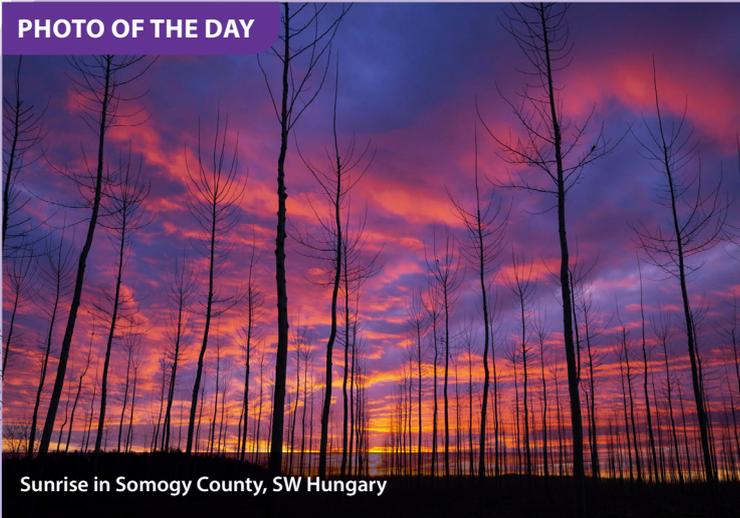


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/György Varga

Sunrise in Somogy County, SW Hungary

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: HUNGARY PREPARED FOR MASS VACCINATIONS

All the necessary technical conditions are in place to begin swift mass vaccinations against Covid-19 in Hungary once vaccines are delivered in larger quantities, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a radio interview.

Hungary currently has enough vaccines to inoculate 35,000 people, Orbán told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, noting that health-care workers are the first to get the Covid shot under the government's vaccination plan. In the event that the country would suddenly have access to millions of vaccines, the shots would be administered at over 10,000 locations, Orbán said, adding that the vaccinations would take place at the regular electoral polling stations. He added, however, that Hungary is not expected to receive millions of vaccines in the foreseeable future, as not even the vaccine producers are in the position to project when they will be able to ship more doses or how many. Orbán also said he would not want to "speculate" as to how quickly Hungary would be receiving more vaccines. "If we have a lot of vaccines, we'll vaccinate a lot of people quickly, but if they arrive at a slower pace, then the vaccinations will also be slower and fewer people will get the shot," he said. Hungary managed to rein in the second wave of the pandemic and now a third one must be prevented, he said.

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**ORBÁN: HUNGARY  
PROCURING COVID  
VACCINES THROUGH EU,  
BILATERAL DEALS**

Hungary is ordering vaccines against Covid-19 both together with other European Union member states and also exercising its option of buying more on its own through bilateral agreements, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a radio interview. "The vaccines coming from the West are being handled by the European Union," Orbán said, noting that doses member states order together are to be distributed among them by Brussels. "I'm not satisfied with the pace, because there are manufacturers whose products were available sooner in Canada, Britain and Israel than for instance in the European Union," the prime minister said, adding, at the same time, that Brussels was not to blame for "being at the mercy of pharmaceutical companies".

He said Hungary and Germany are two countries exercising their option to buy vaccines on their own in addition to the ones they buy through the EU. This, however, is not considered a violation of the agreement with the other member states, he said, noting that the deal does not bar countries from purchasing more vaccines through bilateral agreements. The government is primarily focused on vaccines being developed in the East, Orbán said. Russia's Sputnik V vaccine is unlikely to

be available in the quantities Hungary would need, he said, adding that though China's vaccine was looking more promising, it was not available yet, either. The prime minister said that ideally, people would get to choose whether they prefer to be inoculated with a vaccine developed in the West or in China. The prime minister dismissed as "falsehoods" claims by the opposition that the government did not have a vaccination plan. He argued that both he himself and the chief medical officer had made it clear multiple times that health-care workers would be vaccinated first, followed by social-sector employees, those vulnerable to the virus, the elderly and law-enforcement workers.

Orbán said the pandemic had also taught countries to build the industrial capacities necessary to make their own vaccine, even if those investments are lossmaking "in times of peace". Hungary's government, he said, had done everything necessary to build those capacities.

The prime minister also said the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine was "actually a Hungarian vaccine". He said he had recently "spoken at length" with Hungarian biochemist Katalin Karikó, a senior vice president at BioNTech, and had been told that though "a German professor is also involved in all of this, most of the scientists doing the research are Hungarian". "So it's only a bit of a stretch to say that this is a Hungarian vaccine developed using American money and Hungarian minds," Orbán said.

