

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Máthé

Students at the launch of the government's "Digital Immune-Booster Programme"

UPCOMING EVENTS

Áder holds talks on climate change in Boston

Budapest Municipal Assembly session

Parliament's economic committee session

Minister János Süssi gives presser on Paks power plant upgrade

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ CHIDES UN FOR APPROACH TO MIGRATION

The UN global migration compact is about managing migration rather than stopping it, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in a public television interview.

The UN is acting as if there were no security risks involved. The UN document treats migration as a fundamental human right, he said, calling this approach "nonsense". "There is no law that says someone can pick a destination on a map at random and then cross dozens of borders illegally to get there," he said. "The document is also dangerous," he said, as each country must choose which category it falls into – a transit country or a destination country – and it fails to recognise that countries may not want to choose either category. The right of the Hungarian state to decide on whether migrants should enter the country is a sovereign one, Szijjártó said, adding that the European Union wanted to make the compact obligatory for all member states.

In a separate interview to public radio, the minister said: "There are those who think the EU will be strong if it comprises weakened member states, but the Hungarian government rejects this ... We believe in a union of strong member states which adhere to their national identity and cultural, religious and historical traditions."

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ÁDER TO MEET UN SECRETARY-GENERAL IN NEW YORK

President János Áder left for New York on Tuesday to meet UN Secretary-General António Guterres and other senior politicians, the president's office said. On Wednesday, Áder will hold talks with senior researchers of the economic and social effects of climate change at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. On Thursday, he will address the UN General Assembly high-level debate on climate change and sustainable development. The president is scheduled to meet the UN secretary-general as well as President of Austria Alexander van der Bellen and President of Slovenia Borut Pahor on that day, Áder's office said.

KOVÁCS DISCUSSES MIGRATION IN SWEDEN

Sweden, like Hungary, sees migration as the most important issue in the European Union, Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, said in Stockholm. Kovács met members of the Swedish parliament's foreign and European affairs committees as well as journalists and gave a lecture at Stockholm University. The state secretary said he had visited Stockholm because of the "heavy criticism" Swedish politicians and journalists had levelled at Hungary in recent months.

He said that whereas the Swedish government showed little interest in meeting him, he had an "excellent discussion" with the members of the two committees. "Although we didn't agree on everything, it's obvious that Hungary, and specifically Fidesz, the ruling party – like the Swedish parties – has the right to its own opinion on key European issues," Kovács said. He said Swedish lawmakers, journalists and university students he met had all agreed that "migration is the number one European issue today." Kovács added, however, that many of the people he met, including a number of politicians, disagreed. The state secretary said he had also spoken during his visit about Hungary's approach to family policy, social institutions and European politics.

FIDESZ SAYS POSITION ON 'MIGRANT CARDS' VINDICATED BY CASE OF SYRIAN TERRORIST SUSPECT

Hungary's ruling Fidesz party says its opposition to prepaid bank cards for migrants has been vindicated by intelligence reports that a Syrian terrorist suspect recently arrested in Budapest received such a card after arriving in the European Union. János Halász, the deputy head of parliament's national security committee for Fidesz, told the committee that his party had warned in the past that anonymous bank cards could be used to finance terrorism. The committee heard

briefings by representatives of the Counter Terrorism Centre (TEK), the Constitutional Protection Office and the Information Office (IH), Hungary's civilian intelligence agency. Halász said some 64,000 debit cards had been distributed to migrants in January alone. "Who knows how many among them could be suspected of terrorism?" he asked. The lawmaker called for a change of direction in Brussels' migration policy, arguing that "the current pro-migration majority" was putting the safety of Europeans at risk.

Jobbik lawmaker Ádám Mirkóczki, the head of the committee, said Hungary was not the suspect's destination. Hungary was but a transit stop for him, and the authorities were still investigating the man's network of connections.

Meanwhile, it was revealed at the meeting that though the accused Christchurch mosque gunman visited Hungary, he only spent a few hours in Budapest and is not believed to have had any Hungarian connections.

DK: FIDESZ SEEKING TO RESTRICT MPS' RIGHTS

The opposition Democratic Coalition has accused Fidesz of seeking to restrict and possibly scrap the right of lawmakers to freely enter public institutions and request information about their operations. Gergely Arató, the leftist party's deputy group head, said after a meeting of parliament's judicial affairs committee that a ruling party proposal to review this

right was on the committee's agenda. Opposition lawmakers "exercised this right several times" last December and in January, he said.

The fact of the proposal indicates that opposition MPs were illegally thrown out of public institutions and access to information was unlawfully restricted, he said, referring to opposition lawmakers who were ejected from the public media headquarters. If this had not been the case, there would be no need to change the law, he added. Meanwhile, asked about tapes of anti-Semitic and racist comments made by nationalist Jobbik politicians, Arató said Fidesz politician János Pócs had made disparaging statements about the Roma Holocaust and had threatened a Roma employee. DK, he said, does not consider any kind of racist statement to be acceptable, but it is right, he added, if the person concerned apologises. "Jobbik did so, Fidesz did not," he said.

