

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Actors Zsolt László (L) and Sándor Koroknai (R) participating in the Night of Literature

MTVA/Márton Mónus

UPCOMING EVENTS

Govt official for family, youth and international affairs Katalin Novak in Verona

Socialists hold presser on lack of constitutionality in Hungary

Budapest Central European Fashion Week events

WWF Earth Hour events

TOP STORY

AZERBAIJAN GAS IMPORTS PLANNED FROM 2021

Hungary's foreign affairs and trade minister has reached a deal with his Azeri counterpart to set up a working group tasked with laying the groundwork for the delivery of natural gas from Azerbaijan to Hungary from 2021.

It is in Hungary's interest to have access to Azerbaijan's increased supply of gas to Europe from 2021, Péter Szijjártó told MTI. This is important for Hungary because the diversification of its gas supply has been on the agenda for a long time. But until now, there have always been geopolitical and regional political hurdles along the way, the minister said. "Now, with Azerbaijan, there's a realistic chance for this after 2021, and it'll significantly improve Hungary's gas supply," Szijjártó said, commenting on his talks with Parviz Shahbazov in Baku.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has taken its toll on Europe, he said, noting that it has kept the two countries from signing a new gas transit deal that would ensure the delivery of Russian gas to central Europe via Ukraine. This presents a particularly tough challenge for Hungary, as more than half of the gas it imports from Russia is delivered through Ukraine, the minister said.

GAS DEAL WITH RUSSIA IN THE BAG

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó noted that last week he signed an agreement with the CEO of Gazprom ensuring that the company will supply Hungary with gas next year regardless of whether or not Russia and Ukraine sign a new transit deal, adding, at the same time, that Hungary also had to get started on negotiations on its 2021 gas supply. "We're being serious when we say that in order to improve Hungary's energy security, we need to be able to import the gas Hungary needs from multiple sources," he said. "Looking around our region, we see that importing gas from Azerbaijan could be one of the most viable scenarios in terms of gas supply sources."

He pointed out that Azerbaijan exports an annual 16 billion cubic metres of gas to Turkey and southeastern Europe. The minister also noted the discovery of three new gas fields in Azerbaijan which hold more than 500 billion cubic metres of reserves. And the Caucasian country has begun making preparations to increase the transport capacity of its southeast European pipeline from 16 billion cubic metres a year to 31 billion, he said.

ÁDER: POLITICIANS, SCIENTISTS, GENERAL PUBLIC SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION

Politicians, scientists and the general public share responsibility for climate

protection, President János Áder said after meeting the United Nations Secretary-General in New York on Thursday under the arrangements of a climate change summit at the UN General Assembly. António Guterres called climate change "the greatest challenge of our times", posing an immediate and direct threat to humanity, Áder told the press. Guterres asked participants during his address to prepare plans and programmes instead of speeches for the next climate meeting, he said, adding that the Hungarian delegation would not arrive empty-handed for a UN summit in September. He added that he would present to the General Assembly decisions and measures that have a beneficial influence on the climate. Guterres called Hungary's actions for climate protection "exemplary" and noted that Budapest would be hosting a Water Summit this year for the third time, Áder said. A solution to climate change must be found within the next 15-20 years because the Earth will become uninhabitable if no action is taken, Áder said. The solution will much depend on the attitudes of the two largest polluters, the US and China, but everyone bears responsibility, he added. People should try to save water and not waste energy in everyday life, he said.

ORBÁN MEETS CDU DEPUTIES OF BADEN- WÜRTTEMBERG

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, leader of Hungary's ruling Fidesz party,

met a CDU delegation of Baden-Württemberg's state parliament in his office, his press chief said. Orbán held talks with group leader Wolfgang Reinhart, deputy group leader Winfried Mack and Baden-Württemberg's minister of justice and European affairs Guido Wolf. The two sides reviewed Hungarian-German relations and the challenges faced by Europe.

GROSS WAGES UP 10.6% YY IN JAN

The average gross wage in Hungary rose by 10.6 % year on year to 343,469 forints (EUR 1,070) in January, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Net wages grew at the same pace, reaching 228,407 forints. Wage growth in Hungary has been in the double digits for almost two years, since the government, employers and unions agreed on a series of minimum wage increases paired with payroll tax cuts. Calculating with twelve-month CPI of 2.7% in January, real wages were up by 7.7%.

Excluding the 112,400 Hungarians in fostered work programmes, the average gross wage rose by 9.6 % to 354,200 forints, while net wages grew at the same rate to 235,550 forints. Excluding fostered workers, the average gross wage in the business sector, which includes state-owned companies, rose by 11.6 % to 360,400 forints. The average wage in the public sector increased by 3.8 % to 341,000 forints.

The data confirm a gender pay gap: men employed full time in Hungary

earned gross 376,700 forints in January, while women earned 311,300 forints.

Finance Minister Mihály Varga said wages had grown in parallel with jobs growth. He noted that wage increase in the private sector was even higher than in the public sector. The extremely low unemployment rate of 3.6% forced employers to keep skilled workers by increasing their wages, a statement by the finance ministry said. In the long term, wages in the business sector and the public sector should not diverge, which is partly why wages for police and defence staff, skilled workers in the health sector and local council employees have been increased, he added. In comparison with Visegrad Group countries, gross average wages grew fastest in Hungary between 2010 and 2019, Varga said. Compared with January 2010, net average wages have grown by 64%, in the case of families with a child by 70%, families with two children by over 83% and in the case of three or more children, net average wages doubled, he said.

PAKS PROJECT COMPANY PUBLISHES UPGRADE CONTRACT WITH RUSSIAN DELIVERER

Paks II Zrt, the company managing a project to add two new blocks to

Hungary's sole nuclear plant, has published its contract with Russia's Atomstroyexport concerning the design and implementation of the upgrade, daily Magyar Nemzet reported online. The package "covers the whole span of the project from design through to commissioning, up to the new blocks' retirement". The Hungarian government expects the Russian contractor to deliver the project at a fixed price and in a "turnkey" state of full completion including commissioning of the VVER-1200 blocks, all necessary additions to the system, as well as nuclear fuel for the first and second loads. The contracts, written in English, are governed by Swiss law and any legal dispute should be settled by a Swiss court of arbitration.

HUNGARY CALLS ON EC TO REVEAL WHETHER IT KNEW ABOUT SYRIAN TERROR SUSPECT'S 'MIGRANT CARD'

The Hungarian government wants the European Commission to reveal whether it was aware that a Syrian terrorist suspect had been given a prepaid bank card after arriving in the European Union, the government spokesman said. Addressing a press conference, István Hollik said

the suspect's lawyer had recently confirmed the reports that his client, Hassan F, who was arrested in Budapest last year, had received a prepaid debit card. In spite of this, the EC insists to this day that these "anonymous migrant cards" pose no danger, Hollik said. He cited EC spokeswoman Natasha Bertaud as saying earlier this week that there were no "anonymous migrant cards", as the commission knows whom the cards are distributed to and checks up on their status on a monthly basis. If this is indeed the case, Hollik said, it raises important questions. Hungary's government therefore wants to know if Brussels was aware "that it was funding an executioner of the Islamic State", he said. The people also want to have a clear picture of what is going on, the spokesman said, adding that many Europeans were outraged that Brussels was "using migrant cards to fund terrorists".

PPI FALLS TO 2.7% IN FEB

Producer prices in Hungary rose by an annual 2.7% in February, the lowest rate in almost a year, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Friday show. Factory gate prices for domestic sale were up by 5.2%, while prices for export increased by 1.5%.