

PHOTO OF THE DAY



First Lady Anita Herczegh (L) making wreaths with family organisation representatives for charity fair

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: FIGHT FOR LOW UTILITY FEES TO CONTINUE

The government is committed to its “endless” fight to keep public utility prices low and the upcoming elections will not change that, the prime minister said at a ceremony marking the 15th anniversary of the Nézőpont Institute.

“There’s us who reduced utility fees and work to keep them low and then there are others that say that it is not reasonable and we should let the market regulate them,” Viktor Orbán said. He warned that if the principles in “liberal textbooks” became government practice the cost of living could rise. Highlighting Nézőpont, Orbán said that the pollster “usually predicts the results correctly” in view of the past three general elections. He said that election victories, especially subsequent ones, required a lot of work, adding that “one does not have a two-thirds majority by accident, especially twice or three times one after another”.

On another subject, Orbán said that the period after former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány’s contested 2006 “Őszöd Speech” was “an era of lies” and quoted George Orwell as saying that “telling the truth in such an era is a revolutionary deed”. Nézőpont, founded in 2006, therefore, “could well be considered a revolutionary organisation, which dared to say that two and two made four when everybody else trumpeted the opposite,” Orbán said.

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ORBÁN UNDERLINES NEED FOR HUNGARIAN THINK-TANKS

If Hungary is to be a free and sovereign country it has a constant need for domestic think-tanks, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told a ceremony marking the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the Nézőpont Institute on Wednesday. Political analysis as a profession was in its early stages in Hungary in 2006, Orbán said. "We went from there to having modern and well-structured political analysis even by western European standards," he said. If ever there was a profession that requires an unbiased and objective point of view and is about informing the public about the impact certain decisions have on the country, "it is definitely the profession of politicians", the prime minister said. "There is a need for an entity -- like the Nézőpont Institute -- whose mission is to observe this work without any distortions..." he added. Orbán said Nézőpont had been the first Hungarian think-tank modelled after its Western peers. Fifteen years have passed since the think-tank's establishment, "12 of which we were in power for", he said. Orbán praised Nézőpont's work in gauging public opinion, putting together policy proposals and its analysis of the media landscape. Institutes like Nézőpont are not only useful but vital in a free country, Orbán said. "There's no national sovereignty without nationally-owned research

institutes that prepare the work needed for policy decisions," he said. Orbán underscored the importance of having think-tanks that prioritise national interests.

On the topic of next year's general election, Orbán said that having as big a lead as ruling Fidesz has according to polls "is the most dangerous thing that can happen". "We are confronted with the intellectual challenge of the civic Christian Democratic government enjoying a clear lead in voter support 5-6 months before the election," the prime minister said. Though a lot can change in a short amount of time "our political community is going into this election" in a strong position, Orbán said. According to the polls, all the government has to do in the next 5-6 months "is put in many hours of honest work every day" and focus on enabling people to make a living, he said. Orbán said that unlike at the Olympics, second place in politics did not come with a silver medal. "There's only victory or defeat," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DISCUSSES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WITH JORDAN MINISTER

Hungary supports Jordan in preserving its stabilising role in the Middle East with the aim of preventing the region from becoming a source of new migration waves, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Amman after talks with Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi. Discussions concerning important international challenges

took a back seat during the Covid pandemic, presenting Europe with serious security threats, Szijjártó told a joint press conference after the talks. Middle Eastern security and migration are key issues affecting central Europe's security, he added.

Jordan, one of Hungary's most important allies in the region, is receiving support to help migrants locally, before they can be "used as political weapons thrust onto Europe", Szijjártó said. Within the framework of a NATO project, Hungary has delivered 10 ventilators to Jordan, while as part of a Polish-Hungarian aid scheme, Hungary is providing medical equipment worth 200 million forints (EUR 540,000) to a hospital which is treating Syrian refugees among others, Szijjártó said. Hungary, he added, is also providing 700 million forints of support to Jordanian Christian communities as a contribution to their operational costs as well as to provide aid to refugees. The ministers also signed an agreement on offering 400 scholarships to Jordanian students planning to study in Hungary.

