

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Blooming cherry tree in northern Hungary

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Parliament holds plenary session**

**Coronavirus updates**

**Hungarian Academy of Sciences holds general meeting online**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN SETS NEXT GOAL AT 5 M VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19

Hungary's next goal is "no less than five million vaccinated citizens", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Facebook on Saturday.

In a video published after talks with the interior and foreign ministers Orbán said that the country had enough vaccines, adding that "success depends on whether people register for vaccination". "The shots save lives. Do not listen to anti-vaxxer voices, protect yourself and your families," the prime minister said.

Orbán welcomed the fact that over one million people had received their shots during the past two weeks, and called it a "fantastic achievement". He thanked all nurses, doctors, and other staff participating in the vaccination drive.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó announced that agreements had been signed with the foreign ministers of Slovenia and Bahrain to mutually recognise vaccination certificates. Under the agreements, citizens will be allowed free travel irrespective of the vaccine they have been inoculated with. The minister noted that Bahrain had been one of the first countries to apply the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine, and it had offered its experience to Hungary.

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## **CORONAVIRUS - 101 FATALITIES, 1,593 NEW INFECTIONS**

Fully 101 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,593 new infections were registered, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said on Sunday. So far 4,064,204 people have received a first jab, while 2,016,350 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has declined to 231,580, while hospitals are treating 5,031 Covid patients, 587 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 28,989 people in official quarantine, while 5,415,983 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 782,892 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 27,802. Fully 523,510 people have made a recovery. So far, most infections have been registered in Budapest and Pest County, followed by the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Hajdú-Bihar.

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## **ORBÁN SENDS CONDOLENCES TO NETANYAHU OVER LAG B'OMER**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has sent condolences to Benjamin Netanyahu, his Israeli counterpart, over the stampede that claimed many lives at a religious gathering

at Mount Meron, Orbán's press chief said. "I was deeply saddened to learn about the tragic event that claimed the lives of many participants and left several others injured at a mass gathering for celebrating the Lag B'Omer holiday," Orbán said in a letter. He extended his condolences, sympathy and solidarity with the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to those injured. "We are in our thoughts and prayers with the victims, their families and the people of Israel in this difficult time," Orbán said.

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## **DK ANNOUNCES DOBREV AS PM CANDIDATE FOR OPPOSITION PRIMARY**

Opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) announced on Sunday that Klára Dobrev will be the party's prime ministerial candidate for the opposition primary planned to take place in the autumn.

The official announcement was made at an online event. Dobrev said she had accepted the party board's invitation and was ready to run. She said she was ready to unite the diverse opposition against Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and was also ready to defeat the prime minister and "his utterly corrupt regime" next spring. The next government, she insisted, "must take Hungary back to the main street of history, which we call Europe". Dobrev said the government, which had "pretended

to be strong and able" turned out to be "weak and unable" during the pandemic when "the Hungarian state gradually fell to pieces". The government's policies have led to a "national tragedy with nearly 30,000 families mourning and tens of thousands bankrupt or unemployed", Dobrev said. During the past ten years "those on government systematically tore the country apart, step by step, into the many and the few," she insisted. "The few", she said, were top officials amassing assets of "hundreds and thousands of billions of forints "as against the many Hungarians earning wages and paying taxes, but still living worse and worse". Dobrev voiced hope that the cooperating opposition would "expel the few" at the general election next year, and referred to the primary as an "exercise" in which they could "demonstrate the difference between democrats and autocrats" and added that the candidates would be selected by voters of the opposition parties while "(ruling) Fidesz will have candidates selected by (PM) Viktor Orbán".

Concerning her priorities, Dobrev said that the new government should declare a "state of emergency over graft" and set up an anti-corruption organisation to work with an anti-corruption unit of the police. Each politician's assets should be screened and "Fidesz's oligarchs, who got rich from public funds, must be prevented from rescuing their fortune". Dobrev said that the

government was working to remove a significant part of public assets from state control, and amass debts for the country and for the next government."

