

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamas Vasvari

Migration of wild geese over Tata's Old Lake

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Parliament holds plenary session**

**European Union education ministers meet in Brussels**

**Stats office preliminary report on jobs and unemployment in Oct**

**Coronavirus updates**

## TOP STORY

# RESTRICTIONS ON TRAVELLERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Hungary is joining a host of other countries in restricting air travel from the southern African region in an effort to contain a highly mutated variant of the coronavirus identified there, the Government Information Centre (KTK) said on Saturday.

The EU Council on Friday debated response measures to the newly-identified B.1.1.529 South African coronavirus variant and recommended pulling an "emergency brake" and imposing temporary restrictions on non-essential travel from southern Africa. Under a government decree published in the official gazette Magyar Közlöny on Saturday, Hungarian nationals who arrive from southern Africa or have visited the region in the two weeks prior to returning home will have to quarantine for a period of 14 days. The restrictions apply to arrivals from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, the Republic of South Africa and Zimbabwe. Hungarians returning from the region will be required to enter a designated or official home quarantine regardless of whether or not they are suspected of having contracted the virus. The decree bans entry to all non-Hungarian citizens from the region with the exception of those given special permission by the authorities. Foreign nationals given permission to enter are still required to quarantine for a full 14 days even if they produce a negative PCR test.

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## **OMICRON VARIANT NOT YET DETECTED IN HUNGARY**

The new Omicron variant of Covid-19 has not yet been detected in available samples in Hungary, the national public health centre NNK told daily Magyar Nemzet on Sunday. The website of the daily mno.hu said it had contacted NNK for information after reports on the Omicron variant from countries in Hungary's "direct neighbourhood", such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and Italy.

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## **ORBÁN CONGRATULATES NEW ROMANIAN COUNTERPART**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán congratulated Nicolae Ciucă on his appointment as Romania's new prime minister in a letter on Saturday, his press chief said. In his letter, Orbán said that despite the challenges of the past two years, Hungary and Romania had managed to sustain the momentum of their cooperation. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that the two countries can always count on each other, he added. Orbán said he was convinced that Hungary and Romania could deepen their ties by intensifying economic, energy and transport cooperation and strengthen their political dialogue on bilateral and European matters. The prime minister said he was pleased to learn that the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party was a

coalition partner in the new Romanian government to which he said it would bring added value with its experience and professionalism.

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## **PALKOVICS INVITES KARÁCSONY FOR TALKS ON BUDAPEST PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics has invited Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony to hold coordination talks on Budapest public transport on Monday morning, the ministry said. Palkovics said he would present to Karácsony a draft contract on annual support for Budapest public transport, the ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

"If the invitation is accepted, the sides can immediately sign the contract, which the government side considers final," it said. Public transport is primarily a local council task as stipulated by law, the ministry said. The central budget will help the metropolitan council fulfil its obligation by granting annual support of 12 billion forints (EUR 33m), it added. Payment will be based on a contract to be signed by the ministry and the metropolitan council, the ministry said. In addition to people living, working and studying in Budapest, the capital's public transport system is also in use by a considerable part of travellers crossing the country and the majority of international tourists visiting Hungary, it added.

Karácsony said in response on Facebook that he would attend the meeting. At the same time, he said inviting someone for a Monday morning meeting on Sunday afternoon was "far from being elegant, especially considering that it has been trumpeted all over the press".

He said the question remained "why the united opposition had to protest, submit repeated demands and demonstrate power" in order to get the legally stipulated support for Budapest public transport. He added that it was a "rather modest sum" which represented only 7% of the total budget.

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## **EGYPT, MALDIVES TO HONOUR HUNGARY COVID IMMUNITY CERTIFICATES**

Hungary has agreed with Egypt and the Maldives to mutually recognise Covid immunity certificates, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Saturday. Under the agreement with Egypt, Hungarians who have been inoculated against Covid can enter the country without restriction from Tuesday, with only unvaccinated children between the ages of 6 and 18 needing to present a Covid test upon entry, the minister said in a video on Facebook. From Wednesday, vaccinated Hungarian and Maldivian citizens over 18 can enter each other's countries with an immunity certificate, while minors can enter unrestricted, Szijjártó said. Hungary has now reached agreements

on mutual recognition of Covid immunity certificates with 22 countries, he said.

### **MORE THAN 500,000 GET COVID JABS DURING NATL VACCINATION DRIVE**

More than half a million people were inoculated against Covid during the first five days of Hungary's national vaccination drive, with over 60,000 of them getting their first jab, Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler said on Saturday. As the government has extended the vaccination campaign by another week, people may continue to come to any of the country's designated hospital vaccination points between 7:00 in the morning and 7:00 in the evening without having to register or make an appointment until Dec. 5, Kásler said in a video message on Facebook. So far, some 6.1 million Hungarians have received at least one Covid jab, the minister said. "During the third wave of the pandemic, the vaccines available in Hungary helped prevent around 9,500 deaths," Kásler said, adding that some 40% of those people had received the Chinese Sinopharm and the Russian Sputnik V jabs. He welcomed the European Medicines Agency's decision to clear the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab for children between the ages of 5 and 12, noting that their inoculation was set to start after Dec. 20. Kásler said the booster shot was recommended to everyone who received their second dose over four months ago.