The prime minister also said that despite the criticisms from the leftist opposition, Hungary's health-care sector had "fared a lot better" than those of many of the more prosperous countries. "People didn't die here because of a lack of hospital care, we didn't have people lying in the hallways and doctors didn't have to decide who to save because of a shortage in ventilators," he said. Orbán praised the efforts of the country's doctors, nurses and teachers, who he said were the reason why many jobs were saved, as parents were not forced to stay home with their children. "It's often said that we're a disunited people and at times there are specific examples that illustrate this, but overall in times of serious trouble, it turns out that discipline, unity and the ability to bear responsibility for each other is strong in Hungarians," Orbán said. He noted that Hungary had not seen any protests against the coronavirus-related restrictions "even though they weren't enjoyable for anyone". The prime minister also noted the large-scale wage increases implemented in the health-care sector.

He said it was "hard to say" if the government could afford to relax restrictions before the arrival of the vaccine, arguing that if Hungary does not receive the vaccine on time, infections could flare up again. "Everyone wants to open up again ... but if we don't get the timing right, we could end up seeing a third wave," Orbán said.

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**ORBÁN: HUNGARY POISED FOR MOST SUCCESSFUL DECADE IN CENTURY**

Hungary’s last ten years were the country’s most successful decade in the last 100 years, “and the next ten years could be even better”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a radio interview. “We are at the gate of great times,” the prime minister told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, adding that 2021 could already be a “fantastic year” even if its first months still seem “miserable” due to the restrictions in place because of the coronavirus pandemic. “We will transition to an upward trajectory incredibly quickly,” Orbán said about the Hungarian economy. The global economy, too, could embark on a previously unforeseen level of growth, which Hungary will have to outpace, he added.

Orbán said the Hungarian economy was on the verge of a paradigm shift “that right now only a few understand”. Hungary is poised to become a digitalised circular economy that will be capable of processing its own waste, he said. The country will reduce its carbon emissions “to radically low levels”, it will have full employment and “a growth rate noticeably higher than the western half of the European Union”, he added. The people will prosper as well; they will live in larger homes and have more children, Orbán said. He said that by the end of the decade, the repatriated profits of Hungarian businesses investing abroad

would have to equal those that foreign businesses take out of the country.

Orbán said that unlike the political left, he did not believe in raising taxes during an economic crisis period. Governments and local councils should cut taxes in a time of crisis and banks, too, should get involved by extending the moratorium on loan repayments, Orbán said. He said not all local councils understood the importance of cutting taxes, but added that businesses would only be capable of hiring more people if their public burdens are reduced. Businesses should be put in a position in which they can hire as many people as possible, the prime minister said.

Orbán said his government had been successful in saving jobs during the first and also the second wave of the pandemic, noting that there were only 60,000 fewer employed than a year ago prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. Hungary trails only the Czech Republic and Germany when it comes to unemployment, he added. The prime minister said it was also important that Hungary had been able to carry on with its family support and home creation programmes and the reintroduction of the 13th month pension.

**ÁDER: LET US BE GRATEFUL FOR LIVES SAVED**

President János Áder, in his New Year’s address, said 2021 should be a year when Hungarians feel grateful for

lives saved and “touching moments of helping each other”. The coronavirus pandemic has left its mark on the New Year holiday, Áder said in his speech televised at midnight. All festivities departed from tradition due to the pandemic last year, he noted. “This time last year, we wished each other a Happy New Year without a care in the world,” he said. However, the happy confidence of the year’s start gave way to fear and uncertainty in a matter of weeks, he said. “Hardly anyone has been left untouched by the epidemic,” he said. Everyone is yearning to return to a life “with the gifts, freedoms and possibilities we all took for granted”.

Áder praised the “heroic” work of health-care staff, “making life-saving decisions even now, in the first hours of the new year.” “Can we ever repay them? Is it even possible to make up for this never-ending shift?” Áder called on Hungarians to be grateful for the work and perseverance of health-care and social services workers, to scientists for “helping us to get to know this hitherto unknown enemy, and for working on the vaccine.” Thanks, he said, were also due to teachers for adapting to an ever-changing situation and putting their hearts and souls into their work. “Let us be grateful to those working in the fields and factories, shop assistants, suppliers and law-enforcement officials, because their work kept the country going,” he said.

