

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Csergédi

Starlings near Sárospatak

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parl foreign affairs cttee head meets Bulgarian deputy PM

Stats office releases prelim report on Jan-Aug wages

Govt official on Hungary doubling aid to Transcarpathia Hungarians

Official presentation of Music Academy's renovated organ

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: RIGHT TO BORDER PROTECTION DEFENDED

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in a video posted on Facebook, said Hungary had “successfully defended” its right to protect its borders at this week’s European Union summit in Brussels.

Orbán said that the debate on migration was not over yet. “Some people think that migration is a good thing and they keep pushing on,” he said. “We think it is dangerous.” Hungary together with “a few other countries managed to repel the pro-migration proposals of the Brussels bureaucrats,” Orbán said, adding that some leaders still insisted that Europe needs migration. “And then there’s us, who say that our borders should be protected, that migration is dangerous and that every country should have the right to decide for itself whether it wants to let anyone into its territory,” he said. The migration debate is set to continue in December, he added.

According to reports, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said at the summit that the EU should apply the concept of “mandatory solidarity”. Under this concept, all member states would have to contribute to managing the bloc’s migration situation, although not necessarily by taking in refugees. Politico said Orbán expressed support for Kurz’s plan, which he called “the best proposal”.

ORBÁN TO SUPPORT WEBER'S CANDIDACY

Ruling Fidesz and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will support the election of Manfred Weber as the lead candidate of the European People's Party, of which Fidesz is a member, for the European parliamentary elections, Antal Rogán, the cabinet chief, said. On Wednesday, the EPP board heard two candidates for the post: former Finnish prime minister Alexander Stubb, who belongs to the EPP's liberal arm, and current EPP group leader Manfred Weber, the deputy head of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria, he said. If the choice must be made between these two candidates, Orbán will clearly support Weber and Fidesz will do the same at the EPP congress to be held in November in Helsinki, where the lead candidate will be elected, Rogán said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: COOPERATION WITH CYPRUS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT

Cooperation between Hungary and Cyprus is increasingly important, Hungary's foreign minister said. As the disputes about the future of the European Union intensify cooperation between countries that insist on their national identity, historical traditions and Christian culture will gain in significance, Péter Szijjártó said after talks with counterpart Nikos

Christodoulides in Nicosia. Hungary and Cyprus both belong to this group and represent identical positions on most issues concerning the EU's future, he said. They believe Europe and the European Union can only be strong if they are composed of strong countries and strong member states, and they agree that the protection of minority rights in Europe is of utmost importance and a matter of international law, which should be respected by all, he said.

Cyprus can play an important role in energy security for central Europe, Szijjártó said, noting significant gas reserves found around the island. Szijjártó agreed with his counterpart on signing an agreement on energy cooperation. "We plan to work together in order to get Cyprus to exploit its gas reserves and transport some of its gas to central Europe, possibly through a pipeline, considering that liquid gas capacities in the region are still very modest."

Szijjártó announced that Hungary will open a consular office in Nicosia this year. Hungary's interests in Cyprus have so far been represented by its diplomatic missions in Athens. The ministers also agreed to tighten cooperation in various forums of the United Nations. Hungary will support Cyprus's candidacy for the Council of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and Cyprus will support Hungary's candidacy for the Administrative Council of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

GOVT: LÁZÁR FLOATS BANNING POST-2020 GENERATION FROM SMOKING

A recent proposal floated by János Lázár, the prime minister's commissioner for protecting non-smokers, to prohibit anyone born after January 1, 2020 from smoking, has yet to be examined by the government, the Government Information Centre said. Addressing a conference organised by Tobacco Hungary earlier in the day, Lázár said he will propose banning anyone born in Hungary after January 1, 2020 from buying tobacco products. He said that if necessary, parliament would amend the constitution in order for the bill to pass. The aim of the ban is to turn Hungary into the world's first non-smoking country, he said. Lázár added that he will also propose making it illegal to smoke while driving the same way that using a mobile phone is. The commissioner said his proposal also included giving condominium communities greater freedom to restrict smoking in certain areas of the apartment complex. Lázár has yet to officially submit the proposal to the cabinet, the Government Information Centre said.

KÁSLER MARKS WHO'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY

Hungary and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have always had a strong relationship, and cooperated

successfully, Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler said at a conference marking the 70th anniversary of the organisation.

