

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Balázs Mohai

Snow-clad buildings on Danube bank in Szentendre

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

President's Blue Planet podcast

Cttee on City Hall sale issue meets

Budapest LNG summit

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

PRESIDENT VISITS PLANET 2021 EXPO

The aim of the Planet 2021 Budapest sustainability expo is not to scaremonger but rather to present opportunities to act in the interest of environmental protection, President János Áder said.

Inspecting the event's sustainability programmes for visitors, Áder said the Your Planet exhibition presented man's impact on the environment as well as opportunities to pursue sustainability. The exhibition's 120 pages worth of accompanying text would normally be too much for visitors to take in, but the sound effects and visuals make the information easier to digest, the president said. "It is important to give visitors an experience but it is even more important to instill in them -- especially in children -- a desire for knowledge regarding environmental protection," Áder said.

The president said he hoped the expo's visitors would remember what they see at the event whenever they are confronted with the issue of environmental protection. The feedback from the expo floor indicates that the various programmes have captured visitors' interest and make a good case against overconsumption and burdening the environment with excess waste, he said.

At the expo, held last week, altogether 183 exhibitors displayed their latest products and solutions on 20,000 square metres.

ORBÁN: BRUSSELS SUPPORTS MIGRATION, FAILS TO PROTECT FAMILIES, CHILDREN

Brussels is supporting migration and does not protect families and children which should be the other way round, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a video on Friday evening, after arriving in Warsaw.

The Polish capital is a host of twelve party leaders who seek "to be a voice of the many tens of millions of people who are European citizens but do not feel represented in any platform at all," Orbán said on Facebook.

"We do not want migration, what we want is for families and children to come first," he said, adding that their aim is to change the politics of Brussels. "We have been making preparations for months to set up a strong and influential party alliance," Orbán said, expressing hope that the meeting on Friday and Saturday would take significant steps to achieve that goal.

Bertalan Havasi, Orbán's press chief, said earlier that the Hungarian prime minister would travel to Warsaw to participate in a working meeting of European conservative party leaders.

He told MTI on Friday evening that Orbán had met Mateusz Morawiecki, his Polish counterpart, before participating in a working dinner of the European party leaders.

PARLT SPEAKER: 'LEFT'S POLICY OPENLY TREACHEROUS'

László Kövér, the speaker of parliament, accused the leftist opposition of pursuing "an openly treacherous policy", in an interview published in the Saturday issue of daily Magyar Nemzet. A manifestation of that politics has been prevalent in calls by the left urging ethnic Hungarians in the southern region of neighbouring Slovakia "to be proud Slovaks" and in Transylvania "to support with their votes a Romanian party", Kövér said.

In Brussels, the opposition has repeatedly asked for withdrawing as much community funding as possible from Hungary and punishing the country to the greatest possible extent. While Hungary's ruling Fidesz party pursues a nation-oriented policy, the left-wing parties "have become paid servants in global political endeavours aiming to eliminate nation states", he said.

As regards Hungary's general election next spring, Kövér said the opposition "seeks to turn it into a hate campaign, as it always did over the past twelve years".

"The aim is to have a loose mass of consumers composed of people with no identity, national traditions or culture or roots and with no personality," he said.

Kövér said in today's Europe Hungary "along with Poland, is one of the last fortresses protecting Christian values".

"This is why it is not by accident that we both face all contempt and curse". This is why next year's general election will be decisive which "the other side is also aware of", he said, adding that "we must prepare for every eventuality, even that they will do the unimaginable to overthrow our civic government".

The house speaker said in connection with the United States and next year's election that "there has been hardly a country where they [the US] have not tried to intervene", making reference "to developments in Austria, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic". "They will make their utmost efforts to knock Hungary out of the wall of resistance next April, and then only the Polish government will be left for them to deal with," Kövér said in the interview.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'HUNGARY HAS INTEREST IN UKRAINE'S SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT'

Hungary has an interest in Ukraine developing as a country of security, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Facebook on Friday. "We are celebrating the 30th anniversary of Hungarian-Ukrainian diplomatic relations this year. Three decades ago Hungary was among the first countries to recognise Ukraine's independence," he said. As a neighbouring country, Hungary has always had an interest in the security and development of Ukraine, Szijjártó said.