He called on Hungarians to show gratitude by “offering words of comfort, thanks, by showing discipline, being attentive, by accepting the

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truth, adhering to regulations and by putting our own wishes and interests on the back burner."

"Let there be fewer questions and more acceptance, less doubt and more trust," he said. Citing Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, Áder asked Hungarians to "appreciate those who diligently labour among you." "For that endeavour, I wish all of us strength, more patience, healing in body and spirit, and good health in the new year," Áder ended his speech.

**ORBÁN: SPORTS  
'INDISPENSABLE'**

The government has declared sports a strategic sector because it recognises its indispensable role in modern living, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told sports daily Nemzeti Sport. Aims include Hungary hosting the Olympics and the national eleven competing in the World Cup finals, Orbán said.

Meanwhile, Orbán said he had yet to receive a coronavirus vaccine. "I'm going to wait in line; now it's time to protect those working in hospital ICUs."

In sports, the priority is "survival and preservation" until life can get back to normal, he said. "That's not so far off, and could be sooner than we think." He said public health and safety currently were priority considerations. "That limits sports at the moment, but the vaccine is now here," he said, adding that life could start returning to normal in a matter of weeks. Orbán said sports had a "special place" in the lives of Hungarians and was an important element in the nation's education and

"character building". Also, it was "the best way to compare the performance of nations". The prime minister said football, as the most popular and widespread sport, had a prime role. "I always thought football was a matter of self-worth in Hungary."

Meanwhile, the "left wing opposes everything, including sports". "I don't think it is normal to be niggardly on stadiums and children's sports," he said, adding that Hungarian sport was "far from drowning in money". Regarding school sports, Orbán said that whereas PE lessons had once been treated as a health-care measure, now they specialised in various sports in cooperation with sports clubs. The prime minister said he was especially proud of the government's kindergarten sports policy and the equipment provided. Otherwise, sports facilities are now "no worse than Belgian, Spanish or Austrian clubs," he said.

Referring to corporate culture and sports subsidies known as "tao", Orbán said that the scheme, besides creating additional funding, fostered close bonds between corporations and sports organisations. Meanwhile, he said the government was also providing quality control in state-accredited football, handball and basketball academies, and was mulling drawing volleyball and ice hockey into the system too. The systems of academies and sports clubs are "coming into alignment, with good academies set up where there are good clubs to support them." Developing club culture will also help

struggling clubs financially, he said, by "prodding every member to be as good as possible".

Regarding the future, Orbán cited plans to build a large ice hockey centre, a pentathlon centre, a national fencing programme, a kayaking academy, a Moto GP track and to reconstruct the Hungaroring Formula-1 track. "We also have serious plans for cyclists," he said. "I'd like to live to see Hungary hosting the Olympics -- which we would have achieved by 2032 had it not been for the domestic coup," he said, referring to the Momentum Movement's signature drive against an Olympic bid in 2016. The prime minister said he also hoped to see "Hungarian football rising to a level it has already achieved twice, to the point of playing in World Cup finals."

**BUDAPEST MAYOR: NEW  
YEAR 'A CHANCE TO START  
OVER'**

The New Year is a chance to "start over and go back to the drawing board", Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said in a video on Facebook on New Year's Day, adding that he believed the vaccine against Covid-19 would allow Budapest and Hungary to overcome the coronavirus epidemic. "Many of us faced the toughest period of our lives in the last year," Karácsony said, adding that it had been "impossible" to foresee how hard the epidemic would affect the lives and livelihood of so many. "But not even the threat we all faced was enough for Hungarian politicians to work together," the mayor said. Karácsony



said Budapest's leadership believed the government was "only using one hand to fight the epidemic while using the other to fight local councils, especially those controlled by the opposition".

The mayor said that in 2021, Budapest would not only have to deal with the epidemic and its economic impact, but also "the austerity measures imposed by the government". With the "tens of billions of forints in budget cuts" and the economic slowdown caused by the epidemic, the capital's biggest challenge this year will be to ensure that it can continue to operate public services, Karácsony said. Budapest's leadership will work to protect the city from the epidemic, the economic crisis and the "destructive effects of the government's budget cuts", he added. "Budapest can't be defeated," Karácsony said. "Neither narrow-minded politicians, nor the epidemic will be able to overwhelm Budapest's united community." The mayor thanked Budapest's health-care, social and local-council employees, as well as the city's residents for their efforts, discipline and cooperation over the past year. Karácsony said he was convinced that not only would "life get back to normal" in the year ahead, "but that we'll do everything better".