In his address at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kásler called WHO the “most humane organisation in the world”, saving, supporting and helping human lives. WHO activities span continents, regions and transcend ideological and political boundaries, he said.

Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO’s regional director for Europe, said that an ageing society and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular conditions, respiratory diseases and mental disorders present the greatest challenge in the region. Alcohol consumption and obesity are further problems, she said, adding that Hungary has already introduced a complex package of measures to tackle child obesity.

VARGA DISCUSSES INVESTMENTS, INNOVATION WITH US-HUNGARY BUSINESS COUNCIL

Finance Minister Mihály Varga met a delegation of the US-Hungarian Business Council and praised the two countries’ partnership in innovation and investments. The Hungarian government views innovation and high value-added production and services as priorities, and US companies are “excellent partners” in such endeavours, the finance

ministry’s statement cited Varga as saying. The US is Hungary’s second largest investor, and cooperation between the two countries is vitally important for a strong Hungarian economy, he said. Hungarian-US trade turnover has shown vigorous growth in recent years. Some 1,700 US-owned companies employ more than 100,000 people in Hungary. Investors are being helped by government measures to cut red tape, increase the employment rate and create a reliable economic environment, Varga said.

The minister noted that Hungary is in 48th place on the latest World Economic Forum’s competitiveness ranking of 140 countries.

The USHBC was established in 2016 by American businesses operating in Hungary to facilitate dialogue between US business leaders and the Hungarian government. Today was the second and final day of their third annual business mission to Budapest.

LMP RESPONDS AFTER DEMETER COMES UNDER PRESSURE TO QUIT

LMP has rebuffed a call on lawmaker Márta Demeter, who is running to co-lead the green opposition party, to resign after she claimed that Flóra Orbán, the two-year-old daughter of a Hungarian army officer serving in Cyprus who had flown on a Hungarian military aircraft, was the prime minister’s daughter. Fidesz group leader Máté Kocsis demanded Demeter’s resignation for “mixing up

one of the prime minister’s daughters with a two-year old girl of the same name” and disclosing “sensitive” military information “in the hope of political gain”.

LMP said that Demeter had reviewed publicly accessible documents containing a list of passengers on the military aircraft bound for Hungary from Cyprus before suggesting that a member of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s family had travelled on the plane. Since the ministry of defence had refused to disclose any information regarding the flight in question, Demeter viewed documents in the public domain and submitted a written query on the matter to the ministry, LMP’s spokesman Máté Kanász-Nagy said at a press conference. He cited Demeter as saying that she accessed the documents legally, adding that LMP would take action once in possession of the ministry’s response. Referring to the Fidesz group leader, Kanász-Nagy said that Kocsis “has nothing to do with the matter; he is not even a member of government ... he has no remit to call on anyone to do anything.”

Meanwhile, Szilárd Németh, the Fidesz head of parliament’s national security committee, said that Demeter “has proven herself to be a national security risk”. “Someone like this can’t be entrusted with a leadership position in this body,” Németh told journalists, referring to Demeter’s role as deputy head of the committee. He accused Demeter of having abused her position to obtain the plane’s passenger list and

repeated Fidesz's call for her to resign. The ministry of defence "won't let anyone put the safety of a Hungarian soldier and their family at risk for political gain," Németh said. He insisted Demeter had acted irresponsibly and "violated every law" concerning the review of public documents.

Demeter told a subsequent press conference that her actions were "not only reasonable but also legal". She reviewed documents of public interests at the air base in Kecskemét, central Hungary, and "put questions [to ministers] that followed from those documents". She said she is expecting written answers from the interior and defence ministers and will act accordingly. Demeter also said that she had no intention of resigning as she was "doing the job my voters elected me to do ... an important part of which is holding the government accountable."

IT MINISTER: BMW WORKS COUNCILS BACK DEBRECEN PLANT

BMW works councils fully back building the German company's new plant in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, László Palkovics, the innovation and technology minister, said after addressing an international meeting of BMW's works councils. Hungary is now a top global investment site thanks to its political and economic stability, Palkovics told Hungarian public media. Hungarians and Germans

share a similar work ethic as well as comparable education and taxation systems, he added. Commenting on a recent European Union pact to curb the carbon dioxide emissions of new cars by 35% by 2030, Palkovics said this was a good reason why cooperation to implement new technologies was so important. Accordingly, Hungary is building a new test track for self-driving cars in Zalaegerszeg, in western Hungary, and an agreement signed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Chancellor Angela Merkel will "raise cooperation in innovation and technology to a new level."