ACTIONS COMPLIED WITH EU LAW IN CASE BROUGHT BEFORE CJEU, SAYS PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

The Public Prosecutor did not violate EU law when he declared unlawful a Budapest judge's decision to suspend a criminal case pending a decision from the Court of Justice of the European Union, the public prosecutor's office

said on Wednesday. The statement came in reaction to a ruling of the CJEU on Tuesday, which said the right of European Union member states to turn to the CJEU enjoys primacy, so the courts are within their rights to ignore all decisions prohibiting them to seek guidance from the CJEU.

In its statement, the prosecutor's office said the prosecutor's decision pertained to the fact that the judge had suspended the Hungarian criminal court procedure rather than to the judge's request to the CJEU. Whereas the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, also initiated disciplinary proceedings against the judge who referred the case to the CJEU, it later retracted them, it added.

The CJEU's decision concluded a 2015 case in which a Budapest court turned to the international court concerning whether Hungarian practices on interpretation and translation in legal matters complied with EU regulations. In the original case, a Swedish national was charged with use of illegal firearms. The quality of the Swedish-Hungarian language interpretation at the court was questioned, throwing doubt over whether the accused's right to interpretation and information were fulfilled. In its ruling, the CJEU said that under the Treaty of the European Union, it was unlawful for national supreme courts to declare "that a request for a preliminary ruling submitted by a lower court is unlawful ... on the ground that the questions referred are not relevant and necessary

for the resolution of the dispute in the main proceedings," as that decision is the competence of the CJEU alone. "In such circumstances, the principle of the primacy of EU law requires the lower court to disregard the decision of the supreme court of the Member State concerned," the ruling said. The CJEU also declared the disciplinary procedure against the Hungarian judge in question unlawful. "Such proceedings are liable to deter all national courts from making references for a preliminary ruling, which could jeopardise the uniform application of EU law," the ruling said.

ÁDER: 180 COMPANIES TO MAN STALLS AT SUSTAINABILITY EXPO

The Planet Budapest 2021 sustainability expo, to be held from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5, is expected to draw 180 exhibitors, President János Áder told public radio on Wednesday. The expo will focus on sectors of the sustainable economy such as water management, sustainable agriculture, smart cities, energy efficiency and green transport solutions, Áder said. Alongside Hungarian companies, one-third of the exhibitors will be from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, he said. The expo will also host a conference on sustainable solutions, as well as interactive programmes and youth events, he said. "The aim is to connect ideas people with users," he said.

To minimise the event's carbon footprint, the stalls are made of

reusable materials, rubbish will be collected by electric trucks, and plastic bottles will be banned from the expo, he said. A tree-planting programme will also be launched to offset the event's emissions, he said. Hungary is among the world's 21 countries to have cut carbon emissions while increasing economic activity since 1990, Áder said. The area of forests has doubled in the past century, and 70% of the country's electricity is clean, he said. Reducing pollution is mostly the responsibility of large polluters, and governments which have a duty to curb pollution as much as possible, Áder said. At the same time, "all parents and grandparents wish their children and grandchildren to have clean air and water, and quality food produced in clean soil. If we can act to make that happen, let's do it," he said. As part of Covid protection efforts, only people with immunity certificates and wearing masks will be able to attend the expo, and rooms and equipment will be regularly disinfected, the president said.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY VOTES FOR PROBE INTO ALLEGED PLANS TO SELL CITY HALL

Budapest's municipal assembly has voted to set up an investigative committee to look into alleged plans by the city's leadership to sell the capital's City Hall.

The motion to set up the committee put forward by Fidesz group leader



Zsolt Láng was approved with an amendment proposal submitted by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony. The committee will be tasked with investigating audio recordings concerning plans to sell the City Hall building and other properties owned by the municipality, as well as the circumstances under which they were leaked. The body will look into possible ties between a businessman in the recordings identified in media reports as Gyula Gansperger and the Fidesz party. The body will also establish if “the way of recording and its publishing has any similarity with Russian-style disinformation campaigns”.

The seven-strong committee, headed by Péter Kovács, Fidesz mayor of the 16th district, will present its findings to the assembly at its December meeting.

