

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Celebration of Mass at Saint Margaret's House amid Dominican Monastery ruins on Margaret Island

MTI/Szilárd Kosztesák

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christian communities in Syria event organised by the state secretariat for the Aid of Persecuted Christians and the Hungary Helps scheme

KSH releases wage stats for Jan-Nov 2018

Conference on the image of Germany among Hungarians organised by Nézőpont Institute

Finance Ministry publishes detailed Dec budget data

TOP STORY

PROTESTERS CALL FOR UNITY AT DEMO

Speakers at a Saturday demonstration held in Budapest against the labour code amendments emphasised the importance of unity and they also spoke up for the rights of citizens.

Nikoletta Kiss of the Young People for Democracy civil organisation told the crowd gathered in front of the Várkert Bazaar that young workers "don't want to live in a country where people are at the mercy of their employer and where wages fail to provide a livelihood". Protesters want proper wages and working conditions as well as a flexible pension system, she said. Civil activist Tímea Molnár said citizens should take advantage of their rights and fight those who abuse their power. She urged them to take responsibility for shaping their future and to take part in this year's EP elections.

The government spokesman told a press conference that Saturday's demonstrations were proof that the European parliamentary election campaign had already begun, with George Soros also mobilising his supporters. István Hollik said it was "perfectly clear" that the labour code amendments were "no more than a pretext" for the protests. The government does not want to deal with "Soros's campaign" but it regrets that some trade unions are participating in the campaign of "pro-migration" forces, he said.

ANTI-GOVT PROTESTS HELD AROUND HUNGARY

Protesters held aloft the flags of Hungary, the European Union and the red and white Arpad Stripes, as well as the banners of opposition parties Jobbik, the Socialists, LMP and Momentum during a demonstration in Budapest. Protesters had converged on Clark Adam Square from several directions. The "Let the country come to a halt - Budapest - blockade" event is being held as part of a series of nationwide demonstrations. One group of 50-60 protesters marched from Heroes' Square, with their numbers reaching a few hundred half way along Andrassy Boulevard. People blowing whistles and honking horns carried national and EU flags and a placard with the slogan "We are fed up". Another group marched across Liberty Bridge and then along the embankment on the Buda side towards Clark Adam Square.

Demonstrations were also held in several other cities on Saturday. In Salgótarján, in northern Hungary, a slow-car protest across the city and a demonstration in the main square were held on Saturday morning. About 200 protesters demanded a more flexible retirement system and changes to the strike law. Several trade union leaders and party representatives spoke at the event, demanding fair wages, the restoration of non-remunerative allowances, and wage rises in the public sector. A protest

against the labour code amendment was also held in the southern city of Pécs on Saturday evening. At the demonstration organised by local trade unions, protesters shouted "Enough!" and "We will not be slaves!" Flags of the various opposition parties could also be seen in the crowd.

Norbert Benke of the Vasas Trade Union Confederation told the crowd in the city's central Széchenyi Square that the new overtime rules would break families apart. Employees want to work five days a week and eight hours a day, he said, and if they undertake overtime, they want to receive their overtime pay promptly and not within three years, he added.

Erzsébet Nagy of the Democratic Trade Union of Teachers in Pécs said the government was unwilling to enter into talks with the trade unions unless forced to do so because the unions had convened a strike committee. She called for the restoration of the organisational and economic autonomy of schools and the freedom of education.

Meanwhile, in Tatabánya, north-west of Budapest, the head of the Hungarian Civil Service, Public Service and Civil Service Workers' Union, Mrs Péter Boros, announced a strike, though she added that the union was prepared to negotiate with the government first. An anti-government demonstration was held in the square in front of the town hall, where women politicians from opposition parties spoke to the crowd. Mrs Boros added that they were proposing the formation of a national

labour roundtable and "meaningful talks" based on equal partnership with the government. One key demand is that all public service employees should earn at least the minimum wage, she said, noting that the salaries of local government officials had not been raised for 11 years.

After the demonstration in the capital, a group of protesters marched to the Pest end of the Chain Bridge, blocking traffic on the bridge. Police then pushed most of the crowd onto the pavement, but 15-20 people sat down on the road and refused to move when instructed to do so by police. Police then lifted them from the ground one by one and moved them from the bridge, restoring normal traffic.

DEUTSCH: EU WANTS TO PUNISH COUNTRIES THAT REFUSE TO ACCEPT MIGRANTS

Fidesz MEP Tamás Deutsch said on Sunday that the European Union was "threatening and blackmailing" anti-migration countries and wanted to punish EU member states that refused to take in migrants. Speaking at a press conference in Budapest, Deutsch said the EP decision on Thursday to set up a mechanism tying EU funding to observance of the rule of law in member states made clear that "Brussels wants to punish countries that have not accepted migrants". "This is an outrageous and unacceptable political action disguised as an annual

report on EU fundamental rights," he said.

