

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Advent event at Budapest's Szent István Square

MTI/Balázs Mohai

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases preliminary industrial output data for October

Supreme court Kúria head's presser on court's H2 activities

Hungarian Academy of Sciences holds special general assembly meeting

Presser on Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference

TOP STORY

HUNGARY TO BOOST ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN, KOSOVO

Hungary will take a larger role in NATO missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo, in line with its pledge made to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, the foreign minister told Hungarian journalists in Brussels.

Hungary will reassign most of its troops who are soon demobilising from the United Nations Cyprus peacekeeping mission to Afghanistan and Kosovo, Péter Szijjártó said after a two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers. The country will boost its number of troops by 40 to 106 in Afghanistan and send an additional 60 troops to Kosovo by next summer, he said. Hungary currently has 398 soldiers stationed in Kosovo, he added. Szijjártó said Hungary will bid for the command position of the alliance's KFOR force in Kosovo once Italy's commandship expires next year.

Concerning Afghanistan, the minister said NATO's number one goal in that country was to fight against terrorism. Hungary considers it especially important to combat terrorism in cooperation with the central Asian countries, because they are the ones keeping a number of extremist movements and terrorist groups at bay, he said. Hungary will in addition maintain its annual contribution of 500,000 dollars to support defence forces in Afghanistan, Szijjártó said, noting the government's decision to extend the funding until 2024.

MAYOR: BUDAPEST, GOVT TO COMPLETE BUDAPEST E-TICKET SYSTEM JOINTLY

The Hungarian government and the Budapest city council will complete Budapest's e-ticket system jointly by 2021, Mayor István Tarlós told commercial television. The project has not collapsed but will "probably" be taken over from the Budapest Transport Centre (BKK), Tarlós said. On Friday, Tarlós told the press that the municipal council's contract with the EBRD remains in force and the project to set up an automated fare collection system will continue. Earlier in the day, he initiated firing BKK managing director Kálmán Dabóczi because of the e-ticketing project. According to an agreement with Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics and Interior Minister Sándor Pintér, the city's e-ticket system will be coupled with the national system, Tarlós said on ATV.

HOUSE SPEAKERS MARK ANNIVERSARY OF HUNGARIAN-CROATIAN COMPROMISE

House Speaker László Kövér and his Croatian counterpart, Gordan Jandroković, marked the 150th anniversary of the Hungarian-Croatian Compromise at a conference in Budapest. Cooperation is needed more than ever now that "we may be facing a trial more taxing than ever

before," Kövér said in his address. The European Union offers the framework for an alliance, he said. "We have to find ways to cooperate if we are to preserve our freedom against the empires ... using the region as a parade ground," Kövér said.

Jandroković said that the sovereign states of Hungary and Croatia, from a distance of 150 years, have the possibility to evaluate the compromise objectively. "Hungarian history is part of the Croatian and vice versa," he said. The bond between Hungary and Croatia was one of the most enduring alliances, and a significant factor in regional politics, Jandroković said.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's visit to Zagreb last Monday further boosted bilateral ties, Jandroković added.

The Hungarian-Croatian Compromise signed in 1868 governed Croatia's political status in the Hungarian-ruled part of Austria-Hungary up until the end of the first world war.

IIB BOARD DECIDES TO RELOCATE HEADQUARTERS TO BUDAPEST

The board of governors of the International Investment Bank (IIB) has decided to relocate the lender's headquarters to Budapest, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. The headquarters is expected to open in the second half of 2019, but the full relocation from Moscow will take 2-3 years, he added.

OPPOSITION DK CALLS ON SPEAKER NOT TO BAN JOURNALISTS FROM PARLIAMENT

The opposition Democratic Coalition has initiated a law amendment proposing that the speaker of parliament should not be allowed to deny journalists entry to Parliament. Ágnes Vadai, DK's deputy group leader, told a press conference that under "the Orbán regime" certain journalists had been banned from Parliament for years. She said László Kövér, parliament's speaker, decided "on a whim" whom to allow into Parliament, making it impossible for the independent press to hold Fidesz politicians to account. DK's proposal is that only people who present a physical threat to parliamentary security or who provide false personal information should be deprived of access to the building. Journalists who are refused entry should have the chance to appeal to the country's supreme court, the Kúria, she added.

SOME 773,000 PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON FAMILY POLICY IN FIRST MONTH

A total of 773,000 people returned their answers in the first month to a "national consultation" survey launched by the government to gauge Hungarians' views on family policy, a state secretary at the Cabinet Office

of the Prime Minister said. The high level of participation demonstrates that family policy involves issues that determine the future and stand above party politics, Csaba Dömötör said. The opposition parties have not contributed real proposals to the survey but they criticised it, he said. The reason for this is that they are against the current family subsidy system, as they already attacked the system of tax allowances and the home creation scheme during their campaigns, Dömötör added. He called on all Hungarians to participate in the survey which will run through December 21. Hungary's government has held a number of national consultations over the years seeking feedback from citizens on important policy issues.

