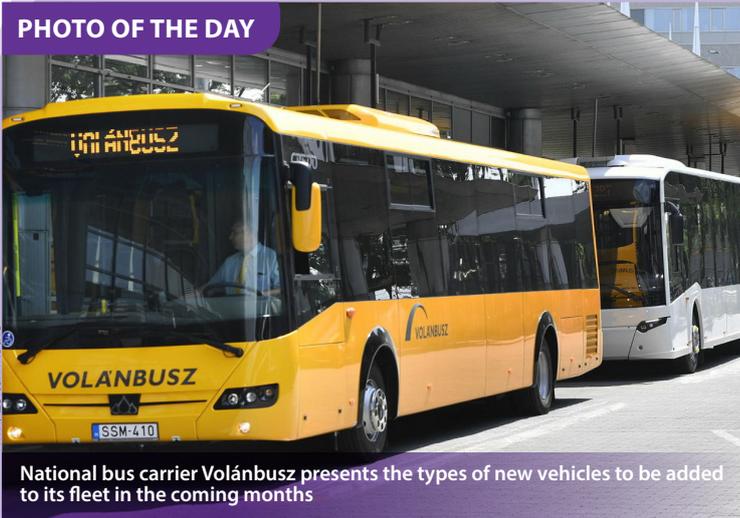


PHOTO OF THE DAY



National bus carrier Volánbusz presents the types of new vehicles to be added to its fleet in the coming months

UPCOMING EVENTS

Presser on armed forces' voluntary military service

Coronavirus updates

Presser on 23rd Jewish Cultural Festival

TOP STORY

JUSTICE MINISTER SLAMS EC RULE OF LAW REPORT

Hungary's justice minister has slammed the European Commission's latest rule of law report, calling it a tool used to blackmail the country over its child protection law.

"We are not surprised: the latest report of the European Commission focuses on the Hungarian Law on Child Protection," Judit Varga said in an English-language post on Facebook. "According to them, in Hungary right now, there is no rule of law precisely because we protect children's and parents' rights at the highest level." She said the reason behind the EC's criticism was that "we do not allow LGBTQ activists and any sexual propaganda into Hungarian schools and kindergartens." Once again, the EC is worried about the state of Hungarian democracy, while Hungary is working to guarantee the most fundamental rights and protect not just its own constitution but also the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights, she said. The minister said the "verdict" of the report had been pre-determined, arguing that instead of justification, objectivity and real professional work, it echoed the criticisms of NGOs that were "biased towards Hungary". Varga said the report was part of a campaign in which the rule of law was not a principle, but "a tool of extortion".

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JUSTICE MIN: EC VALUES 'COMPLIANCE WITH LGBTQ LOBBY' OVER PROTECTING MINORITIES, FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

It appears that "compliance with the LGBTQ lobby" is more important to the European Commission than the protection of national minorities or the fight against anti-Semitism, Justice Minister Judit Varga said, commenting on the commission's latest rule of law report. In an English-language post on Facebook, the minister noted that the report released on Tuesday was the second of its kind within a year. The report released last autumn also proves that it is impossible to compile an objective comparable analysis on complex legal institutions "based on politically motivated starting points, prejudices and unstable methodological footing", Varga said.

In its report, the EC welcomed the Hungarian justice system's high level of digitalisation and its performance in terms of the lengths of proceedings. It added, however, that a recommendation to Hungary to strengthen judicial independence "remains unaddressed", noting that new rules allowing the appointment of members of the Constitutional Court to the Supreme Court outside of the normal procedure is among developments "adding to existing concerns". As for the system of checks and balances, the EC said the transparency and quality of the

legislative process remained a source of concern.

The EC acknowledged in the report that Hungary is implementing an anti-corruption strategy but said "its scope remains limited". "Shortcomings persist as regards political party financing, lobbying and 'revolving doors'. Risks of clientelism, favouritism and nepotism in high-level public administration as well as risks arising from the link between businesses and political actors remain unaddressed," according to the report.

The EC said media pluralism in Hungary "remains at risk", adding that "concerns persist with regard to the independence and effectiveness of the Media Authority". "While no media support schemes were established to counter the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on news media outlets, significant amounts of state advertising have continued to permit the government to exert indirect political influence over the media," according to the report.

FIDESZ MEP SLAMS EC RULE OF LAW REPORT AS 'POLITICAL BLACKMAIL'

Balázs Hidvéghi, an MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz, on Tuesday slammed the European Commission's annual rule of law report covering all member states as "political blackmail dressed up in legal garb". "It didn't come as a surprise," Hidvéghi said in a video message commenting on the report, adding that the government "had no

illusions in connection with the EC's so-called rule of law report after the events of the past few weeks". He said Brussels was "using this frivolous and biased document" to call Hungary to account for its own ideological expectations.

