

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Budapest 'Bálna' commercial and cultural centre sold to the state

MTI/Zsolt Szegedvári

UPCOMING EVENTS

Áder meets UN secretary-general

Orbán holds talks in Cape Verde

Stats office releases unemployment figures

V4, Romania investors' meeting

TOP STORY

PRESIDENT MEETS SCIENTISTS IN BOSTON

President János Áder met scientists of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for talks in Boston.

"The longer we delay decisions to stop climate change the higher the price humanity will pay," he said after the talks where the MIT professors named climate change as the largest threat to mankind. Meeting the challenge cannot be delayed, because recurring water crises are jeopardising food supplies, he insisted and warned that the political and social consequences could be serious.

Water shortage in some countries of Africa and Asia could hinder the gross national income by as much as 10-15%, and coupled with a demographic boom it could lead to a food crisis, which would then involve political tension, conflicts and increased migration, he said.

Áder cited India and Pakistan for example, and said that their recent conflict was rooted in a shared river basin, which can no longer serve increased populations in both countries. He warned that a large part of the global population has to share such areas with other peoples which could lead to further conflicts.

Áder called for urgent research to find ways to store solar and wind energy and to reduce the water consumption of farming.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ PRAISES CAPE VERDE'S 'RESPONSIBLE ATTITUDE' TO MIGRATION

Cape Verde is a country demonstrating a responsible attitude to migration, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said.

Szijjártó has accompanied Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on an official visit to Praia, the capital of Cape Verde. During the two-day visit, the Hungarian delegation is meeting Jorge Carlos Fonseca, Cape Verde's president, Jorge Pedro Mauricio dos Santos, the speaker of parliament, and Ulisses Correia e Silva, the PM.

Szijjártó told Hungary's public media that in many parts of Europe, especially in Brussels, "a disturbing simplification" is applied to Africa. The European Commission often tries to present the continent as a group of countries that have "schemed" to send their citizens to Europe and want to get rid of the burdens of population growth this way. However, this is untrue in many cases, for instance in the case of Cape Verde, which wants to retain its population instead of sending people away, he said

Cape Verde has introduced serious border control measures and takes cooperation with Europe seriously, so Hungary is calling on the EU to also take seriously the development of links with Cape Verde. Hungary is urging the EU to sign bilateral economic partnership agreements with Cape Verde, Szijjártó said. "We must help countries that demonstrate a serious and responsible attitude towards

measures that directly influence the security of Europe," he added. Cape Verde will certainly not be a source of mass migration and will cooperate with Europe when introducing measures that affect its own security and the security of Europe, he added.

Hungary wants to tighten economic cooperation with Cape Verde in order to promote economic stability there and serve the interests of Hungarian businesses. As a result, a 35 million euro tied aid agreement is in the making. This will help Hungarian companies carry out investment projects that contribute to increased stability in Cape Verde, improve the productivity of agriculture and develop water management, Szijjártó said.

NÉMETH: 'SPECTACULAR BREAKTHROUGH' IN HUNGARY-US TIES

A "spectacular breakthrough" is taking place in ties between Hungary and the United States, Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, told MTI by phone from Washington. The Obama administration's "patronising narrative" has been replaced by "dialogue based on mutual respect", said Németh, who is on a nine-day tour of the US.

Concerning his programme, Németh highlighted talks on preparations for a military-defence cooperation agreement (DCA) and added that the accord could be signed in the near future. He also spoke highly of the US' role in endeavours to create energy

security in central Europe. Németh had talks with Philip Reeker, Principal Assistant Secretary of State at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Kurt Volker, the US Special Representative for Ukraine, and other officials.

On the subject of Ukraine, Németh said that "we are working to protect values; when Ukraine tramples on the rights of minorities they undermine a community based on shared values", adding that Hungary is committed to protecting NATO's community of values, too. He also thanked the US for mediating between Hungary and Ukraine.

Earlier this week, Németh had talks with United Nations deputy head Rosemary DiCarlo in New York, and urged that a day of the year should be dedicated to commemorating the victims of communism worldwide.

On Thursday, the Hungarian delegation will leave for Los Angeles and meet representatives of the Hungarian and Jewish communities.

HUNGARY, GERMANY TO STRENGTHEN COOPERATION IN RESEARCH, INNOVATION

Cooperation between Hungary and Germany will be strengthened in research and innovation, László Palkovics, the minister in charge of innovation and technology, said after talks with Federal Minister of Education and Research Anja Karliczek.

