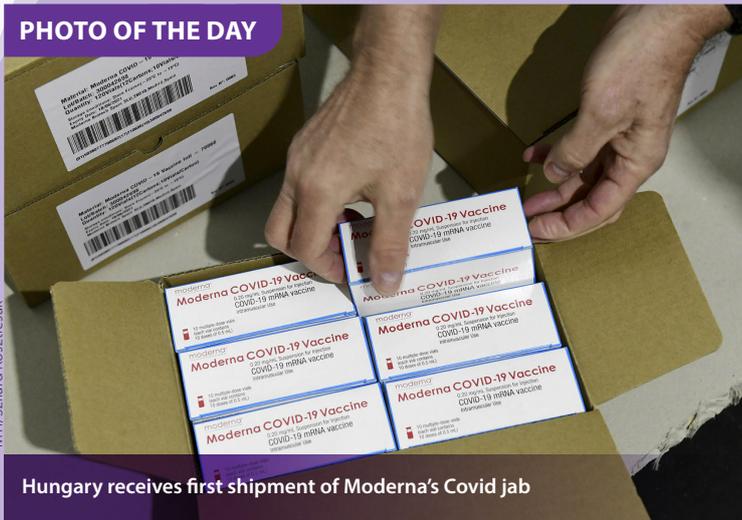


## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Szilárd Koszticsák

Hungary receives first shipment of Moderna's Covid jab

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Stats office reports on Nov industrial output**

**Coronavirus updates**

**EU health ministers hold informal conference call**

## TOP STORY

# HUNGARY RECEIVES FIRST MODERNA VACCINES

Hungary has received its first shipment of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine, public news channel M1 said.

A total of 7,000 doses of the vaccine arrived shortly after 10am, sufficient to inoculate 3,500 people. A police escort accompanied the van transporting the vaccine from Belgium. The vaccines are kept under constant surveillance, and digital thermometers ensure that it is kept at a temperature below -25°C. M1 said that according to unconfirmed information, the vaccine will be used to vaccinate residents of elderly care homes.

Meanwhile, Cecília Müller, the chief medical officer, told a press conference that one vial of the vaccine can provide ten doses. Hungary inoculated 78,579 people against Covid-19 by Monday evening, mainly health-care workers and elderly care home residents, using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, Müller said.

Hungary took delivery of the first shipment of Pfizer's vaccine on Dec. 26. It is set to receive a total of 4.4 million doses of the vaccine before the end of the year. The government has placed orders for more than 19 million Covid vaccine doses, sufficient to inoculate 10 million people, Müller has said.

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## **GOVT OFFICIAL: RULES, DATES OF SCHOOL- LEAVING EXAMS UNCHANGED**

The government has no plans to change the rules or dates related to school-leaving exams scheduled from mid-May to June, a government official said. The government expects both written and oral exams to take place in the usual manner, with a deadline for applications for school-leaving exams and university admissions of Feb. 15, Zoltán Maruzsa, the state secretary for public education, said at a press conference of the operative body responsible for handling the coronavirus epidemic. Last year, some 80,000 students sat for their school-leaving exams in the spring and an additional 30,000 in the autumn, Maruzsa said, adding that this showed that the exams could be organised safely, even during a pandemic. No infection hotspots emerged as a result, he added.

Meanwhile, Cecília Müller, the chief medical officer, said Hungary has received vaccines developed by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna sufficient to inoculate 51,000 people. The Pfizer ampoules have been "significantly overfilled", and so allow for the vaccination of six people rather than five as originally expected, she said. Lieutenant Colonel Róbert Kiss, a leader of the operative board, noted that Serbia expanded travel restrictions at its borders on Tuesday. Entrants will

continue to have to show a negative PCR test result from the previous two days, or self-quarantine for 10 days, he said. The restrictions pertain to all travellers, regardless of citizenship, he added.

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## **V4 SPEAKERS HOLD ONLINE MEETING**

The parliamentary speakers of the Visegrad Group held an online conference on Tuesday to discuss V4 parliamentary cooperation and strengthening of the role of national parliaments in the European Union, parliament's press chief said in a statement. The meeting called by the parliament of Poland, which holds the V4 rotating presidency, also addressed regional cooperation in light of the economic and social crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic. Further, on the agenda were the European Commission's European Green Deal and the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, as well as current foreign policy challenges.

Hungary's speaker, László Kövér, said much pride could be taken in the V4's 30 years of regional cooperation. "We're proud that József Antall, Hungary's first freely elected prime minister, restored a deep historical tradition dating back to the 14th-century Visegrad royal meeting," he said. Kövér insisted that V4 cooperation transcended the topical and cyclical political issues at hand, and spoke of a historical and future interdependence.

