hungarian song contest A Dal 2020

MTVA/Márton Mónus

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Updates on new coronavirus outbreak**

**Plenary session of parliament**

**Finance ministry releases budget report for Jan-Feb**

**Innovation and technology minister on University of Debrecen-MIT cooperation**

## TOP STORY

# HUNGARY CORONAVIRUS CASES RISE TO 7

Hungary's operative board coordinating efforts against the new coronavirus has recommended that hospitals and nursing homes introduce visiting bans as the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country rose to seven over the weekend.

Tibor Lakatos, head of the board's emergency centre, told a news conference that Hungary has so far only identified individual cases of the virus and that the aim was to prevent an epidemic. Of the seven people diagnosed with the new virus so far, four are Iranian citizens, one is British and two are Hungarian nationals, he said.

Chief medical officer Cecília Müller said their condition was satisfactory, adding that only the elderly Hungarian patient with underlying illnesses was in a poor condition.

Tamás Schanda, a state secretary of the innovation and technology ministry, told the same news conference that the government has ordered nationwide consumer protection inspections with a view to catching any retailers looking to take advantage of consumers concerned about the virus. He added that retailers were constantly restocking their supplies and there was "no reason to panic".

Foreign ministry state secretary Tamás Menczer said there were seven Hungarian citizens quarantined in four foreign countries, including one who has tested positive for the virus in Japan.

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## **GOVT CANCELS MARCH 15 STATE CELEBRATIONS OVER CORONAVIRUS CONCERNS**

Hungary's government has decided to cancel next week's state celebrations of the March 15 national holiday because of the new coronavirus, at the recommendation of the operative board overseeing the response to the virus, the Government Information Office said over the weekend. Though Hungary so far has only identified individual coronavirus cases and there are no major centres of infection, the state commemoration of the 1848 revolution held in the garden of the National Museum would attract people from all over the country, the statement said. "Therefore the government has decided to accept the operative board's recommendation and will cancel the March 15 celebration at the Museum Garden for security reasons," it added. Local commemoration events will be decided on by the local organisers, the centre said.

Soon after the government's cancelling of the celebrations, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony also announced that a March 15 event planned for City Hall would be cancelled. "Nothing is more important than the safety and health of Budapest residents," the mayor said on Facebook. He said he hoped the virus hazard could soon be eliminated and "our cancelled reunion could be made

up for". Two cities in the provinces followed suit, with Szeged, in the south, and Székesfehérvár, in the west, cancelling celebrations of the national holiday.

Meanwhile, the opposition Momentum Movement announced on Facebook that the leftist Democratic Coalition, conservative Jobbik, the Socialist Party, Párbeszéd, green LMP and the Liberal Party had also decided to cancel their joint March 15 event "in the interest of protecting the health of attendees".

Earlier, Tibor Lakatos, the head of the operative board's emergency centre, told a news conference that steps had been taken to suspend the operation of Milan-Budapest and Milan-Debrecen flights.

Lakatos added that any suspected patient who fails to submit to the necessary medical procedures could face criminal charges. He said proceedings were under way against two Iranian citizens who were refusing to comply with the rules of quarantine. He said anyone who deliberately infects someone else could be charged with causing serious bodily harm. If their actions lead to someone's death, they could face homicide charges, he added.

As regards the operative board's most recent measures, he noted that visa issuance has been suspended to Iranian citizens for an indefinite period, the South Pest Central Hospital has begun making room for more potential patients and prisons have been instructed to prepare

epidemiological plans. Lakatos said several corporations have released their own action plans and the ban on lorries has been lifted for this weekend at the request of retailers and shops. In addition, schools have been sent a list of recommendations of epidemiological response measures. Transit zones at the southern border are still on lockdown, he said, adding that there are currently 306 people staying in them.

Miklós Kásler, the human resources minister, said that the most important thing was to prevent an epidemic of the virus in Hungary, noting that only individual cases had been identified so far. He said that if necessary, more space would be made available for quarantines at the Kútvölgyi hospital block.

Chief medical officer Cecília Müller said the fifteen Japanese tourists who were taken to St. László Hospital late on Thursday had tested negative and have been released from hospital. The health authorities are currently looking into whom the Covid-19 patients had come into contact with, she said.

## **DK PROPOSES MEASURES TO PREVENT NEW VIRUS FROM SPREADING**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) on Sunday presented a series of proposals to tackle the coronavirus outbreak in Hungary. Speaking at a press conference, MP Lajos Oláh suggested drawing up a list of countries from which passengers

arriving in Hungary should report to the health authorities. He added that those resisting isolation should be fined. School trips and study tours should be cancelled, while the government should also put a cap on public gatherings and cancel larger ones due to the epidemic, he said.

According to DK, disinfecting hands in public institutions should be made mandatory, while the state should provide local governments with the necessary funds to disinfect public spaces. He noted that the elderly were especially vulnerable to the new virus and proposed that events scheduled for seniors should be cancelled. Oláh added that the government should encourage companies to have their employees working from their homes, as well as set up a fund to compensate people off work because of a need to be isolated.

