

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Group of common crane en route from N Africa to N Europe

UPCOMING EVENTS

Orbán meets EPP group leader Weber in Budapest

EP election campaign events

Ruling in 2016 Budapest bombing case

Gold of the Incas exhibition opens in Budapest

TOP STORY

ORBÁN HAILS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH LAOS

Political ties with Laos “have been elevated to the level of strategic partnership”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after talks with Thongloun Sisoulith, his Laotian counterpart, in Budapest.

Orbán told a joint press conference after the talks that Hungary would open a representative office in Laos, and that the two countries would open the fourth phase of a tied aid programme. He said that Hungary had also opened a 45 million dollar credit line to promote bilateral cooperation between businesses. Orbán added that the loans Hungary had provided to finance investment projects in Laos have now amounted to several tens of millions of dollars and the turnover of bilateral trade had increased six-fold in the past two years.

Orbán said that education was a key area of cooperation, with over 300 people that graduated from Hungarian universities now in senior positions in Laos, and 186 Laotian students currently studying in Hungary. Parties at the talks agreed that Hungary would provide scholarships to 100 students annually.

Sisoulith applauded the elevation of bilateral ties onto a strategic level. He thanked for the Hungarian government’s financial support which he said would greatly contribute to his country’s economic development goals.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EC 'HATCHING PLANS' ON MIGRATION

Citizens of the European Union have the right to know "what secret plans the European Commission is making behind their backs to further undermine the continent's security", Foreign Minister Péter Sziijártó told public Kossuth Radio.

Referring to a document prepared by the legal service of the commission concerning ramifications of the United Nations' Migration Compact, Sziijártó said that "it has been Brussels's greatest lie concerning migration". He insisted that it was "well-known" that "Brussels would cram the compact down the throat of each European country". He noted that Hungary was the first EU member to reject the document, while eight other countries followed suit. Before the UN vote on the compact, "Brussels kept pulling the wool over our eyes saying that it would not be legally binding", Sziijártó said, adding that "still, the word obligation is used 80 times in the document passed". He insisted that "work is under way both in New York and Brussels" to make the compact a point of reference "gradually, through the back door" at the conferences and in documents of international organisations.

The compact seeks to "legalise illegal migration and declares, by definition, that each country in the world must participate in migration," the foreign minister said. Hungarian people have the right "to make it

clear that they do not want to live in a migrant country and that they do not consider migration as a fundamental human right". If the compact were to be made mandatory, migrants should be provided the same services as "people living in the (given) country legally and paying taxes", he added. This would provide further incentives for migration and further increase the threat of terrorism, he insisted.

ORBÁN, WEBER TO MEET IN BUDAPEST ON TUESDAY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will meet Manfred Weber, group leader of the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament and EPP's Spitzenkandidat in the upcoming European parliamentary election, in Budapest on Tuesday, the prime minister's press chief said. Weber told the German weekly *Welt am Sonntag* on Saturday that he will initiate talks with Orbán concerning issues around the EPP membership of Orbán's Fidesz party.

SZIJJÁRTÓ ADVOCATES 'MUTUAL RESPECT' IN TIES WITH NETHERLANDS

Hungary and the Netherlands "look at the world from different positions" but "they will be able to discuss many issues if they stay on the grounds of mutual respect," Foreign Minister Péter Sziijártó said.

At a joint press conference with his Dutch counterpart in Budapest, he

said that "Hungary gives and expects respect" especially concerning its position that "Hungary's future should be determined by the Hungarians only". Economic and defence achievements are in the focus of Hungarian-Dutch ties, and "calm discussions will contribute to success stories rather than disputes dominating (bilateral) cooperation," Sziijártó said.

The Netherlands is an important ally for Hungary within the EU and NATO with the two countries cooperating in several areas, Sziijártó said. There are, however, areas such as European politics where the two countries disagree on more issues than on which they are on equal footing, he added. One such issue is migration, Sziijártó said, attributing the difference to the role immigrants had played in Dutch history. "In turn, Hungary has never been, and will never become, an immigrant country," he said, adding that this difference explained why the two countries had voted differently on the UN's global migration compact.

Hungary and the Netherlands, however, can rely on one another in defence cooperation, he said, noting the 22-strong Dutch contingent serving on the military base at north-western Hungary's Pápa.

Concerning economic ties, Sziijártó noted that 650 Dutch businesses are employing 15,000 people in Hungary.

Stef Blok, the Dutch minister, said that bilateral ties are strong; Hungary and the Netherlands are allies within NATO, partners in the EU and have

tight business ties, too. As partners, they can discuss differences in their positions and share concerns, he said, adding that “they may not always agree; a respectful and open dialogue is needed”.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO BUILD STRATEGIC TIES WITH LAOS

Hungary will raise its bilateral ties with Laos to a strategic level, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Saleumxay Kommasith, his Laotian counterpart, in Budapest.

