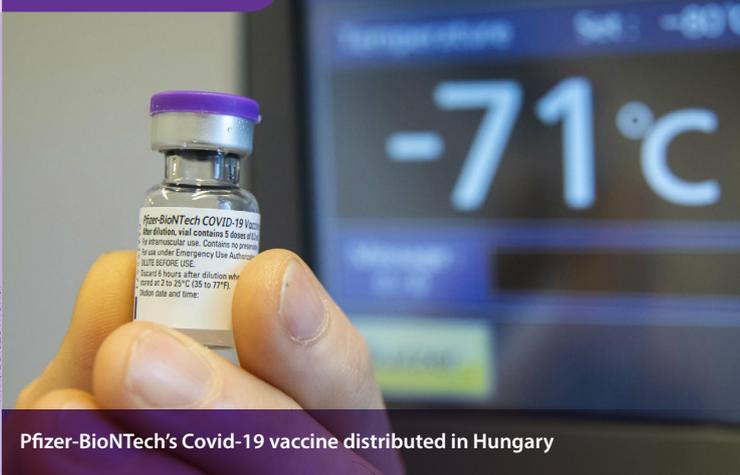


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Balázs Mohai

Pfizer-BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine distributed in Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

President Áder gives New Year's speech

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

BIONTECH VP PUBLIC MEDIA'S PERSON OF THE YEAR

Hungarian biochemist Katalin Karikó, a senior vice president at German biopharmaceutical company BioNTech, is the inaugural winner of the Public Media's Person of the Year Award, public media foundation MTVA said.

The award, founded by public service media operator Duna Médiaszolgáltató and MTVA, is handed out at the end of each year to those whose professional careers have delivered lasting value and who had a significant impact on current events over the last year, MTVA said in a statement. Because of the impact the novel coronavirus pandemic has had on 2020, Hungarian public media chose Karikó, whose work was crucial in the development of one of the vaccines against the virus, as the recipient of this year's award.

Duna Médiaszolgáltató chief executive Menyhért Dobos praised Karikó's role in "allowing humanity to overcome" the coronavirus pandemic. "There could not be a more worthy recipient of the Public Media's Person of the Year Award than Katalin Karikó, whose discovery and work has restored hope to us all," Dobos said.

MTVA chief executive Dániel Papp said the award served to preserve and enrich Hungarian national identity, adding that Karikó was an "important treasure" to Hungarians all around the world.

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**ORBÁN'S RESPONSE TO
MANFRED WEBER**

In a response to criticisms by European People's Party group leader Manfred Weber, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has defended the record of his government over the past ten years. In the response entitled "Samizdat No.5", the prime minister wrote (the response in full):

"To the German public, Manfred Weber has labelled Hungary's policies as being on the wrong track. These are the policies that have been governing Hungary for the last ten years. Before the COVID crisis hit, these policies have succeeded in cutting unemployment from 12 percent to below 4 percent and decreasing state debt from 84 percent to less than 66 percent. Meanwhile, we have more than doubled the minimum wage and nearly doubled the average wage. At the same time, the financial assets of households have grown threefold. Since 2014, Hungary's GDP has grown 2-3 percent above the EU average. Hungary has spent the most in relative terms on family support, culture and sport. We guarantee places in creche and nursery schools and provide free, school meals and textbooks for Hungarian children.

Is this the wrong track?

"Clearly, Manfred Weber resents Hungary. He blames us for his failure to become the president of the European Commission.

This is true. But should a leader of a European political party be allowed to let his vision succumb to personal anger or even hatred? Even if it is understandable on a personal level, it is not right. We expect that our leaders will strengthen our party family, elevate its weight and influence so that together we would be stronger than the mathematical sum of our efforts.

"Manfred Weber has joined the elite club of the Left, where an absurd European political geometry is currently in fashion. According to this geometry, the political right only has extremes; therefore, even its mere existence poses continuous threats: it is synonymous with fascism, Nazism, nationalism, anti-Semitism and homophobia. The political left, however, only has a center, therefore it means no threat to the European People's Party's ideals, and neither does it jeopardize freedom, democracy and market economy. First, they kicked the Brits out of the EPP, then the EU; the conservatives led by PiS, in this geometry, cannot be considered partners; and it is better to get rid of the suspicious, Fidesz-like Christian conservatives, too.

"The gates must be opened towards the left. Let's welcome the Social Democrats, then the left-wing Liberals, soon the Greens. Who knows where it will stop? It's a slippery slope.

"The people in Brussels must understand that, for us in Central

Europe, our contempt for Marx, Lenin and communism is no less than what we feel for Nazis and national socialism.

"A politician with ambitions for high office in Brussels must understand that Central Europe will never surrender its Christian values, national culture and our belief in the traditional - and, for us, the only - family model.

Those pursuing positions in Brussels must understand that the goal is not the cultural, liberal homogenization of Europe but the construction of the alliance of free nations.

"If they are German, politicians applying for Brussels offices never have easy paths.

"A politician with ambitions for high office in Brussels must never forget this. They would be making a mistake if, instead of accepting our cultural and historical differences, they tried to force migrants on us or threatened us with sanctions, withdrawal of funds, starving us out and other assorted torments. They would be making a mistake, if they denied the existence of national sovereignty, as does Weber. They would err if, as Weber suggests, they placed the European Parliament above national parliaments, and, instead of the consensual decisions provided for by the EU Treaties, they would favour in the future a majority decision-making process, one that suppresses smaller countries. It is not easy, but it is possible to thread the eye of the needle. Supposedly, everyone is capable."