The candidate said the earlier system of indexing pensions should be restored and seniors compensated for "the pensions they partially lost during the past 10 years". She also suggested that a minimum consumption of public utilities should be defined, under which gas, electricity, and water would be provided free of charge. Family benefits should be doubled in general, while single parents or parents of children with special needs should receive three times the current amount, she said.

Concerning health care, Dobrev said that health developments should "not only target hospital buildings, surgeries and equipment". The system needs 3,000 new doctors, at least 9,000 nurses and 500 general practitioners, she added.

## **FAMILY MINISTER MARKS MOTHER'S DAY**

The government has supported families through a number of measures since 2010 under the motto that being a mother is compatible with pursuing a career, the minister in charge of family affairs said on Sunday, marking Mother's Day. Katalin Novák said in a statement that the government was working to offer more opportunities for women, to ensure that "they

have real freedom of choice and that mothers could be active in all walks of life".

Novák said that since 2016 young mothers in Hungary have the opportunity to return to their full-time jobs after their child is 6 months old and still enjoy continued maternity allowances from the central budget. She added that the government had increased the capacity of creches, offering 50% more places now than in 2010 and provided an allowance for grandparents who would look after small children while the parents were working. Women can choose early retirement after 40 years in employment, Novák said, adding that the measure allowed grandmothers to "take a more active role in raising grandchildren, thus helping young mothers return to work". She added that the period when they were not working as a result of child birth also counts in the 40 years of employment. So far, over 304,000 women have used the early retirement option, she said. Since January last year, women with four or more children have been exempted from paying personal income tax, Novák said, adding that the benefit was unique in Europe.

## **JUSTICE MINISTER: HUNGARY, CJEU AGREE ON IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPARENCY OF NGOS**

The Hungarian government agrees with the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)

that transparency is a legitimate, democratic expectation, especially in the case of "non-governmental organisations which ... are capable of exercising a significant influence over public life and public debate," Justice Minister Judit Varga said. Referring to the CJEU's ruling regarding Hungary's law on the transparency of non-governmental organisations, Varga said in a bilingual Facebook post that the Hungarian government also agrees with the Court "that the transparency of the funding of these organisations is in the interest of all of us, i.e. it is a public interest." "So far, the debate between Hungary and Brussels has not been about the goal, but about the choice of means. Subject to these considerations, and noting and respecting the decision of the Court, the Government proposes to establish new regulation in line with EU law while also repealing the Law on Transparency, thus resolving the conflict to the satisfaction of all parties. This proposal does not impose any greater burden on NGOs than before, moreover, it does not require more than what was previously expected: a transparent operation," the minister said.

At the same time, Varga noted that some 60,000 NGOs are currently thriving in Hungary. Their key role in Hungary makes their transparency a public interest, she added. Varga lamented that the leftist opposition, in the meantime, is "considering the

proposal as a group of sanctions and other nightmares". "They have been crying wolves many times, but they have not yet come. Now, they won't come either," she said.

## **JUSTICE MINISTER MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF HUNGARY'S EU INTEGRATION**

Justice Minister Judit Varga marked the anniversary of Hungary's joining the European Union on May, 2004, on Saturday. "Europe used to be a dream of an alliance of Christian nations," Varga said in an English-language post on Facebook, adding that "for us, it is no longer a dream but a reality, a goal that we will always work for". She also said that "without Hungary, there is no united Europe".

When Hungary joined the EU "we believed we had joined a European community that, carrying on the spirit of the EU's founding fathers, would form a strong Europe based on strong nations." "Over time, however, it has become clear that it is not in everyone's interest to preserve the legacy left by our ancestors," she added. "From 2010, instead of constructive debates, a political witch-hunt began, whereas common sense no longer matters while dialogues have been replaced by smear campaigns motivated by ideological reasons," Varga said. "Despite all the difficulties and hostility, we remain, even though many in Brussels want the opposite," she added.