Palkovics told the public media that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán

had agreed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to raise the level of cooperation in this field during a visit to Berlin last summer.

A working team will be set up to “very quickly” draft detailed plans, such as supporting cooperation between institutions, coordinating research and innovation strategies, and the possibility of jointly operating large infrastructures, he said.

Concerning the Central European University (CEU), another issue on the agenda, Palkovics confirmed that Hungary’s government supports a proposal by Manfred Weber from the Christian Social Union to involve carmaker BMW and the Technical University of Munich in education cooperation. The proposal “meets the applicable legal conditions but details still need to be clarified by those involved,” he added.

Concerning changes affecting the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Palkovics told Karliczek that Hungary wants to develop a research institute network which is “structurally identical to the excellently functioning German network.” Karliczek acknowledged the information that “no bad intentions are involved and we would actually like to set up a much better functioning and more efficient network of research institutions,” he added.

GOVT OFFICIAL: GERMANY OPEN TO HUNGARY’S HUMANITARIAN POLICIES

Germany recognises and is open to the Hungarian government’s

humanitarian policies, Tristan Azbej, the state secretary in charge of helping persecuted Christians, said in Munich, wrapping up a two-day visit to Germany.

Though Hungary and Germany differ on their views on taking in migrants, they agree that “it’s right to provide help in the region where migrants originate from” and that humanitarian and migration crises need to be tackled at their roots, the state secretary told MTI by phone.

Azbej opened the Hungarian National Museum’s exhibition on persecuted Christians at Hungary’s consulate general in Munich.

Addressing the opening ceremony, former Bundestag vice-president Johannes Singhammer of the Christian Social Union (CSU) said Hungary’s humanitarian policy of protecting persecuted Christians was unique worldwide and with it, the country was setting an example for the West.

Singhammer said Christians were the most persecuted religious group but Western governments and international organisations were not paying enough attention to their plight. He praised Hungary’s state secretariat for aiding persecuted Christians and the government’s Hungary Helps humanitarian programme.

DK CALLS FOR EU TAX ON MULTINATIONALS

The opposition Democratic Coalition is calling for the European Union to introduce a tax on multinational companies, Klára Dobrev, who

heads the party list for the European Parliament election, said, commenting on an EP report approved on Tuesday which showed that seven European Union countries, including Hungary, were operating as tax heavens, enabling aggressive tax planning by corporations. Multinationals make use of the environment the government has developed and they pay an insignificant amount of tax, Dobrev said. Instead of serving the interests of Hungarians and the country, the government is aiding multinationals in a completely unprincipled manner, she added. This is why a United States of Europe is needed, so that EU countries can act together on this issue, Dobrev said. In response to a question, she said when any country introduces very low corporate tax, it harms EU taxpayers. Minimising tax often means avoiding tax, she added.

LMP ACCUSES GOV’T OF GIVING PRIORITY TO GERMAN CARMAKERS’ INTERESTS

The green opposition LMP said the Hungarian government’s veto of a European Parliament climate plan showed that the government was supporting German carmakers’ interests rather than Hungary’s clean environment.

Hungary and Germany, joining force with car industry alliances, have vetoed an ambitious plan by the EP to reduce greenhouse gas emission by 45% in the EU by the year 2030 and go completely carbon-free by 2050, national board secretary Máté Kanász-

Nagy said. "This move has again made it clear that the Hungarian government supports German car industry interests rather than a clean environment and clean air in Hungary," he said. Instead of pushing deadlines away, immediate action should be taken because there are hardly five to ten years available for making steps for climate safety, he said.

Kanász-Nagy called it a stake in the European parliamentary elections whether or not the representation of green eco-politics can be strengthened in the European Union, including Hungary.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY VOTES TO SELL 'BÁLNA' COMPLEX

The Budapest Assembly voted to sell the Bálna Budapest Commercial and Cultural Centre to the state. The sale was approved with 18 votes in favour and nine votes against. The meeting approved the initial offer made by the Hungarian National Asset Management Company (MNV) on Feb. 28 to purchase the building for 11.2 billion forints (EUR 35.4m).