Deutsch said it was "absurd" that the report focused on the rights of migrants and immigrants while barely addressing the rights of EU citizens. The report, for instance, failed to identify how individual and collective minority rights are handled in the EU, he added.

He said it was clear from the report which direction "pro-migration policymakers in Brussels" sought to take in respect of "the mass influx of illegal migrants and immigration into Europe". It expects all EU member states to accept immigration as a fundamental human right, he said. Almost a third of EU member states have refused to adopt the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, he said, adding that the EU nevertheless expected its members to aid issuance of migrant visas, to set up legal migration routes and to support organisations that assist migration. He said the latter were backed by billionaire George Soros. The Fidesz MEP said the EP report stated that only countries that host migrants could be considered democratic and abiding by the rule of law, while the opposite was true of countries that did not want to accommodate migrants. "This is simply an absurd claim," he said, adding that the statement was tantamount to blackmail. He said the Hungarian people had made their view of migration clear on several occasions. "They do not want to live in a country of immigrants."

Asked whether Prime Minister Viktor Orbán would attend the EP hearing initiated by Socialist MEP István Ujhelyi and Párbeszéd MEP Benedek Jávor, Deutsch said Orbán would decide whether the debate required his personal participation in it. Deutsch added that for his part as an MEP, he would attend and give his opinion.

DÖMÖTÖR: SYRIAN MIGRANT 'IS A SYMBOL HIGHLIGHTING MIGRATION SUPPORT NETWORK'

Commenting on the imminent release of Ahmed H., convicted under terrorism laws in September 2015 and recently transferred from prison to an immigration detention facility, a government official said the Syrian was "not just a violent migrant, but his case shows that activist groups, typically funded by George Soros, not only import migrants and support them while they commit a crime, but they also help them earn money at the expense of the taxpayer." Referring to the Syrian's decision to sue the cabinet office on the basis that a 2017 government survey on public attitudes to migration referred to him directly and gave the impression he had already been convicted when the court had not yet produced a final ruling, Csaba Dömötör, a cabinet office state secretary, told public radio in an interview on Sunday

that it was "totally absurd" that "a criminal" wanted to earn 8 million forints (EUR 25,000) to defend his good reputation.

A government spokesman said on Friday that Ahmed H. will remain in detention until Hungary can reach an agreement with Cyprus, his former place of residence, concerning his return.

Commenting on moves to expel him from the country, the state secretary noted that the Hungarian authorities had decided Ahmed H. could stay in Hungary since he presented a danger to the security of the Hungarians. "A terrorist cannot walk freely in Hungary," he said, adding that Ahmed H. will remain in detention until his removal. He said the Syrian had been found in possession of eight passports at the time of his crime, "which is unrealistic for a real refugee fearing for his life." It is no coincidence, he added, that many of the organisations that attack the government's migration policy have supported Ahmed H.

Meanwhile, Dömötör noted the European Parliament's decision to increase support for "so-called democratic NGOs", and added that experience so far suggested that most of the amount would be spent on organisations that supported migration. Dömötör said the Hungarian government decried increasing support for such activist groups insofar as Brussels failed to give adequate funding for border protection.

SOCIALIST, PÁRBESZÉD MAYORAL CANDIDATES DEBATE

At a debate ahead of the preselection of the left-wing opposition candidate for mayor of Budapest, the Socialist and Párbeszéd candidates said they were campaigning for a greener Budapest and for better public transport. Both candidates, Socialist Csaba Horváth and Gergely Karácsony, pledged to involve Budapest residents in taking major decisions and to take a stronger stand against the government when it comes to local decision-making. Their main bone of contention was over Dávid Vitézy, former head of the Budapest Transport Center (BKK). Horváth insisted Vitézy was responsible for billions of forints of losses connected to the introduction of an electronic ticketing system whereas Karácsony maintained that Vitézy had done an excellent job at BKK. Both candidates vowed to support whoever ends up winning the preselection process.

KUNHALMI: SATURDAY'S DEMONSTRATIONS MADE GREAT PROGRESS

MP of the opposition Socialist party Ágnes Kunhalmi said Saturday's demonstrations had made "huge progress" as more and more Hungarian cities joined the protest. Speaking at a press conference, Kunhalmi said demonstrations had

taken place in cities which had not seen political action in the past 8-10 years. The politician said this revived hope that the current government could be brought down. Opposition cooperation, "which will be crucial in this year's municipal election," is also developing, she said, adding that NGOs, trade unions and parties must work together to achieve their desired outcome.