Karácsony said that setting up a committee to probe “something that did not happen” was of “historic significance”. He said the city leadership had “nothing to fear” and was ready to answer the committee’s questions. City Hall is “not for sale”, Karácsony said, adding that earlier discussions on how to utilise the building’s facilities excluded “any option that should involve selling the property”. “The case before us is an attempt by the System of National Cooperation and the Russian secret services to hack the election campaign,” Karácsony insisted.

According to Karácsony, “the Rahimkulovs, Hungary’s richest family

with a Russian background, pretended to be preparing to buy City Hall and started fake talks; the talks were recorded, edited, and published, while the ruling party and its media augured that the building was being sold.”

City councillors also approved a proposal for the municipal council to ask the government for help in matters that “seriously threaten the financial situation” of the Budapest and district councils. “Whereas the government has seen its tax revenue rise ... during the crisis, it is ... bleeding the Budapest local councils dry and ... reducing their autonomy like never before,” the proposal on the city council’s exercise of the right of referral reads. The municipal council is asking the government to reduce the so-called solidarity contribution local councils pay into the budget to 10 billion forints (EUR 27.0m) and to compensate local councils for their losses in local business tax revenue. As part of its coronavirus crisis relief, the central government halved the local business tax this year for companies with annual turnover of under 4 billion forints and fewer than 250 people on payroll. The city council also wants the government to transfer 12 billion forints owed to the city’s public transport system. The assembly is also calling on the government to build affordable dormitories and housing for Hungarian students and young families in the area earlier designated for a student quarter “instead of building a campus for a Chinese elite university using budget resources”, they said.

HUNGARY RECORDS 12,637 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 176 DEATHS

Altogether 176 patients died of a Covid-related illness during the past 24 hours, while 12,637 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday. So far 6,057,367 people have received a first jab, while 5,808,536 have been fully vaccinated. Fully 2,043,213 Hungarians have received a booster jab. The number of active infections stands at 155,003, while hospitals are treating 6,840 Covid-19 patients, 664 of whom need respiratory assistance. Since the first outbreak, 1,044,852 infections have been registered, while the number of fatalities has risen to 33,519. Fully 856,330 people have made a recovery. There are 54,978 people in official quarantine, while the number of tests taken stands at 8,196,724.

MINISTRY: PUBLIC TRANSPORT BUDAPEST ADMINISTRATION’S MAIN TASK

Public transport provision is the Budapest administration’s main task, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM) said in a statement on Wednesday, adding that Gergely Karácsony, the city’s mayor, would be unfit for office if he failed to solve the city’s transport financing. The Budapest metropolitan council, had it been willing to cooperate, would

have solved the city's public transport financing long ago, the statement said. Karácsony, it added, either due to incompetence or, more recently, his tactic of diverting attention away from scandals plaguing City Hall, had failed to address the issue. "This is still in the mayor's hands," the statement said. While central budget financing for local public transport is significant, its provision is a statutory task of local governments, the ministry said, adding that the city administration was refusing to pay its share in respect of public transport for the city's agglomeration and to conclude the financing agreement accordingly. All that's required is the mayor's signature, it added.

In response, Karácsony said on Facebook that rather than the government supporting the city, it was the other way round, insisting

that the government deducted 98% of local taxes paid in the capital, while the city had to pay into the central budget from its own revenues. Budapest has become a net payer into the central budget, he said, adding that this had once been "unimaginable". Karácsony insisted the government would hobble Budapest's public transport by withholding the 12 billion forints which was owed to the city as part of the budget law. The government, the mayor added, was "punishing the people of Budapest".

MORE BIRD FLU INFECTIONS DETECTED IN E HUNGARY

Hungary's food safety authority (NÉBIH) has detected bird flu infections in poultry farms in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg

counties, in eastern and north-east Hungary, the authority said. The authority inspected farms in Nyíradony and Pátroha after reports of rising death rates and falling feed consumption. The culling of 14,500 ducks and 19,500 hens has already started, Nébih said. The authority warned of increased infection risk in the autumn bird migration season. Under a previous order of the chief veterinarian, poultry must be kept indoors in Bács-Kiskun, Békés, Csongrád-Csanád, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Hajdú-Bihar, Komárom-Esztergom and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties, unless open-air runs are protected by appropriate bird nets. Feed and water must be stored in closed containers, Nébih said. Those not complying with the regulations risk losing their right to compensation in case of an outbreak, Nébih said.