

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/György Varga

Recently reacquired silverware in Keszthely Festetics Château

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament plenary session

NATO foreign ministers meet in Washington DC

4th Startup Budapest Forum

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-OHIO COOPERATION TO YIELD HUNDREDS OF JOBS

An economic cooperation agreement to be signed between Hungary and the US state of Ohio will yield hundreds of jobs in high-tech, high value-added industries in Hungary, the foreign minister said.

Péter Szijjártó held talks with US company heads and is scheduled to sign a memorandum of understanding on Hungary-Ohio economic cooperation with Director of the Ohio Development Services Agency Lydia Mihalik.

He told MTI that cooperation with the US economy in recent years played an important part in Hungary being able to better attract investors and boost exports. The US continues to be Hungary's most important export market outside the European Union and it is the second largest investor in Hungary, with over 1,700 firms employing 105,000 people. The car industry, a major sector of Ohio's economy, plays a key role in cooperation, he said. Szijjártó said that 12 companies based in Ohio had already invested in Hungary and they employ 2,600 people locally. These companies include some of the biggest in the United States, such as Procter and Gamble, Owens-Illinois, Dana, Eaton and Goodyear, he added. Szijjártó said he had met with executives from all of the mentioned companies as well as a number of others during his visit to Ohio.

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POTÁPI: SENTA SCHOOL UPGRADE 'MODEL' OF HUNGARIAN, SERBIAN GOVT COOPERATION

A secondary school in Senta (Zenta), in northern Serbia, has been renewed in a joint project supported by the Hungarian and Serbian governments, a senior Hungarian government official said at the inauguration of the facility.

"The project is an outstanding example of how two countries can work together to help the region thrive," the state secretary for Hungarian communities abroad said.

The Hungarian government part-financed the project with 120 million forints (EUR 375,000) and the Serbian government by the dinar equivalent of 470 million forints, Árpád János Potápi said.

The Hungarian government is ready to provide "all possible support to ensure Hungarian children and youth access to high standard education where they live and help them become a useful member of their communities," he said.

PÁRBESZÉD DEMANDS HALTING PAKS UPGRADE

Benedek Jávor, MEP of opposition Párbeszéd, called on the government to take immediate steps to terminate the Hungary-Russia contract concerning an upgrade of the Paks nuclear plant. Jávor told a press conference that implementation of

the project has been "erratic" and argued that "neither the Russian nor the Hungarian party are able to keep implementation deadlines" and the government resorts to "continual legislative machinations" to speed up the process. Referring to a bill before parliament, Jávor said that its passage would cut the deadline for authorities to complete certain procedures, which could make those procedures superficial and impact nuclear safety.

A further problem with the bill, Jávor said, is that the range of authorities to be involved is not clearly defined, which creates uncertainty. He added that there are plans to complete components of the project before its final permit is obtained, and warned that it involves security risks and is against the main contract. Jávor suggested that the government is "trying to conceal that the project will cost more than planned until a later phase when they can convince the public that the project could no longer be dropped".

MOMENTUM LEADER QUESTIONED ON CHARGES OF ASSAULT

The Budapest regional prosecutor's office has questioned András Fekete-Győr, the head of the opposition Momentum Movement, in connection with charges brought against him of assaulting police at a demonstration in front of Parliament last December. Fekete-Győr is suspected of throwing a smoke bomb towards the line of

policemen protecting the Parliament building at the Dec. 13 demonstration, obstructing their vision and making breathing difficult. The prosecutors' office acted on complaints filed by the National Office of Investigation and private citizens, the prosecutor general's office said in a statement. Fekete-Győr has filed a complaint against the charges and refused to cooperate. Assault on public officials is a crime punishable by one to five years in prison, the statement said.

FAMILY OF TEACHER KILLED IN 2006 LYNCHING TO GET COMPENSATION

The family of Lajos Szögi, a teacher lynched after a minor road accident in the north-eastern Hungarian village of Olaszliszka in 2006, is set to receive compensation of 4.9 million forints (EUR 15,200). Szögi was beaten to death by three men after causing mild injuries to a child in a road accident on October 15, 2006. The perpetrators were sentenced in 2009 to 17, 15 and 10 years in prison and were ordered to pay 46 million forints in compensation to the family of the victim. Dezső H, the primary perpetrator, has sued the Hungarian state for inadequate conditions at the prison he was held. He won his case, and the compensation he received has been handed to the family of the victim as an instalment of the compensation due to them, György Schadl, head of the Hungarian judiciary executive body which collects outstanding

debts, told the paper. The 44 year-old local geography teacher was beaten to death after accidentally running over the 11 year-old girl while driving his car through a Roma district of the village of Olaszliszka. Although the girl was only slightly injured, locals pulled him out of the car and beat him to death in front of his two daughters sitting in the car.

