

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamas Soki

Frozen Lake Pécsi in SW Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases 2018 Nov figures on retail trade

Defence, human resources minister on developments at Honvédkórház

IT minister addresses "Automotive in Transition" conference

EU affairs state secy holds talks in Zagreb

TOP STORY

HUNGARY, TUNISIA TO COOPERATE ON SECURITY

Hungary has agreed with Tunisia on cooperation in the areas of law enforcement and defence, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Khemaies Jhinaoui, his Tunisian counterpart, in Tunis.

Keeping also its own interests in view, Hungary aims to contribute to Europe's efforts towards helping North African countries maintain their stability, combat terrorism, protect their borders and improve their people's living standards so as to prevent a mass exodus from the region, Szijjártó told MTI. Hungary has therefore agreed with Tunisia that its police officers will provide training for Tunisia's land and airport border protection forces in the fields of crisis management, risk assessment, and combatting cross-border crime, he added. Hungary's counter-terrorism force TEK will also train Tunisia's border protection forces. Further, Hungary's armed forces will help train the Tunisian army in preventing blast attacks and disposing explosives.

The two ministers also agreed that Hungary will supply to Tunisia water purification equipment with capacity to produce 20,000 litres of drinking water per day and increase the number of university grants for Tunisian students by 90 to 200. Szijjártó said that a meeting of the Hungarian-Tunisian economic committee had been called for April.

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BUDAPEST OPPOSITION URGES LOCAL GOVERNMENTS NOT TO APPLY 'SLAVE LAW'

Opposition parties in the municipal council of Budapest jointly proposed that companies owned by the city and their contractors should not apply recent changes to the labour code under which employees could be required to work as much as an annual 400 hours overtime. Erzsébet Gy. Németh, a councillor of the Democratic Coalition, told a press conference that the opposition is working to "prevent any effect of the slave law" which she said had been adopted "amid scandalous circumstances" in December. Budapest's 15,000 municipal employees "won't be slaves", Gy. Németh said.

Márta V. Naszályi, representing the Párbeszéd party, said that municipal operations in Budapest "must not rest on the exploitation of employees" and suggested that the city should "set an example" to other municipalities through making without the "slave law".

AUDI UNION CALLS WEEK- LONG STRIKE

The trade union of Audi Hungaria in Győr, in western Hungary, called a one-week strike starting on Thursday morning, after no agreement was reached at wage talks on Wednesday. Union leader Sándor Németh said that the talks would continue during

the strike, and the action would be terminated "if an acceptable wage offer is received". Last Friday, the union held a two-hour warning strike after the employees rejected the company's wage offer. The union is seeking an 18% hike to the basic wage which amounts to at least 75,000 forints (EUR 233), among other salary demands. Further, it wants each worker to be guaranteed one full weekend each month as well as child-related and age-related leave.

KARÁCSONY, HORVÁTH TO VIE FOR LEFTIST MAYORAL CANDIDACY

Socialist city councillor Csaba Horváth and Gergely Karácsony of the Párbeszéd party have garnered the recommendations to compete in the primary process ahead of the local elections, to become the "united left's" mayoral candidate, leftist opposition parties said. The Socialists, Párbeszéd, the Democratic Coalition and Szolidaritás parties said that the primary election would take place between January 28 and February 3, when voters can cast their ballots online, and in offices and tents set up in Budapest.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES MIGRATION, ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH CEI HEAD

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Tuesday met Roberto Antonione, newly elected Secretary-General

of the Central European Initiative (CEI), to discuss regional economic cooperation and migration, the foreign ministry said. Hungary is increasing its contribution to the CEI development fund so that Hungarian companies could have a bigger share in development projects in countries of the Western Balkans, the Hungarian foreign minister said at the meeting in his offices in Budapest. Szijjártó noted the "sensible" migration policy of member states participating in the initiative, eight of which have rejected the UN's migration compact. Central European countries consider the security of their own citizens as a priority, he said.

The CEI is the region's biggest non-institutionalised framework for interstate relations. Italy is at the helm of the organisation this year. Its members are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Belarus, Croatia, Poland, Macedonia, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. The group's main aim is to promote regional cooperation, European integration and the accession of its non-EU member states to the European Union.

JOBBIK INITIATES SETTING UP PARLT CTTEE ON PAKS UPGRADE

Conservative opposition Jobbik has proposed that a parliamentary committee should be set up to review

the upgrade of the Paks nuclear plant, party lawmaker and deputy head of the sustainable development committee Lajos Kepli said. Jobbik expects to have enough signatures from lawmakers to set up a committee, and possibly a cooperation of all opposition parties on the matter, Kepli told a press conference.

Jobbik has always supported the peaceful use of nuclear energy but, as the project went along, an increasing number of economic and financial problems surfaced, he said. The majority of Hungarians is against the upgrade of the plant, Kepli insisted, adding that a referendum should be held to determine the future of nuclear energy production in the country.

Hungary signed a contract with Moscow in January 2014 on the construction of two blocks at the Paks nuclear power plant by Russia's Rosatom. Russia has agreed to lend Hungary 10 billion euros to cover 80% of the project's costs.

