

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zoltán Máthé

The Mercedes-Benz eCitaro electric bus set to begin test runs on Budapest bus route

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Coronavirus updates**

**Whitsun celebrations nationwide**

## TOP STORY

### ORBÁN: THIRD WAVE 'BASICALLY DEFEATED'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a radio interview on Friday that “we’ve basically defeated the third wave” of the coronavirus, and most remaining restrictions would be lifted once five million people have been vaccinated.

So far 4,898,866 have received a jab and the five million mark “will certainly be reached this weekend”, Orbán told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio. This puts Hungary in Europe’s vanguard, he said. “Hungary is ever safer compared with other countries.” Outstanding restrictions to be lifted include the night-time curfew, the mandatory closing time of restaurants and shops, wearing masks in public spaces, as well as the ban on outdoor individual and team sports. Further, up to 50 people can attend private and family events, while up to 200 people can attend weddings. Hotel and restaurant managers must make sure guests are separated, while up to 500 people can attend outdoor events, including meetings, he said, adding that only people with vaccination certificates can attend music and dance events. Vaccinated 16-18 year-olds can take part in cultural and sports events indoors, he said. Orbán said that, like in Israel and the UK, vaccine take-up in Hungary was beginning to slow down, with a “trickle” of 5,000-10,000 registrations per day.

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## **ORBÁN: READINESS TO RESPOND TO ANY RESURGENCE TO BE MAINTAINED**

Whereas the operative board overseeing Hungary's Covid-related measures will no longer be active from Friday, readiness to respond to any resurgence would be maintained since 3,000,000 adults are still not inoculated, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told Kossuth Radio. He urged them to overcome their resistance to vaccination, noting that, with the exception of Serbia, vaccination rates in neighbouring countries were much lower than in Hungary. Also, vigilance is needed to ensure that vaccines used in Hungary also protect against new variants, he added. In addition to the vaccines already administered, 7.3 million vaccines are in stock or on order from Pfizer, 1.2 million from Moderna, 4 million from Janssen and 4.7 million from AstraZeneca, he said. Setting aside Chinese and Russian vaccines, these would be enough to vaccinate all Hungarians in 2021 and 2022, even taking into account a possible third or even fourth dose, he added. Orbán said that even so, in order to ensure self-sufficiency in the long term, a Hungarian vaccine would be ready and manufactured in the second half of 2022 at a plant now under construction in Debrecen. With domestic production "we can guarantee the safety of all Hungarians for decades." The prime minister said

hopefully the special legal order that gives the government powers to react to pandemic-related developments swiftly would be lifted during the summer. On the subject of Hungary's economic growth, Orbán said: "The first quarter figure didn't surprise and I'm expecting a phenomenal second quarter figure..." He said the number of job-holders in Hungary was now the same as before the crisis, adding that strong growth was also expected in the third and fourth quarters, and the figure for the full year may be better than expected. Regarding the opposition and the campaign for next year's general election, Orbán identified one-time Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány as the central figure, "and then there's a clown who has no clue about professional issues ... But the clowns shouldn't be taken seriously."

## **ORBÁN: HUNGARY VETO IN LINE WITH EU TREATIES**

When it came to vetoing the European Union's joint statement regarding missile attacks against Israel, Hungary acted in line with the bloc's treaties, according to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In an article on the Prime Minister's website also carried in English, Orbán noted that Armin Laschet, the CDU/CSU candidate for German chancellor, had argued that Hungary's veto provided another reason to switch to majority voting in connection with European Union foreign policy. "Today, a common

foreign policy decision can only be made unanimously, while Laschet prefers the will of the majority to be imposed upon the minority in the future. All of this in the name of Europeanism," Orbán wrote. Orbán noted that the EU's treaties stipulated that full agreement is required on important issues such as foreign policy, adding that Hungary "acted in accordance with the basic treaty" when it made its veto. "To accuse Hungary of being non-European because it exercised its right set forth in the treaty, is in fact deeply non-European," he added in the article entitled Szamizdat 8.