### **WIZZ AIR SUSPENDS FLIGHTS TO MILAN, TREVISO, BERGAMO**

Hungarian low-cost carrier Wizz Air has suspended its flights to Milan, Treviso, and Bergamo due to the coronavirus outbreak and a quarantine in northern Italy, until April 3, the company told MTI over the weekend. The company said it would inform passengers with bookings for the cancelled flights, adding that they could choose between a full refund or 120% of the price they paid credited to their WIZZ accounts. Passengers that booked their flights through a travel agency should

contact their agent to learn about those options, the company said.

Meanwhile, operator Budapest Airport announced that Liszt Ferenc International Airport would not receive flights from Milan, Bergamo, or Treviso from Monday on. It added that since the introduction of coronavirus-related measures at the airport, a total of 5,919 passengers and 416 crew members have been checked for fever, a symptom of the Covid-19 disease.

### **KARÁCSONY: OPPOSITION SHOULD STAY FOCUSED ON FUTURE**

Hungary's opposition parties can only be successful in the next general election if they stay focused on the future, rather than "trying to return to the pre-2010 world", Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said over the weekend. "The opposition shouldn't be competing in who hates [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán more or how many likes they get when they lure away another party's politician," Karácsony, the co-leader of liberal Párbeszéd, told an event focused on green policy. The opposition would attract more votes if it were capable of presenting a worldview of its own, the mayor said, adding, at the same time, that voters today were only capable of retaining the government's messaging. "They can barely say anything about the kind of world the opposition would strive to create if it came into power," he said. Karácsony said this meant that the opposition had to be responsible when

shaping and implementing policy measures. Since there are three million Hungarians living in municipalities governed by the opposition, he said, the parties had an opportunity to enact policies but were also faced with the possibility of failure. Karácsony said the opposition had to offer "responsible, 21st-century green and left-wing policies". He said the opposition should conduct primaries before they put together their 2022 candidate list, arguing that last year's local elections had shown that an election victory required collaboration with civil groups and local organisations.

Timea Szabó, Párbeszéd's other co-leader, said the difference between true green parties and "those who only brandish themselves as green" was that "real greens" were ready to spend to meet the needs of the people.

Independent lawmaker Bernadett Szél said climate change would create "a new order" in Hungarian politics. "National populism has no answer to the real problems and does nothing but leech off of people's poverty," she said.

### **PM ORBÁN MARKS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán greeted women in a message on social media on Sunday, marking International Women's Day. In his message, Orbán quoted former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as saying that "If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman."

## **ERDŐ INAUGURATES CHAPEL AT STATE SECRETARIAT FOR ASSISTANCE TO PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS**

Cardinal Péter Erdő, head of the Hungarian Catholic Church, inaugurated a chapel at the Prime Minister's Office's state secretariat in charge of assistance for persecuted Christian communities. At the inauguration ceremony, Erdő said that the new chapel was "some space taken from the profane for prayer and worship" and called for compassion for all those who are "oppressed, slandered, or persecuted because of their faith".

State secretary Tristan Azbej told MTI after the inauguration service that the Catholic chapel was the first of its kind on the premises of a ministry. He called it an "ecumenical sacral space" in which Orthodox or Protestant services could also be held. He added that the new chapel has received a number of objects of liturgy and relics, including the

relics of Saint Charbel and Ignatius Maloyan, from persecuted Christian communities across the world.

## **COMMEMORATION HELD IN PARLIAMENT TO PAY TRIBUTE TO JÁNOS ESTERHÁZY**

A commemoration was held in Parliament on Sunday, to pay tribute to the late Count János Esterházy, the sole Hungarian deputy in the Slovak parliament before 1945. At the ceremony Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said in his address that Esterhazy's legacy was "global and national at the same time", adding that the late count was a "much-suffered, innocent saint", who should be revered by "all for whom freedom and human dignity are unquestionable values". Gulyás said he hoped that Esterházy would soon be officially rehabilitated, an act "our Czech and Slovak friends owe to his memory, to justice, and thirdly, to themselves".

In another development, Gulyás said that ramifications of the Trianon

Peace Treaty concluding the first world war had "determined the careers of all politicians" of the 20th century. "We have had to fight for the survival of our communities. Sometimes we have to make tremendous sacrifices so that there are people speaking and singing in Hungarian, praying and dreaming in Hungarian even if they live in an ethnic minority under the rule of another state."

Esterházy (1901-1957) was a firm advocate of the ethnic Hungarian community, raising his voice against any violation of minority rights and against discrimination. Czechoslovak authorities arrested him in 1945 under the charge of war crimes, and turned him over to the Soviet military authorities. In 1947 he was sentenced to 10 years of forced labour in Moscow and handed a death sentence in absentia in Bratislava on trumped-up charges. Two years later, the Soviet Union extradited the ailing politician to Czechoslovakia, where the president commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment. The count died in a prison in Mirov on March 8, 1957.