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF OPENING OF EP'S JÓZSEF ANTALL BUILDING MARKED

Marking the tenth anniversary of the opening of the European Parliament's József Antall building in Brussels, former European Parliament head Hans-Gert Pöttering said that values should always come before interests because the alternative was political and moral annihilation. Pöttering said preserving the political legacy Hungary's first post-communist prime minister, embracing dignity, freedom and democracy, was a shared duty. He said Antall showed that three-and-a-half years in power was enough time to go down in the country's history as a great politician. Length of tenure, he added, was not the point but what a leader did for his country and the European Union.

Fidesz MEP József Szájer said that the EP building was named after Antall because he was a great European, a great patriot and a great social democrat. He wanted to build a strong Hungary within the EU and

paved the way to NATO and the European community, he said. "Fidesz has learned from József Antall's legacy," he said. "We have learnt that from strength comes unity. The differences of a diverse community can be bridged with a strong leader." Szabolcs Takács, Hungarian state secretary for European affairs, said that thanks to Antall, generations of Hungarians lived amidst freedom and democracy.

RETAIL SALES GROWTH ACCELERATES TO 8.4% IN FEB

Retail sales in Hungary grew by an annual 8.4% in February, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Growth picked up from 5.4% in January, reaching the highest level in just over a year. Adjusted for calendar year effects, sales in February also rose by an annual 8.4%. Adjusted food sales were up 4.8%, non-food sales grew by 10.8% and vehicle fuel sales by 13.8%. In Jan-Feb, sales increased by an annual 6.9% based both on adjusted and unadjusted data. Adjusted food sales increased by 4.4%, non-food sales by 8.5% and vehicle fuel sales by 10.4%.

The increase in retail sales over February was fuelled by rising wages which in turn are largely connected with the current labour shortage, market analysts told MTI after the KSH data release. Domestic consumption remains the driving force of economic growth, they said. Dávid Németh of K&H Bank pointed to higher household consumption on the back of the sharp rise in real wages. Wage growth, he

added, is expected to continue this year and retail sales are likely to grow by around 5% in 2019. András Horváth of Takarékbank said the headline figure outperformed expectations, noting that growth in retail sales had accelerated in February considerably. Household consumption is not only fuelling retail sales but major growth is also likely in hospitality, domestic tourism, leisure, entertainment and other services.

GOVT TO LAUNCH RETAIL BOND WITH COUPON THAT KEEPS GETTING BIGGER

Hungary's government has decided to launch a bond for retail investors that pays a graduated coupon of 3.5% to 6% over five years, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. The bond will be available from June. The coupon on the five-year bond will be 3.5% at the end of six months and 4% at the end of twelve months, Varga said. Half a percentage point will be added to the coupon each year after that, meaning the bond pays 6% in the final year of its term, he added.

HUNGARY TO BOOST COOPERATION WITH THE PHILIPPINES

The investment and export development agencies of Hungary and the Philippines will start "intensive cooperation", an economy ministry official said after the first meeting of the Hungary-Philippines economic mixed

committee. Additionally, the human resources ministry signed a cooperation agreement with the Philippines sports committee, István Joó said. Hungary and the Philippines signed an agreement to enhance cooperation in water management, agriculture, food industry and food safety, as well as in the area of infocommunications technologies, he said.

SOCIALISTS-PÁRBESZÉD SLAM JUSTICE MINISTER FOR “SIDING WITH BANKS”

A law firm associated with Justice Minister László Trócsányi represents banks in law suits initiated by troubled forex debtors, leaders of the opposition Socialist-Párbeszéd alliance told a press conference on Wednesday, adding that Trócsányi has “sided with banks and capital rather than with forex debtors”.

Trócsányi is “interested in the banks winning those suits”, Socialist deputy chair László Szakács said. He also demanded that the government should stop foreclosures and evictions of forex debtors’ families.

Párbeszéd board member Beáta Hegyesi said that several hundred thousand forex debtors have now lost their homes and called it unethical that the Trócsányi firm has represented three banks in the relevant court procedures.

Hegyesi noted that Párbeszéd had earlier proposed that “business firms should be banned from being named after senior politicians” and that senior officials should be banned from taking a leading position in such companies.

SURVEY: 71% VIEWS NATO MEMBERSHIP FAVOURABLY IN V4, 67% IN HUNGARY

NATO membership is viewed favourably by 71% of all respondents in the Visegrad Four grouping and by 67% in Hungary within the group, according to a survey conducted in 12 countries and regions in central Europe by the Nézőpont Research Institute.

The pollster asked 1,000 voting-age adults in NATO-member Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary,

Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, in Germany’s Bavaria and former eastern German regions, as well as in Austria and Serbia outside the bloc, respectively, between February 1 and 27. It marks the 70th anniversary of NATO and the 20th anniversary of the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

Fully 64% of respondents in the entire region surveyed expressed a highly favourable view on their country’s or region’s NATO membership whereas only 26% said the opposite. Translated into figures it means that 71 million out of the region’s 100 million residents supported membership in NATO, Nézőpont said. The survey shows the highest support (89%) for NATO membership in Poland and the lowest (52%) in Slovakia within the Visegrad Group they form with the Czech Republic and Hungary. NATO membership was deemed desirable by only 19% of respondents in Austria and by 17% in Serbia, the survey released to MTI shows.