"The states of the Franco-German axis are known to have millions of Muslim citizens whose views cannot be neglected in a democracy. But it also must be taken into account that in Central Europe, the territory of the Visegrad Four — including Hungary — only a negligible number of such citizens live," he wrote. "We can also see that most western European countries have entered an era of a post-national and post-Christian concept of life. But it cannot be ignored that we still live our lives according to Judeo-Christian values, a Judeo-Christian culture and concept of life. It is, therefore, clear to us that it is not possible to equate a state, Israel, with an organization on the EU sanctions list."

"It is high time to finally acknowledge that Central European countries, which joined the Union later, are nevertheless equal members of the community of the European Union.

We also have the right to stand up for our beliefs, our allies, and our own interests," the prime minister wrote.

### **HUNGARY TAKES OVER CHAIRMANSHIP OF COE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

Hungary took over the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) from Germany at a meeting in Hamburg on Friday. Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said after the meeting at which he briefed participants about the Hungarian Presidency's programme running until Nov. 17, that Hungary had chosen three priority areas: national minority protection, religious communities, and the rights of children and families. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas pledged his country's support for the Hungarian presidency, adding that common values should guide its work. Marija Pejčinović Burić, the CoE's secretary general, said the outgoing German presidency had "set a high bar", adding that multilateral cooperation to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law was "perhaps more important than ever."

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: CONFLICTS BETWEEN GLOBAL PLAYERS CAUSE FOR CONCERN**

Besides the pandemic, fresh political conflicts have arisen in the recent period with tit-for-tat sanctions and "verbal incidents" between major

players in global politics and economy, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Friday, adding that the developments were "a cause for concern". Szijjártó said in his English-language address to a Council of Europe meeting, also posted on his Facebook page, that he represented a central European country whose people understood that "geography determines the house number of the countries, which is unchangeable". "Based on geography we have learnt the lessons of our history and have drawn the conclusions," he added.

"Maybe the most important conclusion is that whenever there's a conflict between East and West, central Europe usually loses," he said, adding that "we don't want to be losers anymore". As a result, Hungary wants a pragmatic cooperation based on dialogue between East and West, Szijjártó said. "We are absolutely not interested in a new cold war to be launched," he said. "Under these circumstances, the significance of the organisations which offer a platform to East and West dialogue is getting bigger and bigger," he said. "Council of Europe is serving as one of the best frameworks for that," he added.

During the next half year, Hungary will do the best it can to help and support the Council of Europe, he said. The pandemic offers a chance to re-establish pragmatic cooperation between East and West because the aim is to save people lives and this requires close cooperation, he added.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: NEW SINOPHARM SHIPMENT FULFILS CONTRACT WITH CHINA**

A government cargo plane carrying 700,000 Sinopharm vaccines is scheduled to land in Budapest on Friday, marking the fulfilment of China's contract with Hungary, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. The remaining part of the contract was for 500,000 doses but the Chinese defence ministry added 200,000 doses as a donation, Szijjártó said before leaving for Hamburg to take over Hungary's presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

The aircraft made 15 round trips between Budapest and Moscow and Budapest and Beijing in the past three months transporting Eastern vaccines to Hungary, and Hungary has received more vaccines from China and at an earlier date than originally contracted, Szijjártó said in a video posted on Facebook. The vaccines ordered from China and Russia have contributed to putting Hungary a month and a half ahead of Europe in terms of the proportion of vaccinated population, he added. "It is that much sooner that we can fully open our economy and give people back a normal life," he said.

### **JUSTICE MINISTER: EP MORE OF A PROBLEM THAN A SOLUTION DURING PANDEMIC**

The European Parliament has been more of a problem than a solution

during the pandemic, Justice Minister Judit Varga said in an English-language post on Facebook on Thursday. "It seems like it is no different in the case of the negotiations on the European Digital Green Certificate. While the Member States agree on what kind of certificate they would consider acceptable for their citizens, MEPs are blocking the agreement," she said.

"As the negotiations concern measures restricting free movement in order to protect public health, Member States believe that this system can be implemented without the involvement of the European Parliament, thus listening to their standpoint remains simply a gesture," she added. Varga said the situation was properly illustrated by the fact that news portal Politico, "which cannot be accused for promoting the idea of Europe of nations, has also noticed the increasing number of national governments asking the same question: why should they suddenly involve the European Parliament in decisions that previously have not even been agreed with their neighbours?"