DK CALLS ON GOVT NOT TO FINANCE CHURCH, HOSPITAL PROJECTS ABROAD

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has proposed legislation to ban the government from "spending Hungarian taxpayers' funds on churches or hospitals abroad as long as a single hospital in Hungary is facing bankruptcy".

Zsolt Gréczy, DK's parliamentary spokesman, told a press conference

that the government's financing "construction of housing in Iraq, churches in Lebanon or Mexico, as well as hospitals in Syria, Vietnam, or Nigeria" through the Hungary Helps programme was a "crime" at a time when Hungary's healthcare system is "falling apart" with "services being stopped and hospital departments left without doctors". Gréczy said that "there is hardly any hospital in Hungary that has not amassed debts in the several billion forint range" and mentioned Budapest's Honvédkórház with a debt portfolio of 1.5 billion forints (EUR 4.7m), where 54 doctors have recently quit their jobs.

Solving the problems of "Europe's Hungarians" should be a top priority for the government "anything else must come second", Gréczy insisted.

FARM MINISTER MEETS AMBASSADORS OF FRANCE, SAUDI ARABIA, JAPAN

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union, animal feed free of genetic modification and trademark protection were in focus at talks between Hungarian Farm Minister István Nagy and the ambassador of France on Tuesday, while later in the day Nagy met the ambassador of Saudi Arabia to review trade relations, the ministry said in a statement.

French ambassador Pascale Andreani and Nagy were in agreement that Budapest and Paris had been maintaining good relations

in agricultural and environmental cooperation for quite some time, the statement said. The main tasks for Hungary are to increase the processing level of products, improve irrigation, promote generational change, and utilise the results of research and development in agriculture, Nagy said. The most important issue of 2019 will be the common agricultural policy and much will depend on the budget and detailed regulations in the sector, he added. A strong common agricultural policy has remained in Hungary's interest and the country is active in promoting the best compromises for member states, he said.

Talks with Saudi Ambassador Mohammed Abdulhadi Almatrafi focused on foreign trade, investments in Hungary, secure meat supplies and cooperation in research and development, the statement showed. Nagy said it represented important progress that Hungary had received licence to export red meat to Saudi Arabia.

The ministry added that Nagy had also held talks with the ambassador of Japan.

CULTURAL, ACADEMIC UNIONS STAGE DEMO IN BUDAPEST

Unions representing employees in Hungary's cultural and academic sectors staged a demonstration demanding greater appreciation for their sectors' workers in Budapest on Tuesday, the Day of Hungarian Culture.

Csaba Csóti, chairman of the public museums and public cultural employees union (KKDSZ), told the event held in front of the main headquarters of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences that the sector's workers were not being paid fairly and that the sector lacked a fair partnership with the state. Hungary's cultural employees observe the Day of Hungarian Culture each year, but have been waiting for a decade to be paid fair wages, he said.

László Kuti, head of white-collar union ESZT, talked about last year's changes to the funding of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, saying that the state must not be allowed to interfere in the work of research institutes.

Ilona Kazinczi Korecz, head of academic and innovation workers' union TUDOSZ, said academic workers were facing an existential crisis. She said researchers deserved a pay rise and better career prospects.

**TOURISM AGENCY:
NEW DATABASE WON'T
INCLUDE PERSONAL INFO**

Personal information about guests will not be collected and stored by the National Data Centre for Tourism

(NTAK) and its database will only serve statistical purposes, daily Magyar Idők said on Wednesday, citing the managing director of the Hungarian Tourism Agency (MTU) Zoltán Guller.

NTAK will be launched this year in line with amendments to the tourism law and opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has presented a complaint with the European Commission, arguing that the government would use tourism data to monitor Hungarians and that travellers' personal data would be misused. The human rights NGO Hungarian Civil Liberties Union has also qualified the new database as unacceptable.

Guller said the database would not collect any personal data about travellers as such data would not be relevant for tourism development purposes. Transition to the new system will not affect tourists, as information will be collected anonymously by NTAK in order to monitor the key tourism indicators, he added. Most commercial lodgings already run software to handle bookings but tourism data reporting is now paper-based and its digitalisation would help improve the sector's competitiveness, he said. The new system starting this year will collect data from all over the country

in real time, enabling the MTU to prepare projections about visitor numbers and launch more effective marketing campaigns, he added.

**LITERARY EVENING,
BAGPIPE COMPETITION
TO MARK BURNS
ANNIVERSARY IN BUDAPEST**

A literary evening, a bagpipe competition, concerts and charity events will be held to mark the 260th birth anniversary of Scotland's national poet Robert Burns in Budapest between January 25 and 29, the Robert Burns International Foundation (RBIF) said.

The celebration will begin with a "changing of the guard" at gate IX of Hungary's Parliament building with the participation of the Parliamentary Guard, a military band and a Scottish bagpipe group on Friday. It will be followed by a performance by the Budapest Scottish Dance Club, RBIF told MTI.

In the evening the British Embassy will host a reception in honour of Burns. On Saturday the RBIF will host its traditional Burns Supper charity evening featuring the All Star Scottish pipe band, violinist Alison Ewan and the Hungarian Dagda band performing Celtic tunes in Hotel Corinthia.