**SOCIALIST-PÁRBSZÉD
READY TO FIGHT BILL
ON OVERTIME**

The Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance is ready to use all possible measures, including a referendum bid, to stop the Fidesz-sponsored bill on overtime which would raise the upper threshold for annual overtime from 250 to 400 hours in its tracks, the leaders of the opposition parties said.

Socialist Party leader Bertalan Tóth told a press conference the bill's aim was to address the country's labour shortage by forcing Hungarians to work more. He accused the government of making a "secret pact" with multinational companies to this end.

He dismissed the ruling party's insistence that overtime would be voluntary, adding that vulnerable workers would be forced to serve their employer's interests. "The Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance will take all necessary steps to mobilise worker resistance," he said, adding that its members planned to attend a related demonstration on Saturday. If the bill is accepted, the parties will turn to President János Áder and ask him to initiate a constitutional review, he said.

Párbeszéd co-leader Tímea Szabó said a popular vote may be needed to thwart the "slave law". The bill would open the door to a six-day week "without payment", she said. Szabó said the shortage of skilled labour was due to hundreds of thousands of young Hungarians leaving the country during Fidesz rule.

Lajos Kósa, one of the bill's proponents, recently said that increasing the number of hours employees may be required to work overtime is "not possible without their consent" under changes made to the bill in light of negotiations with trade unions. He said the bill "is aimed at dismantling administrative barriers in the labour code to allow employees to earn more through more work done on a voluntary basis".

Reacting at the end of last month to opposition criticism of the bill, he said basic principles such as working for eight hours a day, five days a week with two days off would remain unchanged. He also insisted that if the bill is passed into law, employers would continue to

settle payments for overtime once a year. "Claims that employees would only be paid for their overtime once every three years is nonsense," Kósa said.

**LMP, JOBBIK BACK 'STOP
FRAUD AND ABUSE OF
EU FUNDS' CITIZENS'
INITIATIVE**

The opposition LMP and Jobbik parties on Wednesday declared their support for a European citizens' initiative aimed at combatting the misuse of European Union funds. The European Commission registered the "Stop fraud and abuse of EU funds" initiative on September 27, 2018. It requires one million signatures to be submitted over the next twelve months from at least seven different member states for the EC to either approve or reject taking action.

Speaking at a press conference held jointly by the two parties, LMP co-leader László Lóránt Keresztes said corruption had been prevalent in Hungary since the democratic regime change, and had by now "reached a historic level". He said graft was also the reason why rural areas have been lagging behind in overall development, forcing many young Hungarians to seek a living abroad. Tibor Bana, Jobbik's deputy leader, urged making EU funding approved to a member state transparent. He called it "outrageous" that it was "law-abiding Hungarians" who had to pay the fine levied on the country by Brussels for

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irregularities “linked to the pals of the prime minister” in the tendering procedures. The parties asked their supporters to back the initiative, the text of which can be accessed and signed via the parties’ homepages.

KSH REVISES UP Q3 GDP TO 4.9% YR/YR

Hungary’s gross domestic product in the third quarter grew by an annual 4.9%, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a second reading of data. The KSH raised the figure from 4.8% in a first reading released on November 14, mainly on the better than expected performance of market-based services and strong growth in higher value added branches of industry.

In the first three quarters, GDP grew by an annual 4.8%. The strong growth of the Hungarian economy is based on the robust performance of services and higher wages, the deputy state secretary of the finance ministry said commenting on the GDP data.

László Balogh told current affairs channel M1 that the KSH’s second detailed data release showed that

branches within the service sector linked to strong wage growth, such as tourism, arts and entertainment, and commercial services performed well. He said the data suggested that Visegrad Group states were the engines of European growth. Hungarian economic growth was two and a half times higher than the EU average of 1.9%, he said, adding that annual growth in Hungary was set to hit 4.5% in the full year.

In a statement, the ministry said the KSH’s second reading showed growth unparalleled since 1995 and was the second strongest data among EU member states. The rate of growth is expected to remain steady for the rest of this year and is likely to hue to around 4% in the coming years, it added.

HUNGARY RETAIL SALES UP 6.6% YR/YR IN OCT

Retail sales in Hungary rose by an annual 6.6% in October, up from 4.4% in September, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first

reading of data on Wednesday. Adjusted for calendar-year effects, retail sales were up an annual 5.7% in October. Adjusted food sales increased by 4.1%, non-food sales by 8.3% and vehicle fuel sales by 4.4%. In the January-October period, both unadjusted and adjusted retail sales grew by 6.4% year on year. Adjusted food sales increased by 4%, non-food sales by 9.4% and vehicle fuel sales by 6.6%.

JEEP PRESENTS UPGRADED MODELS IN HUNGARY

Jeep, a brand of FCA Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, presented upgrades of its Renegade, Wrangler and Cherokee models in Hungary on Wednesday. Jeep is the fastest growing brand in Europe at the moment, and it aims to keep this position next year, too, said FCA Fiat Chrysler regional head Andrew Higgins. Jeep sales in Hungary reached 1,016 in January-November, up one-third from the same period a year earlier. Sales of the Renegade model accounted for 751 of the total.