MI HAZÁNK PLANS TO FIELD MAYORAL CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL ELECTION IN MAJOR CITIES

The radical Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) Movement will field a candidate in all major cities for the local elections this autumn, party leader László Toroczkai said. After launching the non-parliamentary party's local chapter in the southeast Hungarian city of Hódmezővásárhely, he said that as a grassroots movement, Mi Hazánk gives priority to "the interests

of the homeland and the nation" over party policy considerations. Toroczkai said that stepping down in favour of candidates of ruling Fidesz or leftist parties was "out of the question". Mi Hazánk works to offer an alternative to citizens who want nothing to do with "the systems of [Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán or [former prime minister] Ferenc Gyurcsány", he said.

EP COMMITTEE FINDS HUNGARY SHOWS TRAITS OF TAX HAVEN

Hungary is among seven European Union countries that "display traits of a tax haven and facilitate aggressive tax planning", according to a finding by the European Parliament's Special Committee on Financial Crimes, Tax Evasion and Tax Avoidance (TAX3). The finding was among conclusions in a package of recommendations approved by MEPs on Tuesday after a one-year inquiry. The other six countries are Belgium, Cyprus, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands. Among the recommendations in the package are ones to start work on a proposal for a European financial police force and an EU financial intelligence unit, as well as the establishment of an EU anti-money laundering watchdog.

POLICY MAKERS RAISE O/N CENTRAL BANK DEPOSIT RATE 10 BP TO -0.05%

The National Bank of Hungary's Monetary Council decided to raise the

O/N central bank deposit rate by 10 bp to -0.05% at a monthly policy meeting.

The decision caused the "interest rate corridor" – the difference between the O/N deposit rate and the rate for the central bank's O/N collateralised loan – to narrow from 105 bp to 95 bp and marked the first tightening in years. However, at a press conference after the meeting, central bank governor György Matolcsy said the tightening did not signal the start of a new monetary policy cycle. He said the NBH had taken the "necessary" and "sufficient" steps to achieve the inflation target, adding that the nature and character of monetary policy would remain loose.

The Council left the O/N collateralised central bank loan rate as well as the base rate, which is paid on mandatory reserves, unchanged at 0.90%. The Council has left the base rate on hold since signalling an end to an easing cycle at a policy meeting in the spring of 2016. Afterward, the rate-setters used targeted, unconventional instruments to ease monetary policy further. However, after recent policy meetings, the Council has said it is "prepared for the gradual and cautious normalisation of monetary policy".

At the policy meeting, the Council set the amount of liquidity to be crowded out from central bank instruments at "at least" 300 billion-500 billion forints, down from 400 billion-600 billion forints in Q1. The rate-setters take the level into account when setting the stock of central bank swap instruments.

The Council acknowledged in the statement that the NBH had “met its inflation target” as its measure of core inflation excluding indirect tax effects, an indicator of underlying inflation, rose to 3% at the beginning of 2019.

The Council said inflation “will fluctuate around” the 3% target in the coming quarters, while the measure of core inflation excluding indirect tax effects is “expected to continue to rise until the autumn months and then to decline from the end of 2019”.

The Council also noted that “persistently buoyant” domestic demand is boosting the pace of price increases, while weakening external activity is restraining that pace, and said it would assess the effects of this “dichotomy” on the maintenance of price stability over the 5-8 quarter horizon of monetary policy.

“The monetary policy stance will continue to be accommodative, economic agents’ financing costs will remain favourable,” the Council said, adding that it applies a “cautious approach” to policy decisions and relies “mainly” on the macroeconomic and inflation projects in the NBH’s quarterly Inflation Report.

NBH LIFTS INFLATION FORECAST FOR 2019 AND 2020

The National Bank of Hungary said in a preliminary release of the main forecasts from its quarterly Inflation Report due on Thursday that inflation could reach 3.1% both in 2019 and 2020, higher than its earlier forecasts. The NBH raised its forecasts for inflation for this year by 0.2 percentage points and for 2020 by 0.1 percentage points compared to the estimations it gave in the December edition of its Inflation Report.

RATE OF POPULATION DECLINE INCREASES IN JAN

There were fewer births and more deaths in Hungary in January compared with the same month a year earlier, the Central Statistical Office said. Fully 5.5% fewer children (7,364) were born in January compared with the same month a year earlier, while the number of deaths (13,790) increased by 19%. The number of marriages declined,

with 1,436 couples tying the knot, down 5% compared with January 2018.

BUDAPEST INTL BOOK FAIR TO HOST 850 GUESTS FROM 24 COUNTRIES

Some 850 guests will attend the 26th International Book Fair, to be held between April 25 and 28 at Budapest’s Millenáris Park, the organisers said on Tuesday. This year’s guest of honour is Norway’s Karl Ove Knausgård, best known for his six-volume Min Kamp (My Struggle) series of autobiographical novels. In 2010, the series broke sales records in Norway, according to Oslo-based publisher Forlaget Oktober.

Knausgård will receive the Grand Budapest Prize, founded by the Association of Hungarian Publishers and the city of Budapest. Holders of the prize include Mario Vargas Llosa, Michel Houellebecq, Günter Grass and Jonathan Franzen among others. The country of Norway will also be guest of honour, with writers Klara Hveberg, Vigdis Hjorth and Marta Breen attending.