

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Cross at a Serbian Orthodox Christmas mass in Pomáz, near Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU affairs officials meet in Brussels

Stats office releases Nov 2018 industrial output data

TOP STORY

ÁDER URGES CLIMATE CHANGE TURNING POINT

The year ahead could see a turning point in the fight against climate change and this opportunity must not be wasted, President János Áder said.

The president warned that time is running out for the world to respond to the mounting threat of climate change. At a New Year's reception to members of the diplomatic corps in Budapest, he said the world would have to decide quickly what it wants to do about the issue, noting that "despite our commitments", greenhouse gas emissions rose again in 2018. Áder also lamented what he called a lack of serious progress in the talks that have taken place since the 2015 Paris climate summit. "The best that can be said about the [2018] summit in Katowice is that we averted the collapse of the Paris Agreement," he said. "Today we are further away from the two degrees target than we were three years ago in Paris," he said, referring to the main pledge of the Paris Agreement of keeping global temperature rise at below 2 C. "Though we have a rulebook in place that will allow the implementation of the Paris Agreement to begin in 2021, we do not have the courage to enact the decisions needed to stop runaway climate change," Áder said. But what is really at stake is the future of human civilisation, he warned. "Most importantly, we must change the way we look at things."

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HUNGARIAN OFFICIAL MARKS MADÉFALVA MASSACRE ANNIVERSARY IN ROMANIA

Balázs Orbán, state secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, attended a commemoration at Siculeni (Madéfalva), in central Romania, marking the anniversary of a massacre in which hundreds of Szekler Hungarians were slain by Austrian troops 255 years ago. In his address, held at a monument recently renewed with Hungarian assistance, the state secretary said that "no empire should consider Hungarians as second-rate citizens", and he assured ethnic Hungarians across the Carpathian Basin of his government's support. Every country, the official said, should "respect a balance of rights and obligations achieved through negotiations" and "observe written agreements". "Once an empire -- whether Vienna 255 years ago, Bucharest for the Szeklers nowadays, or sometimes Brussels for all of us -- disrespects those [agreements], resistance is considered legitimate under the ancient fundamentals of law," he added. Hungary "now has a government which has learnt the lessons of history and will promote the interests of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin through sober compromises, strong representation and perseverance rather than through militant ranting," the state secretary said.

On January 7, 1765, the troops of Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, retaliated a protest by some 2,500 Szeklers who refused to serve in the Austrian army under command in German.

LIBERALS: BROAD OPPOSITION COOPERATION FORMING

An anti-government cooperation is forming in Hungarian politics that includes, beyond opposition parties, trade unions and civil groups, the Hungarian Liberal Party's candidate for Budapest mayor in this year's municipal elections said. With their close cooperation the incumbent "illiberal government" can be forced "to withdraw" in several areas, Ádám Sermer told public news channel M1. He said that the opposition had better chances in the race for the post of Budapest mayor if they were able to unite to back a single candidate. Sermer said it was important to choose a candidate who can commonly represent liberal and democratic ideals. The municipal election will be held in the autumn.

US SUPREME COURT PASSES ON WW2 ART CLAIM AGAINST HUNGARY

The US Supreme Court said it would not take on a lawsuit filed by the heirs of Hungarian art collector Mór Lipót Herzog against Hungary with the aim of recovering artefacts confiscated

in 1944 and now kept in Hungarian museums. The court's decision means that an earlier appeals court ruling declaring that Hungary cannot be sued in the United States remains binding.

The Herzog heirs filed their lawsuit against Hungary in 2010, laying a claim to 40 pieces of art worth over 100 million dollars. They also demand that the Hungarian government compile a list of all other items in state-run museums that were stolen from the famous private collection during the second world war. In 2011, an American court accepted an appeal by Hungary asking the US to review whether the lawsuit could be pursued there. The Hungarian state argued that the American courts did not have jurisdiction to rule in connection with the ownership rights to the artefacts of the Herzog collection that are in Hungary, arguing that the question had been settled in an agreement the two countries signed in 1973. The Herzog collection was seized after Hungary's Nazi occupation in 1944.

GOVT FORMS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH TUNGSRAM

The Hungarian government has concluded a strategic partnership agreement with lighting company Tungsram. The agreement was signed by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and Tungsram CEO Jorg Bauer.

Last year, Bauer acquired General Electric's lighting business in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Turkey, as

well as its global automotive lighting business.

Szijjártó said that Magyar Eximbank had lent a significant amount to Tungsram to improve its competitiveness on both domestic and foreign markets. Bauer noted that Tungsram has a presence in 100 countries and employs almost 5,000 people in Hungary. Tungsram had a revenue of some 300 million US dollars in 2018, according to preliminary data.

Hungary's government has so far signed strategic cooperation agreements with 80 companies.

RETAIL SALES CLIMB 5.3% IN NOVEMBER 2018

Retail sales in Hungary rose by an annual 5.3% in November 2018, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of data. Sales growth slowed from 6.4% in October, KSH said. Retail sales rose by 5.2% when adjusted for calendar year effects. Adjusted food sales were up 1.7%, non-food sales climbed 9.1% and fuel sales rose by 5.6%.

Gyula Pomázi, a deputy state secretary at the information and technology ministry, told public M1 news channel that the jump in non-food sales in November marked the start of the Christmas shopping season. He noted that retail sales have been growing for 65 consecutive months.

Takarékbank analyst Gergely Suppan said retail sales could continue to

grow dynamically in the coming months. Retail sales growth in 2018 was likely to have been around 6.3% and for 2019 it may slow to 4.5%. ING Bank chief analyst Péter Virovác said monthly data shows retail sales edging down since the end of 2017. The latest monthly data also show the effects of high base numbers and a moderation of household consumption. He noted the overall performance of the retail segment is still good. Zsombor Varga of Erste Bank said despite a setback in sales November data are still robust. Retail sales growth could slow to 4.6% in 2019, he added.

THAILAND, HUNGARY SIGN AGREEMENT ON POULTRY SALES

In the case of a bird flu epidemic, Thailand has agreed to ban poultry imports only from infected areas of Hungary rather than resort to a blanket measure, the farm ministry said. The agreement was initiated by Hungary's chief veterinarian Lajos Bognár after the 2016-2017 bird flu epidemic in Hungary.

Under the agreement, Thailand will accept the guarantees provided by Hungary's veterinary authorities, giving Hungarian poultry exporters an edge over their European rivals. Not long ago Hungary concluded a similar agreement based on the principle of regionalisation with Japan, the ministry said.

COMMISSION PREPARING BEATIFICATION OF JÁNOS ESTERHÁZY SWORN IN

The commission of Hungarian, Slovak, Polish and Czech historians preparing the beatification process of János Esterhazy, a leader of Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian community between the two world wars, was officially sworn in in Krakow, a government official has said.

Count Esterházy (1901-1957), the sole Hungarian deputy in the Slovak Parliament before 1945, was a firm advocate of the ethnic Hungarian community, raising his voice against any violation of minority rights and against discrimination.

The ceremony was attended by Archbishop of Krakow Marek Jędraszewski

and Polish minorite monk Paweł Cebula, the postulator of Esterhazy's beatification, who currently serves in Eger, in northern Hungary, said state secretary for church, minority and civil society relations Miklós Soltész.

The commission's task will be to study and assess the life and virtues of Esterházy. The Vatican gave the green light to the beatification process last November. Once Esterhazy's life is also reviewed by a theological commission, it will be that body's job to submit a recommendation for beatification to the Vatican, Soltész said.