Bálna Budapest, a 13,000 square-metre complex by the River Danube that resembles a whale, was opened in late 2013. Deputy mayor Gábor Bagdy said at the opening that in 2010 his administration had inherited a technically unfinished building which lacked commercial potential, in an underfinanced project under a legally challenging public-private-partnership. The building, designed by the Dutch architect Kaas Oosterhuis, should have opened by August 2010, but the

contractor left it in a half-finished state and failed to pay his subcontractors. The Budapest municipality bought up outstanding debt in 2012 and paid some of the subcontractors, Bagdy said. The city of Budapest called an open tender to sell the building in June 2017 with a minimum net sale price set at 11 billion forints. Government office chief János Lázár announced in November 2017 that the central government intended to buy the Bálna from the city of Budapest for the Hungarian Tourism Agency. In January 2018, the city assembly authorised Budapest Mayor Istvan Tarlós to start talks with the government on selling the facility to the state.

The opposition Jobbik, Democratic Coalition and Socialist parties today stated their objections to the sale. Jobbik representative Marcell Tokody said the city should try to make proper use out of the facility. He told reporters before the meeting of the City Assembly that Budapest was selling the building to the state based on property prices of two years ago and real estate prices had risen significantly since then. DK representative Erzsébet Gy. Németh said that a 11 billion forint lawsuit was hanging over the Bálna and if the city were to lose, it would end up with neither the proceeds nor the property.

ECON COMMITTEE SUPPORTS PATAI'S NOMINATION FOR NBH DEPUTY HEAD

Parliament's economic committee supported a proposal to appoint

Mihály Patai deputy governor of the National Bank of Hungary in a vote of 10 for, one against and one abstention.

During his hearing before the vote, Patai said that the central bank's base rate could be kept at the current 0.9% level in the near future, while the country's economic growth could be maintained in the next 2 or 3 years despite slowing tendencies in Europe and the global economy. He added that Hungary's current account is "manageable" and "basic macroeconomic and fiscal indicators are okay". Patai noted that there is no inflationary pressure in the global economy and Hungary's inflation "mostly correlates with the price of crude oil".

Answering a question, Patai said that Hungary could join ERM II, commonly referred to as the ante-chamber to the euro-zone, within a few months, but added that adopting the euro is "an issue of national strategy" and relevant decisions were up to the government.

MAZSIHISZ WELCOMES HUNGARIAN TRADE MISSION IN JERUSALEM

András Heisler, head of the federation of Hungarian Jewish communities (Mazsihisz), has welcomed last week's opening of Hungary's foreign trade mission in Jerusalem. In a letter to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Heisler said that he was "proud to learn that the Hungarian government opened [the mission] ... in Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, a cradle of Judeo-Christian culture." He expressed

appreciation to Orbán for the “brave step”, Orbán’s press chief said. Heisler noted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, visiting the Budapest Great Synagogue in July 2017, had noted the Hungarian Jewish community’s “hope” that Jerusalem would be recognised as a capital city. The diplomatic measure “inspires hope” as well as sending a “strong signal” to countries to follow suit, he added. The mission was opened by Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and the Israeli prime minister on March 19.

HUNGARY, PHILIPPINES EXPAND COOPERATION IN FARM SECTOR

Hungary and the Philippines signed a cooperation agreement expanding cooperation in the area of agriculture. Hungarian farm minister István Nagy signed the agreement with his

Philippine counterpart Emmanuel Pinol in Manila. The agreement extends to technology transfers, food safety and farm machinery development. Nagy assured Pinol that Hungarian water management know-how would soon be transferred to the Philippines. Three Hungarian meat products companies are already licensed to export to the Philippines and more have launched the application process, he added. A delegation from the Philippines’ animal health authority will visit Hungary in the first half of 2019.

RYANAIR TO LAUNCH SIX NEW FLIGHTS FROM BUDAPEST

Low-cost airline Ryanair will launch flights to six new destinations from Budapest in the 2019 winter timetable. The new flights, to Catania, Luxembourg, Gothenburg, Tel Aviv, Lappeenranta and Poznan, will operate

from October 2019 two or three times a week, regional manager Denis Barabas said. Ryanair’s passenger numbers at the Budapest base are expected to grow by 24% to 3.2 million in 2019. Ryanair carries 18% of air passengers to and from Budapest, taking second place after Hungarian low-cost airline Wizz Air.

CRIMES IN BUDAPEST DROP 10% YR/YR IN 2018

The number of reported crimes in Budapest dropped by 9.8% in 2018 to 56.739 from 62.870 in the previous year, according to an annual report submitted to the Budapest Assembly. The assembly approved the report by the Budapest Police headquarters in a unanimous vote. Commenting on the data, Tamás Terdik, the chief of Budapest police, noted that the number of crimes committed in Budapest in 2018 was the lowest in the past nine years.