Party chairman Bertalan Tóth said the Socialist Party was the most active participant in ongoing demonstrations. He called for a joint list of the parties in the European parliamentary elections in order to avoid the loss of votes.

Tóth said he had convened a party conference for Feb. 16-17, and deputies would decide on the party's programme for the EP elections and on the list of Socialist candidates, adding that he would like to keep this list open to anyone who wants to join the cooperation. He said the Socialists would do their utmost in the parliamentary session due to start on Feb. 18 to continue the non-violent protest started in December.

NAGY: FARMERS NEED EQUAL ACCESS TO DIGITALISATION OPPORTUNITIES

Taking part in the Global Food and Agriculture Forum (GFFA) in Berlin, Hungary's farm minister said all farmers should be able to take equal advantage of the opportunities arising

from the revolutionising of agriculture through digitalisation. István Nagy told MTI at the world's largest agricultural fair that digitalisation is leading to sweeping changes in the sector. The state, he said, can build the basic infrastructure for digitalisation, and in this respect Hungary "is on the right track" as it starts to implement 5G networks. But economies of scale are also an important factor, he added. Returns on digital investments are starkly different for large-scale agribusinesses compared to small farms, "so we also need to look at how to ensure equal opportunities," Nagy said. Digitalisation helps to boost productivity and meet consumer expectations, he said. Produce can also be tracked from farm to table. Also, it helps in the fight against climate change, he added.

Meanwhile, on the topic of negotiations within the framework of International Green Week, which is being held in parallel to the GFFA, Nagy noted that more and more European countries are involved in GMO-free soybean cultivation, with Switzerland signing the European Soya Declaration spearheaded by Hungary, Germany and Austria. Switzerland, he added, is seen as a leader in environmental protection, and so its signing up to the declaration would add force to Hungary's efforts in the vanguard of creating GMO-free agriculture.

In 2015, Hungary announced the Alliance for a GMO-free Europe, and the resulting European Soya Declaration was signed in July 2017 by

14 EU member states. In the meantime, many other countries have joined the declaration, he said.

Nagy said European farming, especially animal husbandry, is heavily dependent on GMO soya imports from South America. The signatory countries pledged to encourage the cultivation of GMO-free soya and other pea plants for feed.

DEPORTATION OF ETHNIC GERMANS FROM HUNGARY COMMEMORATED

The deputy prime minister, Zsolt Semjén, termed the deportation and expulsion of ethnic Germans from Hungary “a crime of historic proportions”, at a commemoration on Saturday. Speaking in Elek, in south-eastern Hungary, on the occasion of the anniversary of the expulsion of ethnic Germans after the second world war, Semjén said this crime had been committed against an ethnic group that had been part of historical Hungary for centuries.

FILM MOGUL VAJNA DIES

Andrew G. Vajna, a Hungarian-American film producer behind

blockbuster movies such as Terminator 3 who went on to head the Hungarian National Film Fund which backed Hungarian Oscar winner Son of Saul, has died aged 74 in his Budapest home after a long illness, the Hungarian National Film Fund told MTI on Sunday. Vajna, the government commissioner in charge of the development of Hungary’s film industry who set up the Hungarian National Film Fund which supported a slew of internationally prize-winning Hungarian films, was born in Budapest in 1944. In 1956, aged 12, he fled Hungary on his own and emigrated to Canada with help of the Red Cross, and later reunited with his parents in Los Angeles. He studied at University of California Los Angeles and started working at the university’s Educational Motion Picture Department. Later he set up his own photo studio before establishing his own wig manufacturing company and operating cinemas in Hong Kong.

Vajna produced 59 films in all, including the Evita starring Madonna and Sylvester Stallone’s first three Rambo films. He worked with directors such as Oliver Stone

and James Cameron, and actors like Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Anthony Hopkins.

In a statement in tribute to Vajna, the Hungarian National Film Fund noted that Vajna never had forgotten his Hungarian roots and always closely followed the domestic film industry. During his period as a government commissioner, Hungarian films which notched international successes include Son of Saul, On Body and Soul, 1945 and Kincsem.

Vajna played an indisputable role in boosting the Hungarian film industry, the fund added. The volume of film productions in Hungary grew by almost fivefold during his period. During the “Vajna era”, Hungarian films supported by the film fund won hundreds of international prizes, including an Oscar, a Golden Globe and a Golden Bear, they added.

“We are bidding farewell to the greatest Hungarian film producer. Hasta la vista, Andy! Thank you for everything, my friend!” Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on his Facebook page.