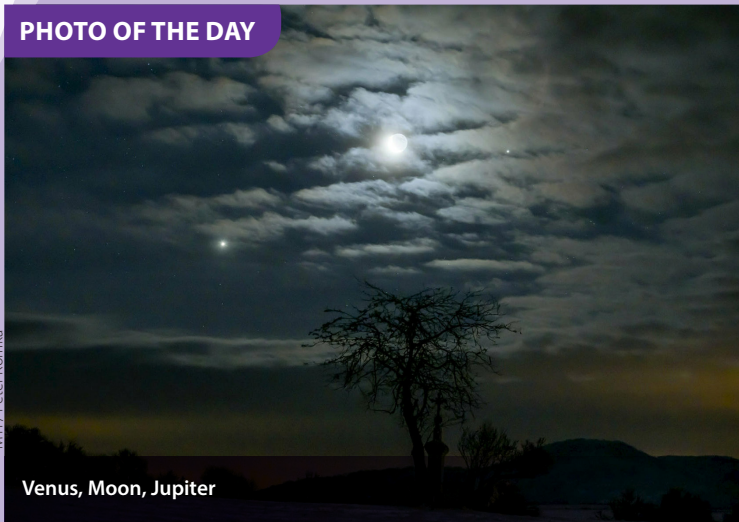


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI / Péter Komka

Venus, Moon, Jupiter

UPCOMING EVENTS

Court ruling on Ahmed H v PM's Cabinet Office on personality rights

Hauni announces investment in Pécs

LMP presser on accommodation crisis in Budapest

5th Budapest International Documentary Festival winners announced

Preselection of left-wing mayoral candidate ends

TOP STORY

OPPOSITION TURNS TO TOP COURT

The opposition is submitting a joint request to Hungary's Constitutional Court to review the law establishing administrative courts, saying the law goes against the Constitution and would harm judicial independence.

Parliament last December approved the law that establishes a system of independent administrative courts that have the authority to make rulings in matters of public administration. The opposition staged a protest in the parliamentary chamber, barring the house speaker from accessing the speaker's podium during the bill's debate.

The Jobbik party said that the law harms the independence and impartiality of the judiciary by putting the justice minister in charge of appointing and firing judges, as well as controlling the courts' budget. Judicial independence means that citizens have a chance of winning against the state, and their chance of a fair outcome is damaged should appointments to the administrative courts and their operations be dependent on the minister, the statement said. The law was also passed unlawfully since there was evidence of voting irregularities in the chamber, the statement added.

The document was signed by Jobbik, Socialist, Democratic Coalition, LMP, Párbeszéd, Momentum leaders and politicians and independent lawmakers.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: EU POLICY ON CHINA 'HYPOCRITICAL'

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Friday called the European Union's policy on China "hypocritical" and said cooperation between the bloc and Beijing was in the interest of the whole of Europe. It is also in Europe's interest that central Europe should develop its infrastructure by utilising Chinese funds, Szijjártó told public media on the sidelines of an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Bucharest. Romania, which currently holds the rotating EU presidency, put EU-China relations on the agenda of Friday's meeting and EU candidate countries have also been invited to the second part of the talks.

Szijjártó said it was obvious that China would soon become the largest economy in the world and the success of European cooperation with China would therefore be vital for the competitiveness of Europe. He said companies from the East and the West were now equally dictating the speed at which global economy changes and in many industries the technologies required for future competitiveness are developed and first introduced in the East. "As a result, cooperation with the Chinese is especially important because if the EU cannot cooperate with China then the latest technology in many industries will be inaccessible to us and this would result in a drop in Europe's competitiveness," he added.

The EU's China policy is "hypocritical" under the current circumstances when trade turnover increased by more than 30% in one year, reaching almost 600 billion euros last year, Szijjártó said. He argued that the countries which had the largest turnover, including Germany, France, Italy, the UK and the Netherlands, were also the loudest critics of China.

"Cooperation between China and central Europe basically concerns infrastructure development projects that are not covered by European resources. As such, the utilisation of Chinese support for infrastructure development in north-south direction is an all-European interest and what's more, this cooperation also yields development for the Western Balkans which will therefore become ever more prepared for EU accession," the minister said. He criticised Brussels for delaying the European integration of Western Balkan countries, adding that it was "unacceptable" that the European Commission was holding back on Western Balkan integration until 2025, even though this would be in Europe's economic and security interests.