"This is exactly the question we should ask more and more often," she added.

"The European institutions take it for granted that the development of the Union is only possible by taking more and more powers away from the Member States. We think differently. Only strong Member States can build a strong Europe," she said. The minister said a key issue in the series of conferences on the future of Europe,

launched on 9 May, is the direction in which the European Union shall move forward. "We share the approach of transferring competencies to the Union only in cases in which the Member States are unable to carry out the task effectively," she said. "We need a smarter Europe, not more, and this has been finally recognised by the liberal media too," Varga said in her post.

### **DK ASKS EC TO KEEP CAPACITY IN EU VACCINE PROCUREMENTS FOR HUNGARY**

The Hungarian Democratic Coalition opposition party has asked the European Commission to keep EU vaccine procurement capacity for Hungary, saying if there is a change of government in 2022, the new government would return to the EU vaccine procurement system. Noting the government's withdrawal from the EU's vaccine procurement system, DK MEP Klára Dobrev told an online press briefing on Friday that Hungary will not receive any further Pfizer vaccine doses in the future. Dobrev, who is DK's prime ministerial candidate, added that she had sent a letter to the commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, with the request. She slammed the government for the move, saying it was clear that the Pfizer vaccine was the most popular jab in Hungary, as well as being the only vaccine that currently can be administered to children, while it also protects against

most virus variants. Also, people who have received a vaccine approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) can travel freely in Europe, she added.

### **HUNGARY RECORDS 47 COVID FATALITIES, 657 NEW INFECTIONS**

Fully 47 patients, generally elderly with co-morbidities, died over the past 24 hours, while 657 new infections were registered, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said on Friday. So far 4,898,866 people have received a first jab, while 2,886,292 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has declined to 110,034, while hospitals are treating 1,645 Covid patients, 195 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 16,209 people in official quarantine, while 5,697,748 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 801,025 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 29,427. Fully 661,564 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.

### **BUDGET DEFICIT NARROWS TO HUF 1,043.6 BN ON APRIL SURPLUS, MINISTRY CONFIRMS**

Hungary's cash flow-based budget deficit, excluding local councils, reached 1,043.6 billion forints at the end of April, narrowing from the previous month on

a 100.5 billion April surplus, the Finance Ministry confirmed in a detailed reading of data released on Friday. Spending on pandemic-related measures exceeded 398.8 billion forints by end-April, the ministry said. Other expenditures included 86.1 billion forints in grants to boost competitiveness amid the coronavirus crisis among other items. Amendments to the 2021 budget submitted by the government in April raise the full-year cash flow-based deficit target to 2,287.7 billion forints. The detailed report shows that payouts for EU-funded projects came to 743.4 billion forints at the end of April, while transfers from Brussels were 153.5 billion. The central budget shortfall was 890 billion forints at the end of April, while the social insurance funds were 139.1 billion in the red and separate state funds showed a 14.5 billion deficit.

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### **AGRICULTURE MINISTRY: PROTECTION OF NATURA 2000 AREAS PRIORITY**

The government spends significant amounts of money on managing, maintaining and reconstructing natural habitats in protected environments, areas belonging to Hungary's Natura 2000 network, an official of the ministry of agriculture said on Friday, marking the European Natura 2000 Day. The deputy state secretary in charge of nature protection, Bertalan Balczó, said that some 38 billion forints (EUR 108.7m) was spent between 2014 and 2020 on 88 individual projects by national park directorates and their partners. Thanks to these developments, the condition of the natural environment

has improved on areas totalling more than 100 hectares, the equivalent of two Budapests, he said. Planning and preparations for the period up to 2027 are currently under way, and developments to protect and improve habitats will continue on a similar scale, he added. Commenting on the European Union's LIFE programme, Balczó said the financing allocation for nature protection projects was expected to double between 2021 and 2027. Hungary has participated in the LIFE programme since 2001, receiving support for a number of projects to preserve and protect habitats and species. The first large-scale Hungarian LIFE project was launched in 2019, targeting the restoration of Pannonia grasslands, the deputy state secretary added.