"Over the past few years, however, infringements of the rights of Transcarpathia's ethnic Hungarian community have had a very harmful impact on bilateral relations. We would like to see Hungarian-Ukrainian cooperation be based again on mutual respect as soon as possible," Szijjártó said.

This endeavour was confirmed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán during a brief phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier on Friday, the minister said.

PARL CTTEE HEAD DISCUSSES SECURITY POLICY, ECON COOPERATION, POLITICAL TIES IN WASHINGTON

Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, discussed security policy, economic cooperation and political ties at talks in the US State Department and with the deputy head of the Senate's Subcommittee on Europe, as well as with the chairman of the Congressional Hungarian-American Caucus, in Washington, DC.

Assessing his talks, Németh told MTI on Saturday that it is key for Hungary to maintain dialogue on the highest level with the United States as the most important player in global politics.

Security policy features high in bilateral relations in which context the issues around the stability of the Western Balkans were the main focus of talks, he said. The US side highly appreciates the role Hungary

plays in the Balkan region particularly from the point of view that the command of the KFOR mission was taken over by a Hungarian general in the autumn. Hungary was commended for considerably increasing its military contingents in the region, Németh said. The US negotiators also praised Hungary for safely evacuating several American citizens during the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

On the topic of Ukraine's NATO accession, Németh underscored Hungary's commitment towards the neighbouring country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. He, however, pointed out that Hungary could only support accession on the condition that Ukraine respects minority rights, with special regard to the acquired rights of the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia. "I have told our US partners that Hungary is dissatisfied with Ukraine's related steps," Németh said.

Speaking about economic cooperation, Németh noted "spectacular results". He said the United States is Hungary's leading trading partner outside Europe and has been the second major foreign investor creating over 100,000 jobs in the country over the past thirty years. "Boosting US-Hungary economic ties and ensuring stable business environment is in Hungary's interest," he said, adding that the US side expressed support for the Hungarian government's economic policy measures.

As regards political ties, Németh stated the Hungarian government's objective to maintain continued and balanced relations with Washington. "It is important to note that a political camp that represents conservative values and has the same approach to major issues in society as the Hungarian government is very strong in the United States," he said, expressing hope that the annual conference of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Budapest is set to host next spring would be an excellent opportunity for an exchange of views.

FIDESZ GROUP LEADER: 'REFERENDUM STRONGEST TOOL AGAINST PRESSURE'

A national referendum is "the strongest tool" against attempts to exert pressure on Hungary over its child protection law, the parliamentary group leader of ruling Fidesz said on Sunday.

Máté Kocsis told public news broadcaster Kossuth Radio's morning programme that Brussels wants to have Hungary scrap its law, which was adopted last summer, by launching an infringement procedure. He said that Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition alliance's prime ministerial candidate, also announced after returning from talks in Brussels last week that he would scrap the law if elected to power. "It is not difficult to realise the connection," Kocsis said.

Speaking about the national referendum to be held on the law,

Kocsis said it would ask the public's opinion about the rights of parents in connection with their children's education.

CO-LEADER KARÁCSONY TO LEAD PÁRBESZÉD LIST FOR 2022 GENERAL ELECTION

Gergely Karácsony, co-leader of opposition Párbeszéd, will lead the party's national list for next spring's general election, the party decided at its congress on Saturday. Karácsony, who is mayor of Budapest, told a subsequent press conference streamed on Facebook that he would only "be leading the party list symbolically" as he has no ambition to serve as a member of parliament. "If the opposition wins and there is a change of government I will be preparing to work as the mayor of Budapest in alliance with the new cabinet," he said.

Speaking at the same press conference, Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition alliance's prime ministerial candidate, said cooperation among opposition parties was free of any tension with their unity becoming stronger day by day.

"As a centre-right Christian, Párbeszéd's programme of a fair, green Hungary advocating solidarity is not in conflict with my set of values," he said.