INTERIOR MINISTRY ALLOCATES HUF 11 BN FOR LOCAL COUNCIL WORKERS' PAY RAISE

The Hungarian interior ministry has allocated 11 billion forints (EUR 34.7m) to helping cash-strapped local councils raise the wages of

public officials, a government official said. Tibor Pogácsás told a press conference in Budapest that local councils are at liberty to award higher pay hikes than specified in the budget law. Municipalities in difficult financial situations, too, will be eligible to bid for the funds, the state secretary said. Local councils are eligible to apply if the average taxable income of residents is below 38,000 forints per person, Pogácsás said. Of Hungary's 1,283 local councils, 1,098 fall into this category, he said. All but 12 have applied, he added. The interior minister will assess the applications by Feb. 28.

GYURCSÁNY CALLS FOR JOINT FIGHT AGAINST 'ORBÁN REGIME'

The current period is an era of "opposition and rebellion", Democratic Coalition leader Ferenc Gyurcsány said at an event marking the Day of the Republic commemoration. "Hungarian patriots and democrats, regardless of where they come from, must join forces against the regime of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán," Gyurcsány said, insisting that Hungary currently "has a single party system, and a republic cannot survive in such a system". At the end of the event held on Kossuth Square near Parliament, Gyurcsány and head of the For a New Republic Foundation István Kolber laid a wreath at the statue of István Bibó. On Feb. 1, Hungary commemorates the law

on the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic in 1946, which has been a day of commemoration since 2006.

According to the Socialist leader, "there is nothing to celebrate on the Day of the Republic, because there is no republic in Hungary today." Bertalan Tóth, addressing an event in Budapest's 13th district, said Hungary was a country headed by a president "not a king", and that it is written down that "the state is a republic". "Yet there is no republic," he said, insisting that a system had been established that shunned the basic institutions of the republic.

Socialist, DK, and Párbeszéd politicians laid flowers at a stone on the Carl Lutz embankment, commemorating the Republic proclaimed on this day in 1946.

LMP: RED BULL AIR RACE TICKETS ON SALE, YET NO PERMIT AWARDED

The green opposition LMP party is demanding an explanation from Budapest city leaders as to why Red Bull Air Race tickets are on sale when the event has not yet been granted a public space permit this year. LMP city councillor József Gál said that answers are expected from Mayor István Tarlós and the head of the city's proprietary committee. He said he wanted to know on what ground Red Bull started selling

tickets before the committee even discussed the matter, and who was involved in any background consultations.

After last year's event, Tarlós apologised for the "chaos" caused and promised that it would not happen again, Gál said. LMP board member Szabolcs Turcsán said preparations were being made for a "multi-illegal speed race above Budapest". Tököl airport, which functions as a base for the annual race, is not eligible for a licence for the event, according to current environmental regulations, he added.

FIRE AT BUDAPEST HALLS OF RESIDENCE SUSPECTED ARSON

It is suspected that a recent fire at a university hall of residence in Budapest's 9th district, which claimed a life, was arson, the Budapest police chief said on Friday. The fire that gutted the Károli Gáspár Reformed University dormitory on Jan. 23 was started on purpose, Tamas Terdik said. Three young people from Budapest have been interviewed by police on suspicion of endangering the public and they admitted to starting the fire, he added. Terdik said the suspects expressed remorse. So far they have not been taken into custody, he added.

HUNGARY NOV TRADE SURPLUS REVISED DOWN TO EUR 478 M

Hungary's trade surplus in November was revised downwards to 478 million euros in a second reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH). In the first reading, published on Jan. 9, KSH had put the surplus at 496 million euros. Imports grew by an annual 7.3% in value to 8.996 billion euros, while exports increased by 4.5% to 9.474 billion. The trade surplus was down 204 million from the same month a year earlier.

HUNGARY PMI EDGES DOWN TO 54.0 IN JAN

Hungary's seasonally adjusted Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) eased to 54.0 in January from 54.3 in December, the Hungarian Association of Logistics, Purchasing and Inventory Management (Halpim), which compiles the index, said. An index value above 50 shows expansion in the manufacturing sector, while a value under 50 signals contraction. Among the sub-indices that comprise the PMI, the new orders index rose and remained over the 50 threshold. The production volume index was higher and continued to show expansion. The employment index also continued to show growth and increased from December.