The four speakers agreed that the four countries together could act as a major force in defending their own interests. At Poland's initiative, the speakers began drafting a joint declaration to mark the Visegrad Group's 30th anniversary.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: JAPANESE COMPANIES IN HUF 6.5 BN OF HUNGARY INVESTMENTS**

Three Japanese automotive suppliers are making investments of 6.5 billion forints (EUR 18.0m) in Hungary, with Hungarian government support worth 2 billion, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. Fully 5,300 jobs will be protected as a result, the minister said, adding that the developments will help Hungary maintain its leading edge in Europe's car industry. Alpine European Electronics Industry in Biatorbágy, DENSO Manufacturing Hungary in Székesfehérvár and Diamond Electric Hungary in Esztergom are bringing new production technologies and increasing supply capacities to Hungary's car industry, Szijjártó added, noting that the companies are among the most important car industry suppliers globally. Fully 173,000 people work in Hungary's car industry, and in the past ten years the sector's production value grew two-and-a-half fold to approaching 10,000 billion forints, he added.

Hungary has always aimed to stand on its own two feet economically,

he said, consistently building cooperation with the East, primarily in trade and investment, in addition to maintaining western European and north American ties over the past eleven years. The decision to launch the government's opening to the East strategy has been vindicated, as demonstrated by a 25% increase in trade with Eastern countries over ten years and the fact that most investment came to Hungary from the East in 2019 and 2020, he added. Szijjártó also said that coronavirus vaccine acquisitions coordinated by Brussels were progressing slower than previously expected. As a result, the government is continuing talks with Eastern suppliers, he added.

### **JUSTICE MINISTER DISCUSSES COOPERATION WITH GREEN, FAMILY AFFAIRS NGOS**

Judit Varga, the justice minister, discussed cooperation possibilities in the areas of environmental protection, child protection, domestic violence and victim support with the founder of three civil organisations. The founder, Nóra Király, is the representative of the young family association Ficsak, the green group Zöld Követ Egyesület and the women's rights association Mindennapok Női Szemmel. Civil groups play an important role in exposing issues that affect the everyday life of

people, giving experts and civil individuals a platform to present their views and serving as "a bridge" between society and politics, Varga said on Facebook. "We are working for the Hungarian people. We cannot achieve success without the support of civil organisations who can convey the message to members of the society that they are not left without help. Together we shall succeed," she said.

### **CORONAVIRUS - 128 FATALITIES, 696 MORE INFECTIONS**

Fully 128 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 696 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 344,352, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday. The death toll has risen to 10,853, while 209,852 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections stands at 123,647, while there are 5,005 hospitalised Covid patients, 356 on a ventilator. Altogether 25,532 people are in official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 2,860,814. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (64,729) and Pest County (42,992) so far, followed by the counties of Hajdú-Bihar (19,596), Győr-Moson-Sopron (19,591) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (19,294). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (7,211).

### **VACCINE ACCEPTANCE GROWING IN HUNGARY**

A growing number of people in Hungary have expressed a willingness to be vaccinated against coronavirus, the daily Magyar Nemzet said, citing a Nézőpont survey. Currently 45% indicated a readiness to receive the jab. Positive experiences reported by people who have received the vaccine and public campaigning by various public figures are behind the growing inclination to be inoculated, the paper said. Vaccine acceptance is the highest (42%) among those critical of the Orbán regime, the survey found. Fully 66% of respondents above 60 also said they would accept the vaccine. Acceptance is growing in all other demographics, albeit at a slower pace, the survey indicated. Meanwhile, Nézőpont said almost two-thirds of respondents were satisfied with the government's coronavirus protection efforts.

### **FIDESZ EP GROUP ELECTS GÁL AS LEADER TO REPLACE SZÁJER**

The European Parliamentary group of Hungary's allied ruling Fidesz and Christian Democratic parties in the European People's Party (EPP) has elected Kinga Gál as its leader to replace József Szájer, who resigned from the post late last year, a Fidesz MEP said. Szájer returned his mandate

to the EP effective December 31. Gál has served as an MEP since 2004. She was vice president of the EPP between 2015 and 2019, Tamás Deutsch said in a statement. Gál's position has been filled by Ernő Schaller-Baross, deputy state secretary in charge of international relations at the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office since 2018, he noted.

### **DK CALLS ON GOVT TO STOP DATA COLLECTION THROUGH VACCINATION REGISTRATION WEBSITE**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on the government to "stop data collection" through the website Hungarians can use to register for the coronavirus vaccination. DK wants to see as many people register as possible but several members of the public have told the party they were fearful of registering because the government may abuse the data collected, DK group spokesman Zoltán Varga told an online press conference. The website [vakcinainfo.gov.hu](http://vakcinainfo.gov.hu) gives an option on the registration form to allow data to be kept and handled in the future until permission is expressly withdrawn. Varga said many people were unaware this was optional and instead avoided registering altogether. Instead of collecting data, the government should focus on preparing for mass vaccination and reduce "shaky trust" in the process, he said.

