

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Snow in Hungary's northern hills

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Council meets in Brussels

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: CENTRAL EUROPE ENGINE OF GROWTH IN EU

The value of central Europe is on the rise, with the focus of growth in the European Union shifting to the east, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the Cirkovce-Pince power line in eastern Slovenia.

When the value of a region is increasing, large and strong countries try to gain influence there and the affected countries and regions become the location for geopolitical games, Orbán said. "Our region has become such a location", he added. Orbán said geopolitical games were natural developments and signs that the region had become important. He said the power line link was the largest Hungarian-Slovenian project of recent decades, a "flagship" endeavour in further building trust and friendship between the two countries.

Agreements on connecting the two countries' gas pipeline and railway networks would also be geopolitically significant moves, he added. The power network link will strengthen Hungary and Slovenia's independence and sovereignty as well as the region itself, making it better protected from "geopolitical games" and allowing them to enforce their interests, Orbán said. "When a nation decides to establish a connection with another country, that requires a level of trust," he said. "Especially if they are linking something as crucial as their power supplies."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOOD SINGAPORE-HUNGARY TIES TO BENEFIT COMPANIES

Hungary has managed to develop political cooperation with Singapore based on mutual respect and friendship in recent years, and this is expected to benefit Hungarian cutting-edge industries, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, after talks in Singapore with government representatives and business leaders.

Szijjártó met his counterpart Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister of Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing, Office for Space Technology and Industry head David Tan, chairman at Singapore Space and Technology Limited Jonathan Hung, and heads of the company groups STE and Patec.

"Hungary and Singapore support each other in international organisations, and what's even more important, as open economies, both support free trade agreements and fair global trading," he said. He added that this also served the interests of the Hungarian economy, noting that Singapore is considered to be the third most open economy in the world, while Hungary is seen as the 12th most open.

The foreign minister said the two countries shared a common position on the issue of migration and both refused to approve the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, arguing that the matter was a national competence.

Szijjártó said Hungarian companies involved in space satellites are expected to receive significant roles in developing satellite programmes in Singapore. Also, Hungarian companies specialised in artificial intelligence, data management and IT solutions are present in the Singapore market and may participate in future developments, he added. Singapore, as a world-leading finance hub, only accepts the highest level of IT and AI solutions and Hungarian companies have been able to meet this demand, he said.

Hungarian companies have also met Singapore's food industry expectations and demands, he said, citing the fact that all goose liver imports in Singapore originated from Hungary. An earlier ban on poultry caused by the bird flu has been lifted and Hungarian pork imports have also been approved, he added.

TWENTY-SEVEN FATALITIES, REGISTERED CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS UP 920 IN HUNGARY

Twenty-seven Covid-19 patients have died in the past 24 hours, while the number of registered coronavirus infections in Hungary has risen by 920 to 40,782, koronavirus.gov.hu said. The number of fatalities stands at 1,023, and 12,164 people have made a recovery. There are 27,595 active infections and 1,538 Covid-19 patients are being treated in hospital, 156 on ventilators.

Altogether 23,815 people are in official home quarantine and 850,878 tests have been carried out.

The website warned Hungarians to observe social distancing guidelines and hygiene regulations. It asked elderly people to pay increased attention to protecting themselves and observe general regulations. Entry restrictions for travellers from abroad remain in force. In addition to shops and public transport, wearing a mask is now mandatory in cinemas, theatres, health and social institutions and public offices, and clubs have to close by 11pm to curb the spread of the virus. Regulations include a ban on visiting hospitals and elderly care homes which have to take every possible measure to prevent infections, the site said. The operative body responsible for handling the epidemic response has ordered 5 schools and 165 classes to revert to digital education. Fully 39 kindergartens and 20 schools have gone on emergency breaks, the website said. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (13,232), followed by Pest County (5,179) and the counties of Győr-Moson-Sopron (2,494), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (2,214), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1,923) and Hajdú-Bihar (1,912). Tolna County has the fewest infections (381).

PRESIDENT SIGNS HEALTH-CARE REGULATIONS INTO LAW

President János Áder has signed a law on health-care employment, including a salary increase for doctors. In a statement published on the website of the president's office, Áder said the law

was compatible with the constitution, and that “further open issues will be addressed in by-laws” ahead of the law coming into force. The law passed by parliament on October 6 regulates working conditions for doctors and nurses. The legislation was prepared in agreement with the Hungarian doctors’ chamber (MOK), “in rare consensus between politicians, professionals and the parliamentary committee”, Áder noted. The law was accepted unanimously by all parliamentary parties in an expedited procedure.