Hidvéghi said the report was "full of absurd claims that have nothing to do with reality". If one looks over the report's references it becomes clear that this text "was also dictated by the known Soros organisations", the MEP said. He said one such "absurd" claim was that Hungarian journalists faced intimidation and were not safe. "They're saying this when just days ago an investigative journalist was murdered in broad daylight in the Netherlands," he said. "Meanwhile, another journalist was killed in Malta by a car bomb, yet Brussels is concerned about the state of the media in Hungary," he added. "This deceitful report is nothing more than an attempt to blackmail our country," Hidvéghi said. "All because we're going against the Brussels-based mainstream, say no to immigration, protect our children and refuse to let LGBTQ activists into kindergartens and schools."

SZIJÁRTÓ: FAKE NEWS PEDDLERS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR COVID DEATHS, DAMAGE

The makers and distributors of fake news will be personally responsible for potential deaths and economic

damage to be caused by the imminent fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Tuesday after a meeting of foreign ministers from five central European countries. The key to combatting the threat of a fourth wave is to achieve the highest possible level of vaccination in the population, he told MTI. The foreign ministers of the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia agreed at the meeting held in Mělník that they would set up a group to coordinate measures and the fight against the epidemic.

MAZSIHISZ: HUNGARY HAS MORE TO DO AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism is present “across the whole of Hungarian society” and “we have something to do against that phenomenon”, András Heisler, the head of Jewish federation Mazsihisz, said at a press conference disclosing the results of a recent survey. He added, however, that “there are fears within the Jewish community, but Hungary does not have the kind of anti-Semitism from which those fears should directly follow”. He argued that physical attacks on Jewish people had not been reported in Hungary recently and “Hungary in that sense is in a better position than other countries in Europe”. To illustrate the situation, Heisler said that during the first bat mitzvah ceremony held in the renovated

Budapest’s Rumbach Sebestyén Street synagogue, the parents of the 12 girls concerned rejected a request for filming the event in fear of what would happen if their colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances found out that they are Jews. Despite the government’s affirmative decisions, anti-Semitism is still present in society as a whole, Heisler said. The share of anti-Semites is still high among the supporters of all political parties and “insinuating half-sentences pertaining to and insulting us” are still prevalent, he said.

Citing 2019 data, Endre Hann, the head of pollster Median, said that 36% of Hungary’s adult population could be considered anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism is usually combined with a pro-order, conservative or extreme-right way of thinking, its advocates brand homosexuality as immoral, would limit the number of people of colour in Hungary, introduce strict anti-abortion and anti-migration measures, and support the re-introduction of capital punishment, he said. There are staunch anti-Semites among the followers of all parties, he said, adding that 40% of them are supporting Fidesz, 16% Jobbik, 9% the Democratic Coalition, 8% the Socialists and 2% Momentum. In 2019 the largest share of anti-Semites was registered in the Jobbik camp, Hann said. All in all, anti-Semitism is not in the focus of public thinking in Hungary, and the general perception of Jews is much better than that of other ethnic groups, he said.

DK DEMANDS EUROPEAN PROBE INTO PEGASUS SPYWARE ALLEGATIONS

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has called on leaders of the European Union to launch an investigation to find out who and for what purpose has been using the Pegasus Israeli spyware in recent years, DK’s MEP and prime ministerial candidate Klára Dobrev said. Dobrev said she had sent letters to the presidents of the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament, also asking the bodies to initiate a rule of law procedure against the Hungarian government concerning “spying on its own citizens”. “A government in the heart of Europe unlawfully spying on its own citizens, journalists, politicians, and attorneys is without precedent,” Dobrev said. The Pegasus affair demonstrates that “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has long been no democrat and no European and he is attempting to lead the country by way of methods seen in dictatorships”, Dobrev said.

NOVÁK: SOME 170,000 APPLY FOR PRE-NATAL LOANS

So far, some 170,000 couples have applied for interest-free, pre-natal loans under a government scheme aimed at assisting families, the minister in charge of family affairs said on Facebook on

Tuesday. Katalin Novák said that 10 million forints (EUR 28,000) could be borrowed, repayment of which would be suspended for three years after the first child was born. When a second baby is born, the debt is reduced by 30%, while after the birth of the third child the entire debt is scrapped, she said. Novák said that the scheme was open and further applications were welcome.

OFFICIAL HIGHLIGHTS BUDAPEST-WARSZAW HIGH- SPEED RAILWAY PROJECT

Integrating Hungary in a European high-speed railway network will be “the grandest railway project of our life”, state secretary László Mosóczi told an online conference on the Budapest-Warsaw railway development project aimed at connecting the Visegrad countries and Austria. Once the new service is complete within the next 10 years, Vienna and Bratislava will be accessible from Budapest in less than 2 hours, Prague in 3.5 hours, and Warsaw in 5.5 hours, the state secretary said. The project, he insisted, will guarantee a sustainable future for Hungarian railways.