### **ITM: MEDICAL UNIVERSITIES FREE TO DECIDE ON OPERATIONAL MODEL**

Hungary's medical universities are free to decide whether they want to shift from being state-run to being operated by foundations, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM) said. In a statement, the ministry said László Palkovics, the minister, held talks with the leaders of four medical and health science universities earlier in the day on the possibility of their shifting to the new operational model.

The advantage provided by the new mode of financing introduced at eight higher education institutions so far and set to be introduced at two others is that it allows the universities to operate under a more flexible structure while guaranteeing students a modern educational experience that will give them knowledge that is competitive on the job market, the ministry said. The government's aim with the new model is to boost the competitiveness of Hungary's higher education institutions, it added. The ministry said it was timing its consultations with universities on their strategic and development plans to coincide with the start of the new European Union funding cycle, offering them a chance to shift to the new operational model.

The ministry cited Palkovics as emphasising at the meeting that medical universities would only be put on a new operational footing

if they specifically ask for it. The rectors assured the minister that they would soon notify the ministry of the decisions made by their respective senates.

### **FORMER PKK KURDISH COUPLE SENTENCED IN ABSENTIA IN HUNGARY**

A Kurdish couple who formerly worked for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for several years has been convicted in absentia by a regional high court in Szeged, in southern Hungary, to two years in prison in a final ruling. The court ruled that the couple had been involved in financing terrorism, and it also banned them from entering Hungary for eight years. Since the regulations allow release on parole once half of the sentence is served, taking into account time already spent in pre-trial custody, the couple are not required to attend prison.

The male member of the couple joined the PKK voluntarily in 2009 and carried out logistical tasks. He was transferred in 2014 to Syria, where he carried out similar duties as a member of Yekiyen Parastina Gel (YPG). The woman, an ethnic Kurd, born in Iran and was recruited by PKK at age 15. Posing as a refugee, she went to Iraq, where she was in charge of receiving and transporting female soldiers. She was transferred in 2014 to Syria, where she carried out logistical tasks wearing a YPG uniform. After starting a relationship in Syria, the couple decided in 2015 to stop serving in

the organisation. Despite threats by the PKK, they escaped to Iraq, where they married and travelled to the Hungarian border with the help of human smugglers, eventually asking Hungary for asylum in December 2017. They were detained in March 2018.

The couple absconded from Hungary after a preliminary court ruling last summer and requested asylum in Germany, deciding against attending their second trial in Hungary. The Szeged court upheld the first ruling that during their five-year service for PKK they were aware that the organisation they worked for carried out armed attacks against the Turkish state.

## **AIR QUALITY WORSENS IN NE HUNGARY CITIES**

Air quality has deteriorated in north-eastern Hungary due to a high concentration of airborne particulates, the National Public Health Centre (NNK) said. NNK declared air quality to be "dangerous" in Putnok, Sajószentpéter and Kazincbarcika. Air quality has deteriorated to unhealthy

levels in Miskolc, Salgótarján and Ajka. Concentrations of particulates are also considered to be too high in other cities and towns nationwide, including Budapest, Esztergom, Székesfehérvár, Pécs, Tatabánya, Vác, Várpalota and other towns, NNK said. Vulnerable groups such as children, people suffering from a chronic illness and the elderly are the particular targets of the warning. Air quality is expected to improve in Budapest over the next few days, the municipality told MTI.

## **EIB LENDS MAGYAR EXIMBANK EUR 200 M TO SUPPORT RECOVERY**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) said it will lend 200 million euros to Magyar Eximbank, creating a new credit line to support the faster recovery of Hungarian companies from the impact of the coronavirus crisis. The financing will be available for working capital and investment loans. The loan is part of Covid-19 emergency measures the EIB is rolling out to support European Union member states during the pandemic. The EIB

signed a 162.5 million euro loan with Hungary's government in December to support the country's health-care sector.

## **HEINEKEN HUNGARIA AWARDED GOVT GRANT FOR HUF 540 M UPGRADE**

Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, on Tuesday awarded the local unit of Heineken a 270 million forint (EUR 748,000) grant to support a 540 million forint upgrade at its brewery in Sopron, in north-western Hungary. Dutch-owned Heineken Hungária committed to preserve 465 workplaces and to buy 85% of its raw materials from local producers, Szijjártó said. The investment will boost efficiency and expand the brewer's product portfolio, he added.

Heineken Hungária CEO Geert Swaanenburg said the company had not laid off a single worker even though its catering sector orders had dried up because of the pandemic. Heineken Hungária had revenue of 63.9 billion forints in 2019, public records show.