NOVÁK: GOVT LAUNCHING HOME RENOVATION SUBSIDY

The government is launching a scheme for subsidising home renovations carried out by households with at least one child, Katalin Novák, the minister for family affairs, told a press conference. Under the scheme launching on Jan. 1, half of the renovation costs up to a maximum of three million forints (EUR 8,400) per renovation will be covered by the state. Applicants are not required to have already participated in the “Csok” housing subsidy scheme launched by the government in 2015. The support covers energy upgrades, bathroom and kitchen renovations, and extensions. Novák gave the example that every family with a child could, say, spend six million forints on renovations and save three million forints. The amount of funding under the scheme will be tailored to demand rather than capped. Full details of the programme will be

unveiled in detail over the next few weeks, she added. She noted that the VAT rate on sales of new-builds is being reduced from 27% to 5% from Jan. 1. Households that qualify for the government’s Csok scheme can also reclaim the 5% VAT when purchasing a new home, she added.

KÖVÉR: RULE OF LAW ISSUE, RECOVERY PACKAGE TALKS SHOULD BE KEPT SEPARATE

The debate around the rule of law and the European Union’s next seven-year budget and post-pandemic recovery package should be kept separate, Speaker of Parliament László Kövér said after talks with his Polish counterpart in Wrocław. Addressing a joint press conference with Elżbieta Witek, the speaker of the Polish Sejm, Kövér said Poland and Hungary were “in the crosshairs of the political and ideological crusade” mounted by Brussels and certain western European countries “with the aim of subjugating our interests to theirs”. The speaker said these countries were using “rule of law procedures” as a facade for their campaigns against Poland and Hungary. On the subject of plans to tie receipt of EU funds to compliance with standards regarding the rule of law, Kövér said the EU had by now launched multiple “operations” against Poland and Hungary and was not even backing away from amending the budget agreement reached by the European Council this past summer.

He said it was important for the Polish and Hungarian parliaments to make it clear that they would “have no part in a game that is practically aimed at blackmailing Hungary”. If the issue of the rule of law is not dropped from the talks on the bloc’s finances, Hungary and Poland will treat the matter as if EU leaders had failed to reach an agreement on the next budget, he added. Kövér said it was “irresponsible” of certain countries to “risk the economic and financial stability of the southern member states just to force through their ideologically and politically-driven agenda”.

Witek agreed that tying receipt of EU funds to the issue of the rule of law went against the bloc’s founding treaties. The speakers said in a joint statement that addressing issues concerning the rule of law through agreements on finances without consent from member states could be considered an “unnecessary amendment” to the EU’s founding treaty. National parliaments have a duty to intervene in this attempt, they said. They urged the European Parliament to approve the budget deal as soon as possible.

DRAMA STUDENTS DISMISS UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP’S DECLARATION ON ‘STUDENT REPUBLIC’

The “student republic” at Budapest’s University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) “cannot be banned”, striking

students at the university's central campus told a press conference. "This is an ideal under which all citizens of the university are considered equal," the students said, adding that they would go on with the blockade. The university's new leadership said on Tuesday that it considered the strike "terminated with immediate effect", and it would not provide "infrastructure or financing" to the facility in future. The students said in response that they were not looking to "anybody else to provide the conditions" for their operations at the campus. The students also insisted that the university's "illegitimate" leadership must not oblige students and teachers sign "loyalty declarations" indicating their readiness to cooperate. They said that the management had cut internet services at the campus, which includes a student hostel, for the night starting at 6pm, when they were still having classes and were preparing for the next day. They added that they were paying for those services to the university. The students also insisted that technical staff at the campus were being forced not to allow them access to rooms where they kept costumes and equipment, and banned making recordings in a facility where film makers are trained.

GOVT OFFICIAL: BUDAPEST MAYOR 'OPENLY SUPPORTS RACISM AND EXCLUSION'

The state secretary for the development of Budapest has accused Budapest's mayor of backing a racist

candidate in a local by-election, and he has demanded an apology. Balázs Fürjes said in a statement that Gergely Karácsony had offended decent Hungarians by supporting László Bíró during the campaign leading up to the Borsod by-election. Fürjes said many people were disappointed in the mayor and expected him to apologise. Left-wing and liberal opposition parties are cooperating with the nationalist Jobbik party during elections. Karácsony is a co-leader of the liberal Párbeszéd party.

