

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Kabir Bedi in Budapest

MTI/Balázs Mohai

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Foreign minister presser with Thai deputy PM**

**S&P reviews Hungary's sovereign credit rating**

**Socialist Party congress finalises EP election list**

**Carpathian Basin conference on demography in Budapest**

## TOP STORY

# HUNGARY-SE ASIA TIES 'OFFER GREAT POTENTIAL'

Building closer ties with Southeast Asia offers "great potential" for Hungarian businesses, the foreign minister said after talks with his Philippines counterpart in Budapest.

At a joint press conference with Teodoro Lochin, Péter Sziijártó said that the Southeast Asian region's economic boom and increased import demand offers great opportunities for the Hungarian economy. He welcomed that Hungary's exports to the Philippines had grown by 74% in the first 11 months of last year and added that the goal was to help Hungarian businesses to further market opportunities. He added that the food industry and water management could become the "flagship" of Hungarian exports. At the talks, Sziijártó voiced Hungary's solidarity with the Philippines over a recent terrorist attack by the Islamic State militant group on a Catholic church. The attack "also shows that the global fight against Islamic extremism, a hotbed for terrorism, must be stepped up", he said. Lochin thanked Hungary for its assistance to Christian communities and advocating protection for those communities in the UN. Lochin said that bilateral political and economic ties are strong, with farming and water management being the primary areas of business cooperation.

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## **HOUSE SPEAKER EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES OVER N MACEDONIA BUS CRASH**

Hungary's parliamentary speaker has expressed condolences to his North Macedonian counterpart over a bus crash that killed 15 people on Wednesday.

"We were shocked to learn about the fatal accident," László Kövér said in a telegram sent to Talat Xhaferi. "We share the grief of the victims' family members and friends," Kövér said.

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## **STRASBOURG COURT CALLS ON HUNGARY TO IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ASYLUM SEEKER FAMILY**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has called on Hungary to improve the living conditions of an Iraqi family of asylum seekers with three children living in the Tompa transit zone. The court called on Hungary to "provide adequate care and take the necessary steps as soon as possible to ensure that the family's circumstances meet the requirements of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights," a court spokesman told MTI on Thursday. Article 3 concerns the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment. The family is awaiting expulsion from Hungary after the authorities rejected their asylum claim. They had turned to the Strasbourg court with a complaint of insufficient food and poor living conditions.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: ENMECH HUNGARY INVESTS HUF 6.4 BN IN CAPACITY EXPANSION**

Automotive parts manufacturer Enmech Hungary is investing 6.4 billion forints (EUR 20.12m) in expanding production capacity at its base in Pécel on the outskirts of Budapest, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said. The government is providing a 641 million forint grant for the project, Péter Szijjártó told a press conference in Budapest. Enmech is the subsidiary of German company Mektec Europe which is in turn a subsidiary of Japan-based Nippon Mektron. Mektec Europe CEO Wolfgang Bochtler said production at the new plant could start in October. The plant will produce parts for car batteries and the sensors of self-driving cars. Staff at the Hungarian plant will also take part in development projects. According to public records Enmech Hungary had revenue of 12 billion forints and after tax profit of 214 million forints in 2017.

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## **FINANCE MINISTER MEETS BANK OF CHINA VICE CHAIRMAN**

Hungarian Finance Minister Mihály Varga held talks with Liu Liange, Vice Chairman of the Bank of China, the finance ministry told MTI. The parties agreed that the cooperation with the Bank of China, Hungary's accession to the Asian Infrastructure Investment

Bank, the opening of OTP Bank's Beijing office in 2017 and Hungary's active involvement in various financial funds will further strengthen bilateral financial relations.

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## **JOBBIK CALLS FOR REFORM OF LANGUAGE TRAINING**

Conservative opposition Jobbik said on Friday that Hungary needs a reform in language training before holding a language certificate is introduced as a requirement for entering higher education. It is a reasonable expectation that degree-holders should have a language certificate, but the language skills that can be gained in the current public education system are not sufficient, Jobbik deputy group leader Gergely Farkas told a press conference.

Introducing such a requirement represents "financial discrimination" against children from families that cannot afford extra language classes, a language school or trips abroad, he added. Farkas welcomed Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's recent announcement to provide all Hungarian students a two-week language course abroad but said the real pledge to success would be more and better trained language teachers. The planned requirement of a successful language exam for entrants in higher education should be postponed by at least four years, he said. In recent years, around 45% of entrants and 55% of higher education

students held a language certificate and these ratios are impossible to change within a year or two, he added.

### **PÁRBEZSÉD TO SUBMIT ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS ON FAMILY SUPPORT**

The opposition Párbeszéd will submit a package of seven proposals on family support to parliament on Monday, the party's parliamentary group leader said. A package announced by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán last week is "insufficient" for improving the demographic situation because it only supports the wealthy, Tímea Szabó told a press conference.

Párbeszéd proposes doubling family support and increasing childcare allowance GYES from a monthly 28,500 forints (EUR 90) to 60,000 forints, she said. The party insists on the equal pay for equal work principle and would make it obligatory for all employers to supply data to the Equal Treatment Authority about how much they pay to male and female employees filling the same position. It is against the law to fire mothers on maternity leave but many employees circumvent the regulations by scrapping the position altogether, she said. Párbeszéd proposes the introduction of fines against employees that use legal loopholes to get rid of employees on maternity leave, she added.

Párbeszéd also proposes increasing the net minimum wage to 150,000

forints and believes that in addition to expanding kindergarten capacities, it is also necessary to boost the salaries of people working in kindergartens, she said. As a result, the party proposes doubling their wages. Additionally, Párbeszéd proposes introducing a home rent scheme to help young people get accommodation, Szabó said.

### **FARM GATE PRICES UP 5.8% IN DECEMBER**

Farm gate prices in Hungary were up by an annual 5.8% in December 2018, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The price of live animals and animal products dropped by 1.5%, however crop prices were up 10.2%. Grain prices were up 14% with the price of maize up by 6.3% and wheat prices rising by 23%. In 2018 as a whole farm gate prices increased by 2.7% from 2017 as crop prices rose by 5.8% and the price of livestock and animal products was down 2.2%.

### **HUNGARY UNI LAUNCHES WATER MANAGEMENT ENGINEER COURSE IN ENGLISH**

The Nagykanizsa campus of Pannon University, in western Hungary, has announced the launch of an English language course of instruction for water management engineering. The university is the first in Hungary to launch an English language

course of study for the profession. The course could draw students from countries in South America, Asia or Africa with a shortage of water resources, said Ildikó Galambos, who heads the Soós Ernő Water Technology Research and Development Centre, which is developing materials for the course.

### **LIDL HUNGARY PLANS 15% PAY RISE**

German-owned discount chain Lidl will raise wages at its shops and warehouses in Hungary by 15%, on average, from March 1, Lidl Hungary told MTI.

The wage rise will bring starting pay for Lidl store staff to a gross monthly 267,000-287,000 forints (EUR 838). Pay for store staff with the company for three years will increase to 297,000-317,000 per month. The figures include non-wage benefits but not allowances, which averaged 32,000 a month last year. Pay for new hires at Lidl's warehouses who work on commission will rise to gross 277,000-313,000 forints a month. Warehouse workers on commission with three years under their belts will get 342,000-393,000 forints. Allowances for warehouse workers averaged a monthly 55,000 forints last year. Since January 2016, wages for staff on Lidl's payroll have risen by 75%, on average. The latest pay rise will affect almost 4,600 staff.