BMW announced late in July its plan to build a new plant in Debrecen with capacity to turn out 150,000 conventional and electric vehicles a year and employing more than 1,000 people when production starts. Earlier in October, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó announced at the signing ceremony that the government had decided to create a new transport node on the M35 motorway close to the site of the future BMW plant by expanding the access road and constructing a container terminal with an electrified rail link, as well as creating a new telecommunications and gas network. Before signing the grant agreement with a representative of the German company, he said the government's 12.3 billion forint (EUR 38.5m) support for BMW's investment would reap many times that amount in dividends for Hungary.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR A FREE, INDEPENDENT BUDAPEST

Commenting on a recent deal between the prime minister and mayor of Budapest to set up a joint development council for the city, the opposition Socialists said the capital city should retain its independence and residents of Budapest should decide on their future. Csaba Horváth, a Socialist deputy for Budapest, called for a law that clearly states the boundaries the central government should not encroach beyond. Also, most of the taxes paid by Budapest residents should remain revenue for the city, he added. "Budapest's resources have been cut and its powers clipped," he told the conference Free Budapest!, adding that the capital "does not get the respect it deserves". "The government dictates the capital's needs and insists what developments are carried out and how they are financed," he said.

He called for a cleaner and more liveable city. A council housing rental scheme should be revived and walkers, cyclists and public transport should have preference over cars, he said, adding that public transport should be further developed and the number of police in the city increased.

Earlier in October, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán asked the incumbent mayor of Budapest, István Tarlós, to run for a third consecutive term in next year's local government elections. At

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a joint news conference, Orbán said he would co-head a new Budapest development council alongside Tarlós.

Tarlós said he had accepted the nomination to run in the 2019 elections after “a serious internal struggle” and with “significant conditions”, including his insistence on holding a direct mayoral election and the establishment of the Budapest municipal development council.

SELF-SERVICE PARCEL TERMINAL BUSINESS EXPANDS IN HUNGARY

Companies that operate self-service parcel terminals in Hungary are expanding, business daily Világgazdaság said. Magyar Posta added significant capacity to its ten busiest package terminals last year, the state-owned postal company told the paper. Magyar Posta has 51 parcel terminals, with a total of 4,260 lockers, across the country. The terminals are more than 85% full, on average.

Parcel terminal company Foxpost will raise its number of pick-up points by 50% this year, while boosting drop-off and pick-up capacity by 80%, founder and CEO Ádám Bengyel told the paper. Foxpost has 103 package terminals. By year-end, it will have

terminals in 48 cities and 19 districts of the capital with 11,200 lockers.

KONZUM, OPUS TO MERGE

Holding companies Konzum and Opus announced their planned merger in disclosures posted on the website of the Budapest Stock Exchange on Thursday. Both companies are controlled by the investor Lőrinc Mészáros. The merger could “open new ground for the implementation of the group’s plans for regional growth of a significant volume”, the companies said. The management estimates the merged companies’ market capitalisation will reach 350-400 billion forints, while its net assets will exceed 320 billion. The merged company’s EBITDA is targeted at 30 billion.

Konzum’s board decided to work out a joint schedule with Opus on the timing of the merger. The first shareholders meeting to discuss the merger will take place on December 3, 2018 and the transaction is expected to close on March 31, 2019. A presentation posted along with the disclosures shows the merged company plans to start paying a dividend on 2019 earnings. The merger will help the company achieve “critical scale”,

winning it greater international recognition, attracting global investors and resulting in its inclusion in equities indices, according to the presentation.

DANUBE LEVEL AT ANOTHER RECORD LOW

The water level of the River Danube has continued to drop from a recent record low, dipping to 41 cm at Budapest, the water management authority said. As a result of a lack of rain in the recent period, the record low level of the Danube has been broken at various sections along the river. The latest weather forecast shows that dry weather is expected to continue and no significant amount of rain is expected in the catchment areas of the river until the middle of next week. As a consequence, low water levels are expected to stay unchanged in the next few days and could rise a few centimetres in the second half of next week. Gabriella Siklós, the spokeswoman of the General Directorate of Water Management, said on Wednesday that low levels do not affect water quality but they do cause problems for river navigation. On Wednesday morning, cargo barges were prohibited from using the river, she added.