Hungary has spent over 2,000 billion forints (EUR 5.6bn) on domestic railway developments in the past 15 years, while the government could spend “several times as much” in future to increase the competitiveness of the railway, Mosóczi said. The state secretary noted the European Union’s directive of reducing greenhouse gas

emissions by 90% before 2050, and said that “the real solution” could be switching over from cars and aircraft to trains, which “could even ensure full emissions-free operations”.

KÁSLER INAUGURATES NEW BUILDING AT DEBRECEN ONCORADIOLOGY CLINIC

Human Resources Minister Miklós Kásler inaugurated a new building of the University of Debrecen’s Oncoradiology Clinic on Tuesday. Hungary’s nationwide oncology network now includes an internationally recognised clinic in the form of the National Institute of Oncology (OOI), four regional centres that include the University of Debrecen, and an oncology centre in each county, Kásler said. The minister noted that he had initiated the European accreditation of Hungary’s entire oncology network instead of just individual institutes. Kásler said the Central and Eastern European Academy of Oncology comprising 21 countries presented an excellent opportunity to establish a partnership between the European academy and the central and eastern European region.

HUNGARY RECORDS TWO COVID FATALITIES, 25 NEW INFECTIONS

Two Covid-19 patients died in the past 24 hours, while 25 new infections were

registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Tuesday. So far 5,573,557 people have received a first jab, while 5,311,557 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has declined to 35,421, while hospitals are treating 77 Covid patients, 11 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 1,504 people in official quarantine, while 6,261,622 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 808,889 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 30,019. Fully 743,449 people have made a recovery. So far, most infections have been registered in Budapest and Pest County, followed by the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Hajdú-Bihar.

ANOTHER 260,000 PFIZER JABS DELIVERED TO HUNGARY

Another 260,000 doses of the Covid vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech have arrived in Hungary, the local unit of Pfizer said on Tuesday. Pfizer Gyógyszerkereskedelmi said the latest shipment raises total deliveries of the Comirnaty vaccine to Hungary to about 6.9 million doses. The unit said Pfizer had reliably delivered Covid-19 vaccines to inoculation points in Hungary on a weekly basis for half a year. It added that over 1.5 million doses of the vaccine had been delivered in the first quarter, and more than 4.5 million doses in the second quarter.

KNAPP HUNGARY INVESTS NEARLY HUF 6 BN IN NEMESVÁMOS

The Hungarian unit of Austrian-owned logistics company Knapp is investing nearly 6 billion forints (EUR 16.7m) at its base in Nemesvámos, in western Hungary, with a 1.4 billion forint grant from the Hungarian government, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Tuesday. The investment will create 500 high value-added jobs, Szijjártó said. He added that Hungary had competed among 20 countries to bring Knapp's investment to the city, where the closure of lawnmower maker MTD Hungária's operation in 2020 left 456 people jobless and an industrial area of 90,000sqm vacant.

Local lawmaker Péter Ovádi noted that German-owned office furniture maker Bock Hungária announced plans late in 2020 to take over some

of MTD Hungária's vacated space in Nemesvámos, creating jobs in the city.

Knapp chief operating officer Franz Mathi said their group offers customized logistics solutions in several sectors, including healthcare, fashion, retail and industry.

HUNGARIAN POLICE UNITS LEAVE FOR N MACEDONIA, SERBIA, SLOVENIA

Three separate Hungarian police units have been dispatched to serve along the border of North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, the national police headquarters (ORFK) said on Tuesday. Hungarian police are committed to preventing the entry of illegal migrants into Hungary and the European Union, and have offered dispatching the units to help achieve this goal, ORFK said in a statement published on its website. The 30-strong unit serving in North Macedonia, the 20-strong unit deployed in Serbia and the three

police officers sent to Slovenia will be tasked with border patrol duties, and surveilling illegal migrants and people smugglers. They will also be dispatched in the central areas of the countries in question. They will carry out their task with infrared hand and mobile cameras and SUVs, ORFK said. The three units were bid farewell in a ceremony in Budapest on Tuesday, it said.

FIRE PUT OUT AT PAKS NUCLEAR PLANT

A minor fire broke out on the premises of the Paks nuclear power plant but it was soon put out, the company said on its website on Tuesday, adding that nobody had been injured in the accident. The company said that the fire had been caused by a heat blower in a container used by a contractor. The fire did not impact the plant's technology, staff, the environment, or local residents in any way, the company said.