Tímea Szabó, the other leader of Párbeszéd and its group leader, said that, if elected into Hungary's next government, the party would more strongly represent leftist and green

values "which Orbán's incumbent government is trampling on". "Viktor Orbán's government is afraid, tells lies and incites hatred because they are well aware that the game will be over for them next April", Szabo said. "Led by Péter Márki-Zay, we will set up a transparent and honest government that pays attention to the rights of workers, to single mothers and those living in poverty," she said.

DK: DATA PROTECTION AUTHORITY 'COVERED UP FIDESZ CRIMES' IN PEGASUS CASE

The opposition Democratic Coalition on Friday accused the Hungarian data protection authority (NAIH) and its head, Attila Péterfalvi, of "covering up [ruling] Fidesz's crimes in connection with the Pegasus case for months".

Ágnes Vadai, the deputy leader of the party's parliamentary group, told an online press conference that the scandal regarding the Pegasus spy software earlier this year "has shown that the government is surveilling opposition journalists, businessmen and politicians with the help of Israeli spy software." NAIH, at the same time, "was idle all summer while its head, Attila Péterfalvi, was on holiday," she said. The authority has been dragging its feet with the investigation which started in the autumn, she said. Should the opposition come to power in next spring's election, those responsible for the Pegasus scandal would be prosecuted, she said.

FINMIN: CEE ENGINE OF EU GROWTH

Three member states of the Central European Initiative (CEI) are among the European Union's five fastest-growing economies, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said after a meeting of CEI heads of government in Budva, Montenegro, on Friday.

Meanwhile, a ministry statement cited Varga as saying that Hungary and the EU have a vested interest in integrating the Western Balkans. Varga also said that during Europe's energy crisis, Hungary's top aim was to ensure a reliable and affordable energy supply. Although government measures already shield private consumers from rising energy prices, the government is always open to competitive solutions to expanding the resources and routes of energy supply, he said. To that end, Hungary also supports strengthening ties between CEI countries, he said.

Regarding migration, Varga said uncontrolled illegal migration posed health, security, economic and cultural risks. From the very beginning, Hungary's stance was clear, he said: help should be taken to where it is needed, and managing migration was not an adequate solution. Hungary has strengthened border protection and calls on the EU to increase funding for that purpose, he said. The EU should cover half of the costs of the countries protecting the EU's external borders, he said.

GOVT OFFICIAL: CONSTRUCTION PHASE OF PAKS NUCLEAR PLANT UPGRADE SET TO START IN 2022

The construction phase of the Paks nuclear plant upgrade project is set to get under way in 2022, János Süli, the minister without portfolio responsible for the project, said on Friday. Before construction on the two new reactor blocks can begin, however, Hungary's National Atomic Energy Authority (OAH) has to issue the implementation permit for the project and several other permits must also be obtained, Süli told the Tolna County assembly in southern Hungary. The application for a manufacturing permit for the reactor vessel was submitted to the authority last month, which it has five months to assess, he said.

Süli noted that the OAH had asked Paks II Zrt, the company managing the upgrade, to resolve a discrepancy in its implementation permit application. "But what's more important than the deadline is that the blocks function safely with high production indicators for 60 years," the minister said.

Work on the construction pit is expected to start early next year and the concrete cover is set to be completed in mid-2023, he said. "We definitely aim to have the new reactors operational by 2029-2030," Süli added.

LAST OF 20 AIRBUS H145M HELICOPTERS ARRIVES IN HUNGARY

The last newly purchased Airbus H145M medium-sized military multirole helicopter to complete a fleet of 20 landed at a military base in Szolnok, in central Hungary, on Friday.

The helicopter arrived from Airbus's Donauwörth plant in Germany, Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi, the chief of the Hungarian armed forces, told a press conference at the base. It was escorted to Szolnok by a Mi-17 and a Mi-24 helicopter.

The H145M has been purchased in the framework of Hungary's Zrínyi 2026 large-scale army development programme.