NOVÁK: CIVIC GOVT GUARANTEE TO CONTINUED FAMILY SUPPORT

Only the Fidesz civic government can guarantee the preservation of family support, the minister in charge of families said in an interview published in Wednesday's daily Magyar Nemzet. Katalin Novák said living standards for the majority of Hungarians had improved, with the income of families with children up 13% last year. Novák said "the largest home-creation programme of all time" would be under way in January and thirteenth month pensions will be gradually reintroduced, while support for mothers raising children under six months old will increase from July. Personal tax exemption for mothers with at least four children was introduced in January, and once the epidemic is defeated and the economy has recovered, the exemption will be extended to mothers with three children, she said.

Novák said much would be at stake in the 2022 general election. She said the opposition had planned to abolish the CSOK family home-creation subsidy during the 2018 election campaign, so "there is nothing new about their anti-family approach", she said. "It would be naive to think that once the left wing gains a position from which they can have a significant influence on the running of the country, they would not make decisions that harm families," she added.

Commenting on pensioners, she said the government had increased the purchasing power of pensions by over ten percent. Further, current regulations that raise pensions by the rate of projected annual inflation guarantee "they will not be worse off than others". "We are reintroducing thirteenth month pensions and there is also a pension premium which has been paid for the past three years. No other government has managed to do this," she added.

NEW SHIPMENT OF VACCINES ARRIVES IN HUNGARY

A second shipment of the German-American coronavirus vaccine containing 70,000 doses arrived in Liszt Ferenc International Airport on Wednesday morning, according to public television channel M1. The first shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in Hungary on Saturday. Around 2,500 health-care staff have been vaccinated with it so far. The new shipment arrived in Hungary on board a Boeing 757 from Germany. The second consignment will be sufficient to inoculate 35,000 Hungarian health-care staff.

During the day, shipments of the vaccine were sent to hospitals in Budapest, Győr, Kecskemét, Tatabánya, Kaposvár, Miskolc, Székesfehérvár and Balassagyarmat. Distribution of the vaccine continued later on Wednesday to another 11 hospitals both in Budapest and in the provinces.

CORONAVIRUS - 137 FATALITIES, 1,972 MORE INFECTIONS

Fully 137 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,972 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 319,543, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday. The death toll has risen to 9,429, while the number of people who have made a recovery has increased to 144,234.

The number of active infections stands at 165,880, while there are 6,115 hospitalised Covid patients, 425 on a ventilator. Altogether 19,496 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,639,729. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (61,405) and Pest County (40,131) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (18,606), Hajdú-Bihar (18,264) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,193). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,206).

ÁDER SENDS LETTER OF CONDOLENCE TO CROATIAN PRESIDENT

Hungarian President Janos Áder has sent a letter of condolence to his Croatian counterpart, Zoran Milanović, over the earthquake in Croatia. In the letter sent on Tuesday, Áder wrote of his shock at learning of the earthquake which claimed several lives and left

many injured, while leaving major damage in its wake. "My condolences to everyone affected by the severe earthquake on behalf of the citizens of Hungary and myself," the president wrote. Áder said that hopefully the restoration work would begin and the lives of residents in the affected areas would return to normal as soon as possible. "We're ready to take part in rescue and recovery," he wrote.

KARÁCSONY: VACCINE THE ONLY SOLUTION

The vaccine against the novel coronavirus is the only solution to the pandemic, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said on Facebook on Wednesday, emphasising the need to build greater public trust in the vaccine. Governments, local councils, scientists and doctors must all focus their efforts on boosting trust in the vaccine, Karácsony said. "And trust can only be built -- or to be more precise, restored -- through clear, straightforward and honest communication, by respecting and disseminating the facts, through cooperation and partnership," he added.

The mayor also slammed the government for what he called "its

harmful tampering with the data on the epidemic". He said this had led to nearly one-third of Hungarians choosing not to get the Covid-19 vaccine over a lack of trust in the government. Karácsony called it "pathetic" that the government on Wednesday omitted Budapest's Covid-19 numbers from its report after he recently assessed the capital's official figures. "The ability to protect the country and save lives could depend on the restoration of trust," Karácsony said. He urged the government to publish every bit of relevant information it has on the epidemic, calling on it to set up a nationwide vaccination programme in cooperation with local councils. Karácsony encouraged the public to trust the vaccine provided by the European Union and get themselves inoculated against Covid-19.

BUDAPEST FIDESZ GROUP ACCUSES CITY MAYOR OF REGARDING CITIZENS AS NO MORE THAN 'MEANS TO POWER'

The opposition Fidesz group in the Budapest city council slammed Mayor Gergely Karácsony and his

colleagues on Wednesday, accusing them of "unscrupulously regarding Budapest citizens as a means to power". The Fidesz group said on Facebook that they would continue to work against the "mayor's lies" next year, and highlight "every mistake and abuse" in order to protect the interests of Budapest residents.

The Fidesz post said Karácsony's promises of transparency during his election campaign were hollow. They accused him of abusing emergency powers to personally decide on the city council's 2021 budget without even consulting the opposition. He appointed political allies to head the city's companies, they said, adding that his "pal" Benedek Jávor was spending four times as much money in Brussels as was allocated in past years. "Not even a single trace of Karácsony's election promises can be seen in his everyday activities," the Facebook post said. His numerous mistaken or legally faulty decisions have resulted in several millions of forints in fines payable by the metropolitan council and its companies, Fidesz added.