## **GULYÁS: HUNGARY HEALTH CARE PROVED WORLD-CLASS IN PANDEMIC**

Hungarian health-care workers deserve praise for providing the best

possible care during the coronavirus pandemic, the prime minister's chief of staff said. The health-care system deployed enough doctors, nurses and equipment at all times, he said. In an interview to commercial broadcaster ATV, Gergely Gulyás slammed the opposition for putting all their efforts into "smear campaigns against the government and the health-care system, and into producing fake videos lambasting nurses." The pandemic-related mortality rate puts Hungarian health care on par with French, Swedish and Croatian services, Gulyás said. That achievement is in itself ample justification for the "enormous and unprecedented" wage rise for doctors, which will come into effect on Friday, with a law outlawing gratuity payments, he said. The same goes for the 72% wage rise for nurses due during the next cycle, he said.

Addressing allegations by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony that the government was falsifying pandemic-related data, Gulyás said the mayor's "actions are mere social media stunts, while Budapest is slowly drowning in the growing number of homeless people, traffic jams and waste in public spaces." Regarding the coronavirus vaccine being rolled out in Hungary, Gulyás said he would be inoculated "when it is my turn". The first to get the vaccine will be health-care workers, essential workers and those with underlying conditions, he said. "A Hungarian politician skipping the line for the vaccine while there are only a few thousand doses at hand would

quickly fall victim to people's anger," he said. All accredited vaccines are incomparably less risky than the virus itself, Gulyás said. All those willing to be inoculated should register, and all those registered will have a vaccine, he added. Getting vaccinated obviates the need for mandatory quarantine, Gulyás said. Those who accept the vaccine "will be differentiated from those refusing it in certain areas of life," he said, adding that people would be given the means to prove, in some form or other, that they had received the vaccine.

Regarding Democratic Coalition leader Ferenc Gyurcsány, Gulyás said the former prime minister "once ruined the country already". "He is leading a coalition of everyone from the radical left to anti-Semites, and so he is more dangerous than ever." Gulyás said he attached little importance to whom the opposition coalition would field as their prime ministerial candidate. "In a coalition without principles, with so many different parties in alliance, the real power is with the party leaders," he said. Left-wing parties are legitimising radicals to obtain power, he said. "They are making anti-Semitism mainstream again ... while even they themselves know they are incapable of leading the country." Gulyás said the Fidesz alliance with the Christian Democrats today would handily win in an election pitted against the left-wing opposition bloc.

He said Fidesz had always taken a rational approach to the EU. As membership of the bloc is in Hungary's interest, Fidesz would vote to join today. But, he added, there were numerous



and ever more “legitimate criticisms” of the EU. The government, he said, supported European rules and measures serving to protect European financial interests and making the fight against corruption more effective, but “Brussels cannot be allowed to take away the governance of cultural, migration or family policy from Budapest under the heading of the rule of law.” It is the prime minister who should determine Hungary’s direction based on the constitution, not Brussels, he said, adding that the Hungarian left wing and “EU elites” dreamt of a United States of Europe that would subsume national powers. On the topic of the new US administration, Gulyás said the government gave all democratically elected governments the respect they deserved. “We’re allies of the United States, so we seek rational, values-based, allied cooperation with all US governments,” he said. “Whether the other side is receptive to this is another matter,” he added. He said the government was glad to cooperate rationally based on mutual interests. Gulyás said the new administration’s foreign policy would hopefully be “wiser than its Democratic predecessor”. The PM’s chief of staff added that Washington had not succeeded in “defining its own interests in our region” under the Obama administration. “What our region’s communists failed to make people believe about America with 40 years of dictatorship propaganda the Obama-Hillary administration succeeded in doing in a matter of eight years,” Gulyás added.

## **CORONAVIRUS - 103 FATALITIES, 1,307 MORE INFECTIONS**

Fully 103 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,307 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 327,995, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said on Sunday. The death toll has risen to 9,884, while the number of people who have made a recovery has increased to 168,381. The number of active infections stands at 149,730, while there are 5,619 hospitalised Covid patients, 403 on a ventilator. Altogether 16,537 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,691,904. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (62,423) and Pest County (41,036) so far, followed by the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (18,939), Hajdú-Bihar (18,796) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (18,607). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (6,503).