Laos has been a “traditional partner” for Hungary in one of the fastest developing regions of the world and it has had a high economic growth in the past two decades, Szijjártó said, adding that cooperation could be profitable for Hungary. He also praised the achievements of Hungary’s economic diplomacy, which have proven that “it is possible to help Hungarian companies to successful business in remote countries if we use appropriate economic and diplomatic tools”.

Laos and Hungary have so far completed two major projects, worth a combined 38.6 million dollars and financed through a tied aid programme, in the areas of farming and food safety, Szijjártó said. An agreement to launch a third project, worth 160 million dollars, has been made, he added. Hungarian companies are currently helping Laos with building a new food safety chain, renewing the sewerage system

of Vientiane, the Laotian capital, and introducing electronic IDs, while talks are under way to launch a fourth programme of health investment. The turnover of bilateral trade has increased six-fold in the past two years, he said. Szijjártó also announced that the government has decided to open a consular office in Vientiane to serve an increasing number of Hungarians visiting Laos.

The Laotian foreign minister praised bilateral ties and said that raising relations to a higher level is a reflection of mutual trust. He thanked Hungary for providing scholarships to Laotian students and voiced appreciation for the projects completed under Hungary’s tied aid programme. The two foreign ministers signed an agreement under which holders of diplomatic passports would not need visas for the other country, and another accord on education cooperation in 2020-2022.

NÉMETH CALLS FOR ‘STRONG HUNGARIAN REPRESENTATION’ IN EP

Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament’s foreign affairs committee, called for a “strong Hungarian representation” in the next European Parliament, which he said was crucial in achieving autonomy for the Szekler Land in Romania . Speaking at an event marking the Day of Szekler Freedom in Budapest’s Heroes Square, Németh referred to a recent European court ruling, under which the European

Commission is obliged to consider a proposal submitted by the Szekler National Council aimed at increased European focus on ethnic minorities. Németh called the ruling a “historic victory” and called on Hungarian voters across the borders to turn up at the upcoming European parliamentary elections. He called it “unacceptable” that “the discrimination ethnic Hungarian communities have been suffering from for some 100 years is maintained and financed from European Union funds” and called for “firm action” against that tendency.

TRÓCSÁNYI: EPP NEEDS STRONG FIDESZ - FAZ

Europe needs a strong European People’s Party (EPP) and the EPP in turn needs a strong Fidesz, Hungarian Justice Minister László Trócsányi, the ruling party’s top candidate for the upcoming European parliamentary election, told German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in an interview published on Sunday. Trócsányi voiced hope that the EPP’s meeting on Fidesz’s membership, scheduled on March 20, “will make a wise decision, one that is favourable for Fidesz”.

Regarding the government’s billboard campaign featuring European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker and American financier George Soros, one of the issues at the root of the debate, Trócsányi said that “we were not attacking Juncker’s person but the bad decisions made by the thought leaders in the EC.” The EC, he said, has

in recent years acted “as a political commission” although its role should be to preserve the “spirit of European treaties” and to follow the guidelines of the European Council, he said. “Instead, we see the influence of the council waning and the EC attempting to define policies,” he said.

Regarding administrative courts, which will start operation in Hungary as a separate branch of the judiciary in January next year, Trócsányi said that although the justice minister will appoint the judges, his competencies are limited. The system has built-in checks and balances “that make it impossible for the minister to act arbitrarily,” he said.

TESCO TO OPEN BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY SERVICES CENTRE IN BUDAPEST

The Tesco Group will set up a business services and technology centre in Budapest creating 800 jobs, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said. The centre will employ young graduates speaking foreign languages in the areas of payroll, labour

administration, customer support service and product administration, Péter Szijjártó told a press conference in Budapest.

“It testifies to the success of a shift in Hungary’s economic policy that an increasing number of foreign companies are bringing service centres to our country,” he said, noting the Budapest had won the project ahead of five contenders from within and outside of the EU.

HUNGARY TRADE SURPLUS NARROWS TO EUR 382 M IN JANUARY

Hungary had a 382 million euro trade surplus in January, narrowing by 225 million from the same period a year earlier, a first reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) shows. Exports rose by an annual 6.4% to 8.993 billion euros during the period. Imports increased by 9.7% to 8.611 billion euros. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 82% of exports and 71% of imports.

FILM PRODUCTION SPENDING IN HUNGARY REACHES HUF 110 BN IN 2018

Spending on film productions in Hungary reached 110.1 billion forints (EUR 349m) last year, data from Hungary’s National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) show. The spending was up from 108.2 billion forints in 2017, but didn’t match the 125.4 billion forints in 2016. About 84 percent of the spending last year was by foreign filmmakers.

A total of 333 films were made in Hungary in 2018, including 245 Hungarian films, 84 foreign films and four co-productions. Among the biggest foreign productions were the latest instalment of the Terminator franchise, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton, with a budget of 16.9 billion forints. NMHH noted that the tax rebate on film production was raised from 25% to 30% last year.