### **CHURCH LEADERS PRAY FOR CORONAVIRUS VICTIMS**

Dignitaries of the Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran churches prayed together for coronavirus victims and the end of the pandemic in Saint Stephen's Basilica in Budapest on the first Sunday of Advent in the presence of President János Áder and First Lady Anita Herczegh. Zoltán Balog, president of the Reformed Church in Hungary, said that the pandemic may have plenty of messages "but for us, Christians, it carries the message that we should stay together".

Gábor Mohos, coadjutor bishop of Esztergom-Budapest, said the pandemic "provided an opportunity for us to reconsider the priorities of life".

Tamás Fabinyi, presiding bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, said that suffering and prayer go hand in hand "but in times of suffering we should never pray only for ourselves but for all sufferers".

During the ecumenical prayer, donations were collected for the Regőczy Foundation that was set up by the presidential couple to help children orphaned by Covid.

### **ORBAN GREETS JEWISH COMMUNITY ON HANUKKAH**

Prime Minister Viktor Orban has greeted the Hungarian Jewish community on the occasion of

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, his press chief said on Sunday.

"This time around as we witness short days and long nights we increasingly long for the light, traditional delicacies and merry days spent in a family circle," Bertalan Havasi quoted Orban as saying in a letter addressed to the community.

"This year, as the holiday approaches among waves of a pandemic and migration, the light of the Hanukkah candles promoting hope and the reality of miracles shine ever more beautifully," he added, greeting every member of the Hungarian Jewish community.

### **SOLTÉSZ: HUNGARY HELPS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES SURVIVE**

The Hungarian government supports Christian communities abroad in their fight for survival, Miklós Soltész, state secretary for church and minority relations, told MTI on Sunday after visiting Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina earlier this week. The Hungarian government has part-financed three projects in the Western Balkans through its Hungary Helps programme, he said. Soltész noted that in Mostar, the location of two projects, Hungarian soldiers had started the reconstruction of the city's iconic 16th-century bridge just 25 years ago. Most recently, the Hungarian government contributed 24.5 million forints (EUR 67,000) to both the building of a gymnasium for a local boarding-

school and the reconstruction of the Serbian Orthodox cathedral that had been totally demolished during the Bosnian war between 1992 and 1995, he said. In Montenegro, Hungary has provided a Roman Catholic Albanian community with 24.5 million forints in support for the reconstruction of a library of a Franciscan monastery, Soltész said.

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### **FIDESZ URGES LEFT WING TO STOP 'INSULTING' HUNGARIANS**

The communications director of governing Fidesz pressed the left wing to stop "insulting Hungarians" on Saturday, in a video message sent to MTI. "It would be nice if the left wing would finally finish insulting Hungarians, even if that is a grand tradition of the left wing," István Hollik said. He said the opposition's joint candidate for prime minister in the next general election had made his views on the government's household utilities price reductions "known to all Hungarians", calling the scheme "obscurantism" and suggesting people concerned about higher utilities prices should consume less energy. "It appears that is just the tip of the iceberg," Hollik said, adding that the

opposition's joint candidate for prime minister had recently compared people who support the household utilities price reduction scheme and oppose migration to "mushrooms kept in the dark and fed manure". "We don't think anybody can be allowed to talk like this about 80% of Hungarians," Hollik said.

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### **LMP PLEDGES ANNUAL HUF 300 BN FOR HOME INSULATION SUPPORT**

LMP will earmark an annual 300 billion forints (EUR 816m) to insulate residential buildings if it comes to power, the co-leader of the opposition party said at a press conference streamed on Facebook on Saturday. Máté Kanász-Nagy said the measure would support the renovation of 150,000 homes a year. It would also create tens of thousands of jobs and serve to achieve economic, climate protection and health goals, he added. Hungary is "in last place" in terms of insulating residential buildings, which is "an especially big problem in the time of runaway energy prices", he said. Kanász-Nagy said comprehensive renovations of residential buildings could save 80-90% on energy costs,

"ensuring reduced utilities fees for Hungarian families in the long term", while cutting pollution. Heating with wood is a major source of air pollution in Hungary, he said, adding that about 15,000 people die each year in the country as a result of air pollution.

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### **NOVÁK: OVER 70,000 FAMILIES APPLY FOR HOME RENOVATION SUBSIDIES**

More than 70,000 families have submitted applications for home renovation subsidies so far, the minister for family affairs said on Saturday. Families who have applied have already been awarded subsidies worth almost a combined 100 billion forints (EUR 272m), Katalin Novák said in a statement. She noted that under the scheme launched in January, the government is offering to cover up to half of home renovation costs, with a grant capped at 3 million forints, for families with at least one child. Families may take out a subsidised loan to cover the other half of project costs. Families have so far carried out renovations worth a combined 277 billion forints with the help of the subsidies, Novák added.