In the last press conference of the operative staff responsible for handling the coronavirus epidemic of 2020, Cecília Müller, the chief medical officer, said Hungary’s biggest Covid-related challenge in 2021 would be to organise vaccinations. Müller noted that so far 5,110 health-care staff have been vaccinated and jabs are currently available at 21 vaccination points. From Jan. 4, this number will increase to 25, and people working in social care,

residents of care homes and people suffering from chronic illness gradually will be offered vaccination.

## **FAMILIES MINISTER: GOVT LAUNCHING BIGGEST HOME CREATION SCHEME YET**

The government is launching its biggest ever home creation scheme this year, Katalin Novák, the minister for family affairs, said on Facebook. Under the scheme, the VAT rate on newly built homes is reduced from 27% to 5% from Jan. 1, Novák said. The measures also make new home purchases with the CSOK housing subsidy scheme exempt from VAT and all home purchases with CSOK exempt from duties, the minister said.

The first day of the year also marks the launch of a new home renovation subsidy for households with at least one child, Novák noted. Under the scheme, half of the renovation costs up to a maximum of 3 million forints (EUR 8,200) per renovation will be covered by the state. Also, a preferential home renovation loan will be available from February 1, she said, noting that its term will be limited to ten years.

The government is also extending the CSOK scheme to loft conversions, Novák said. Families with three children who avail themselves of this option will be eligible for a 10 million forint subsidy, those with two children will get 2.6 million forints, while families with one child will be entitled to a 600,000 forint non-repayable subsidy,

the minister said. A maximum 10 million forints is available in the CSOK support plus another maximum 15 million forints in the CSOK related subsidised-interest loan, she added.

## **OPPOSITION DECLARES OBJECTION TO GOVT'S TREATMENT OF LOCAL COUNCILS, EPIDEMIC RESPONSE**

Hungarian opposition parties have jointly declared their objection to the Orbán government "bleeding dry local councils" and its "irresponsible epidemic handling and crisis management". "Robbing our cities is not governance," according to the statement issued by the opposition alliance on Thursday, signed by party leaders András Fekete-Győr (Momentum), Ferenc Gyurcsány (Democratic Coalition), Péter Jakab (Jobbik), Ágnes Kunhalmi and Bertalan Tóth (Socialists), Tímea Szabó and Gergely Karácsony (Párbeszéd), Erzsébet Schmuck and Máté Kanász-Nagy (LMP). The statement accuses the government of "abandoning government responsibility in the hardest of times as well as millions of Hungarians". It also charges the government with using public funds to support its own clientele rather

than handling the epidemic and "the economic crisis", spending "hundreds of billions" on stadiums, motorsports and the prime minister's residence.

The opposition alliance said halving local business taxes would not provide meaningful help to troubled businesses but it would jeopardise public services provided by local councils across the country by depriving them of vital revenue, forcing many into bankruptcy. The statement says local councils run by the opposition would have to contend with austerity imposed by the central government seven times as severe as that affecting Fidesz-led councils. Further, a "vast majority" of county seats run by opposition mayors were excluded from central compensation funding, it added. Fully, 2.5 million Hungarians living in opposition-run areas would suffer as a result, they said.

Ruling Fidesz in a statement said the opposition's actions had been "shameful all year". This year, the opposition obstructed all decisions necessary to fight the coronavirus pandemic and withheld their vote for the law allocating the funds for it, the statement said. They also "lied throughout the year, produced fake videos and fake news", it said. Meanwhile, the government is providing all necessary support

for the protection efforts and to protect Hungarian families and jobs, it said. Halving the business tax aims at protecting SMEs and thereby local jobs, the statement said. The government is also allocating significant funds to local governments, and had freed them from a total of 1,300 billion forints (EUR 35.6bn) of debt accumulated under leftist governments, the statement added.

## **ORBÁN VISITS KNIFED POLICE OFFICER IN HOSPITAL**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Thursday visited a hospitalised police officer who was knifed last week in a suburb of Budapest, the prime minister's media chief told MTI. Orbán also visited the coronavirus vaccination point at the same hospital, the Honvéd. The prime minister thanked the policeman who is recovering after a spell in intensive care in a critical condition, and wished him well. Orbán, accompanied by the interior minister, also visited the coronavirus vaccination point at the hospital. They thanked health-care staff for their dedicated work. The prime minister said the vaccine would "bring our lives back to normal" in 2021.