Ruszin-Szendi said that altogether 16 of the new H225 type of helicopters are expected to be delivered to Hungary between 2023 and 2025. The Mi-17 and Mi-24 types will be in use as long as possible.

HUNGARY OPENS NINTH VICTIM SUPPORT CENTRE

A new victim support centre has opened in Nyíregyháza, in eastern Hungary, bringing the total number of such centres in Hungary to nine, Justice Minister Judit Varga said on Facebook. The aim of the victim support centres set up by the justice ministry is to provide crime victims with all the help they need, she said. "It is actions, not words, that can provide real help,"

the minister said. "This basic principle is what encourages all of us to take action and turns our compassion into actual assistance."

The support centres aim to create a safe environment for victims, providing them not just relief but also hope, the minister said. They provide not only psychological support but also physical, legal and financial assistance to victims of domestic violence, child abuse and other crimes, as well as to vulnerable family members, she added. The government's goal is to have such an institution in every county seat by 2025, Varga said.

MINISTRY MARKS INTL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

As there are nearly one million people living with some form of disability in Hungary, the government "is working to ensure that both the healthy and the disabled can find their place in society," the human resources ministry said on Friday, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

"The government's goal is to ensure that everyone who wants to should be able to work to the best of their ability and support their families from an income they earn," the ministry said in a statement. It noted government support totalling 50.1 billion forints (EUR 137.6m) for the employment of people living with disabilities by accredited companies for the scheme in 2021 and increases in monthly rehabilitation and disabled benefits. At

present some 44% of the people living with disabilities have jobs, up from 18% in 2010, the ministry said.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons in 1992.

HUNGARIAN CHRISDEM EXPRESS CONCERN OVER TUSK-MÁRKI-ZAY MEETING

Leaders of Hungary's junior ruling Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) have sent a letter to Donald Tusk, president of the European People's Party (EPP), to express concern over his recent talks with Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition alliance's prime ministerial candidate for next year's general election. Tusk and Márki-Zay met and held a joint press conference in Warsaw on Thursday.

The signatories of the letter, KDNP leader Zsolt Semjén and MEP György Hölvényi, deputy leader in charge of foreign relations, said that "the Hungarian left-wing opposition is a political opponent of KDNP, an EPP member party. This opposition and its candidate keep bad-mouthing one of EPP's longest-standing member parties".

Tusk held talks with someone who has no party of his own, and is a candidate only of a political platform, they said, adding that this platform includes Jobbik, which not long ago acted as an overtly anti-Semitic, extreme-right party, whose European lawmaker had earlier asked Hungarian parliament to draw up a list of Jewish deputies.

The KDNP leaders criticised Tusk for his failure to consult with EPP's over 80 members and partners in advance.

"Tusk can meet anyone he wants to. However, the statements he made at the joint press conference, namely that he seeks to cooperate within the EPP with the Hungarian left-wing opposition which he considers a reliable partner, one that is faithful to Christian Democratic values, were totally incompatible with the rules and traditions of the European People's Party," the Hungarian politicians said.

ORBÁN MARKS INTL VOLUNTEER DAY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán promoted volunteerism marking International Volunteer Day over the weekend.

Orbán and his wife, Anikó Lévai, visited the Christmas Market in front of St Stephen's Basilica and

participated in the donation drive at the Ecumenical Charity's stand decorating Christmas gingerbreads, according to a video posted on Facebook on Sunday.

The International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development was mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985 and is observed on December 5.

HUNGARY'S PISTACHIO FRUIT WINS WORLD ICE CREAM CHAMPIONSHIP

Pistachio Fruit (Frutta di Pistacchio), a creation by Budapest's Ádám Fazekas, has fetched gold for best ice cream in the world at an international competition held in Bologna, the organisers said on Friday. Fazekas "blew away" the 11-member jury of experts with the taste and his video presentation, the organisers of the Italian city's World Ice Cream Championship said.

Fazekas won the competition of 32 international ice cream makers. The organisers said they had spent four years attending hundreds of events around the world to select from among 3,500 candidates the finalists to compete for the title in Bologna.