## **FINANCE MINISTER, KARÁCSONY, LEFT-WING PARTIES, ORGS MARK LABOUR DAY**

Finance Minister Mihály Varga, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, opposition Socialists and LMP and other left-wing parties and organisations marked Labour Day on Saturday. Varga said on Facebook that labour undisputably deserves to be respected. At the same time, he slammed left-wing parties for trying to gain profit from a "fake promise" of an unconditional basic income. He said the left-wing parties failed to mention that in order to generate the resources necessary, states would have to increase taxes and reduce family allowances. "What's even worse, they would be forced to take out loans, which would result in a skyrocketing public debt," he added. "On Labour Day, it is worth stating once again that Hungary is making progress because of work and not because of unemployment," he said. The number of jobholders increased from 3.7 million to 4.5 million in ten years, Varga said, adding that "this is why we will continue with an economic policy based on job protection and creation".

In a Facebook post, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said it was mandatory to build a country where better living circumstances are not the privilege of a few and where the state focuses on the demands of 99% of its citizens rather than the private interests of a privileged

1%. He called for a system of guaranteed work which means that people who lose their jobs can opt for joining a state employment company instead of getting severance pay. Karácsony said the costs of such a guaranteed work scheme could be financed from European Union resources. Deputy-head of the opposition Socialists Imre Komjáthi told an online press conference on Facebook that on Labour Day it is necessary to address the most important problem for workers, which is low wages. In order to guarantee sufficient living standards, the Socialists have proposed making the minimum wage exempt from the personal income tax, he added. The measure would help some 2.3 million Hungarians, he said. Co-leader of opposition LMP Máté Kanász-Nagy told an online press conference on Facebook that employees should get back their rights and means of support. The Hungarian state must guarantee a livelihood for employers and their families, especially in the difficult circumstances of the coronavirus epidemic. He accused the government of making Hungary dependent on international capital and multinationals, and reducing social security by restricting workers' rights.

## **SOCIALISTS CALL FOR 'NEW ERA' IN HEALTH CARE**

The opposition Socialists said on Sunday that a "new era" was needed in Hungarian health care to be implemented through the "revolutionary programme" of the European Health

Union. Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi told an online press conference on Facebook that the death of over 26,000 Hungarians caused by coronavirus demonstrated the state of Hungary's health-care system which he said directly resulted from "government carelessness" and policies that handled health care as a low priority. He said the Socialists believe that access to health is a basic human right and the party accordingly gives highlighted priority to health-care service development in its programme. The Socialists' proposals include reduction of surgery waiting lists, the introduction of medicine subsidies based on social need, priority funding to ambulance services, the development of one-day health services and the introduction of financing that recognises the real costs of medical treatments, he said.

Ujhelyi called for the introduction of a career model that ensures special benefits to lure back medical workers now in jobs abroad, and proposed that health spending should be defined as at least 7% of GDP.

## **HUNGARIANS IN DIGITAL CLASSROOMS TO GET FREE INTERNET IN MAY**

The government is extending free landline internet service to students and teachers learning online because of pandemic restrictions through May, deputy state secretary for digitalisation Károly Balázs Solymár said. A government decision to make landline internet service free of charge for those in digital classrooms has supported the work of more than 1 million students and close to 120,000 teachers, while saving Hungarian families around 1.2 billion forints (EUR 3.3m) a month, Solymár said. He added that smaller ISPs, with annual revenue under 12 billion forints and fewer than 300 people on payroll, would be offered compensation for the government measure.

ISPs may apply for the funding for the period between November 2020 and March 2021 by May 19.

## **SERBIAN MAN WANTED FOR VIENNA MURDER ARRESTED IN S HUNGARY**

Hungarian police have arrested a Serbian national wanted by the Austrian authorities for an alleged robbery and the murder of a jeweller in Vienna, at the Tompa border crossing with Serbia, police said on their website. The 21-year-old man, identified as Haris G, is suspected of having killed the jeweller and robbed his shop in October 2020. The man who was on his way from Serbia sought entry to Hungary with documents showing him with a new identity on Thursday. He was arrested within an hour after an information exchange between the Austrian and the Serbian authorities. Haris G has been placed in pre-trial detention awaiting a decision about his extradition by a Hungarian court, police said.