Fürjes said their support for Bíró was inconsistent with Karácsony's Facebook posts in the past calling the Jobbik politician "anti-Semitic, anti-Gypsy and racist." Bíró has referred to Budapest as "Jewpest" and has made other racist remarks about Jews, the state secretary said. Jewish and Gypsy organisations have condemned left-wing opposition parties and leaders for openly supporting a candidate with a racist past, thereby "legitimising racism and anti-Semitism", Fürjes said.

KOVÁCS: 1956 ANNIVERSARY TO BE MARKED WITH ONLY TWO STATE EVENTS

In light of the coronavirus pandemic, only two state events will be held this year to commemorate Hungary's 1956 uprising against Soviet rule, Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications, said. The national flag will be hoisted with military honours in a ceremony beginning at 9am in

front of Parliament, he said in a statement. The other event will be the presentation of Hungarian state awards. Otherwise, on Oct. 22 a laser show will be projected on to the Foreign Ministry building, he said. Between Oct. 22 and Nov. 4, photos marking the most important sites of the freedom fight will be shown around Budapest, Kovács said.

GOVT LAUNCHES HUF 12.5 BN SCHEME FOR YOUNG AND UNSKILLED JOBSEEKERS

The government is launching a 12.5 billion forints (EUR 34.4m) scheme to support the placement of 25,000 jobseekers either under the age of 25 or unskilled. Announcing the scheme, the innovation and technology ministry said a new subsidy will cover half of payroll costs of up to 100,000 forints a month for full-time employees, while the support is proportionally less for part-time employees. Employees under the scheme must be on payroll for at least five months.

VODAFONE, BME TO COOPERATE IN EXPANDING 5G NETWORK, SETTING UP 5G LAB

Telecommunication giant Vodafone is adding some 200 base stations to its 5G network in Budapest, and expanding to support a 5G lab at the Budapest University of

Technology and Economics (BME). Vodafone Magyarország Deputy CEO Gergő J Budai said the new base stations would provide nearly full 5G coverage for the capital and surrounding areas. Vodafone will make bandwidth available for BME across its entire campus, supporting an open innovation environment and the establishment of a 5G lab, he added. BME dean Charaf Hassan said Vodafone's agreement to give the university bandwidth creates a "win-win situation", allowing more than 21,000 students the chance to do research and development and come up with applications that make the 5G network valuable. The number of Vodafone's 5G base stations will approach 300 this year.

CBANK: BANKING SECTOR LIQUIDITY ROSE IN SEPTEMBER

Forint liquidity of Hungary's banking sector rose in September from a month earlier, which was mainly reflected in an increase in the average stock of

credit institutions' preferential deposits with the National Bank of Hungary, the NBH said in a report. According to preliminary data the average stock of overnight deposits including preferential ones rose by 162.8 billion forints to 930.9 billion. The average stock of one-week deposits fell by 36.3 billion forints to 2,246.2 billion. The average stock of central government deposits was up by 492.4 billion forints at 2,151.6 billion in September. The stock stood at 2,784 billion forints at the end of the month, up from 1,906 billion.

10TH ART MARKET BUDAPEST TO PRESENT 70 EXHIBITORS FROM 20 COUNTRIES

The 10th Art Market Budapest international art fair will this year feature over 70 exhibitors from 20 countries between October 22 and 25 in the Millenáris centre and park, the event's founder and director said. The focus will be on contemporary Hungarian artwork

with titles by Imre Bak, László Fehér, Dóra Mauer, Tibor Hajas, Imre Bukta, Péter Korniss and Tamás Konok, Attila Ledényi told a press conference. As regards the international art scene, one of the galleries will present works by Bulgarian-born French artist Christo, famous for his monumental environmental art, who deceased earlier this year, Ledényi said. He added that central and eastern Europe's leading international art fair has been organised in cooperation with the CAFE Budapest contemporary art festival. Coinciding with the Art Market, the annual festival dubbed Budapest Art Week will be held between October 16 and 25 and its programmes will include exhibitions, guided tours of art shows and city tours, visits to artist studios and other events. The organisers said that this year's Budapest Art Week will be record long and special attention would be placed on attracting families and young adults. The detailed list of events can be seen at <https://www.bpartweek.hu/en/>.

