

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV / Zsolt Czeglédi

Celebrating Epiphany in the River Tisza at Tiszafüred beach

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

2022 'CRUCIAL FOR HUNGARY'S FUTURE'

The general election this spring will be crucial for the future of all Hungarians, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad has said.

The whole Hungarian nation, not only the motherland, "must keep moving forward, not backwards," Árpád János Potápi said. Ever since Hungary has had a nationally minded government, the Hungarian nation has been strong and united, he said in a video posted on Facebook. "We consider ethnic Hungarians abroad indivisible parts of the nation, and we're helping them keep their identity and prosper in their homelands," Potápi said. The state secretary noted that the government supported them in developing their institutions, including crèches, kindergartens and schools, and promoted their businesses. Potápi said the situation was in marked contrast to the period of left-wing rule before 2010. "The left wing always aims to serve foreign interests rather than promote the rise of the Hungarian nation," he said. Ferenc Gyurcsány, the former prime minister, "who now wants to return to power, pursued a hate campaign against ethnic Hungarians abroad, and he would deprive them of their Hungarian citizenship," he said, appealing to ethnic Hungarians abroad to register and take part in the elections.

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FINMIN: GOVT RUNNING DISCIPLINED BUDGET

Hungary's government is running a disciplined, tight budget, Mihály Varga, the finance minister, said in an interview to public radio on Sunday, noting that it boosted reserves at the end of last year and rescheduled investments this year. Varga said the ministries have already adjusted their spending in light of the cap on spending of 350 billion forints (EUR 974m) enacted at the end of last year. At the same time, the government seized the opportunity to make longer-term investments, and this year, too, Hungary's investment rate will be higher than the EU average, he added.

Varga said it would not be necessary to cut spending any further than measures already taken, with 755 billion forints already lopped off expenditures. So this year, the deficit will be one percentage point lower than the original target of 5.9%. With greater financial stability and more bullish investor sentiment, growth will be aided in the long run, he said. Also, measures taken during the coronavirus epidemic are expected to aid the budget to a speedier return to balance, he added.

The economy was already on a robust growth path before the outbreak of the epidemic, the minister said, adding that growth in 2019 was the highest in the European Union. Post-crisis, the economy has since returned to this growth path relatively

quickly, with a GDP increase of 6.4% expected in 2021 and well over 5% this year, he added. Growth will lay the foundations for further tax cuts in addition to those made over the past ten years, Varga said.

The minister said that whether the cap on the price of fuel at the pump can be maintained at 480 forints after Feb. 15 would depend on the price of oil on the world market, which, he added, was unpredictable. Varga said that development funds linked to the EU recovery programme were contained in the budget, and even a lack of an agreement with the European Commission would not forestall their launch.

Meanwhile, he said that debt amassed in 2020 had eased in 2021, and the final figures would be available in February. Whereas average debt levels in Europe shot up to over 100% of GDP from around 80%, in Hungary's case debt rose from 65% to 80%. Monetary policy, Varga said, was decisive as regards inflation, and Hungarian policymakers have taken steps since mid-summer to curb it with higher interest rates, which meant higher state spending on financing government securities and debt.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: IMPAIRMENT OF HUNGARIAN COMMUNITIES' RIGHTS IN UKRAINE 'UNACCEPTABLE'

It is "unacceptable" that the government in Kiev is exploiting challenges in eastern Ukraine as

an excuse for continually impairing the rights of national minorities, including ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said at an extraordinary meeting of NATO foreign ministers. In a statement, the foreign ministry cited Szijjártó as telling the virtual meeting that Hungary had a vested interest in a strong, secure and democratic Ukraine and supported the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. At the same time, the government considers the impairment of Hungarian communities' rights as "unacceptable", including a bill the effects of which would exclude dual citizens from public office. "If they pass [the bill], it will considerably restrict the Hungarian government's room for manoeuvre in terms of supporting Ukraine," he said, adding that he had warned all NATO member countries about this and asked them to help end the connected legal violations.

Szjijártó also said that every effort should be made to avoid creating a cold war atmosphere, adding that the Cold War period had been a "nightmare" for central Europe and its return must be prevented.

He welcomed recent consultations between the US and Russian presidents, adding that experience showed it was best for central Europe if the US and Russia could talk to each other directly and at the highest level.

Szjijártó also said that during the upcoming NATO-Russia Council

meeting, Hungary will be represented by a foreign affairs state secretary instead of an ambassador, to highlight the meeting's significance.

PUBLIC HEALTH CENTRE TO SUE HADHÁZY FOR ALLEGED DEFAMATION

The national public health centre (NNK) has said it is taking legal action against independent lawmaker Ákos Hadrhazy for alleged violation of personal rights and defamation in connection with Chief Medical Officer Cecília Müller. The NNK said a recent Facebook post by Hadrhazy had demonstrated "a lack of professional knowledge and bad faith" as well as discrediting the NKK, an authority in charge of protecting the public against epidemics. As a result, he has "intentionally misled the Hungarian people". The NKK said Hadrhazy's actions posed a "direct and severe threat" to epidemiological protection. He has "questioned the professional credibility of those involved and undermined public trust in the methods of protection," the NNK added. His statements "strengthened the anti-vaxxer movement" and his attacks have been "motivated purely by political profiteering", the NNK said.

Hadrhazy stated the Facebook post that he had "filed a criminal complaint for alleged abuse of office

and endangerment committed in the line of duty" and attached an image of Müller to the post. The context and the post directly implied that he was accusing the chief medical officer of those actions, the health centre added.

KUN-MEDIÁTOR DEFENDANT SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS IN PRISON

A local court on Friday sentenced Mária Dobrai, the former head of failed travel agency Kun-Mediátor, which illegally operated as an investment bank on the side, in absentia to ten years in prison for embezzlement and fraud. In its non-binding ruling, the Szolnok court also fined Dobrai -- identified only as Mrs. Sándor D. for legal reasons -- over 5.4 million forints (EUR 14,940) and banned her from holding business leadership positions. She will be eligible for release after serving two-thirds of her sentence. The court said Kun-Mediátor had defrauded its clients of around 10 billion forints by promising them large interest on their deposits. It also ordered the seizure of assets from the company, Dobrai and two of her relatives. The defendant has also been ordered to pay a combined 129.3 million forints to five of the company's clients as compensation. Dobrai's attorney has appealed the sentence.

Dobrai was arrested on a Belize island in late 2016 on suspicion of large-scale embezzlement. Police launched an investigation in April 2015 after a run on the travel agency. The company has been under liquidation since 2016.

ROMANIA CAN LEARN FROM HUNGARY, SAYS SPORTS MINISTER

Romanian Minister of Sports Károly Eduárd Novák, in an interview with public news channel M1, said he had always considered Hungary a partner and believed Romania could learn a lot from its north-western neighbour. Novák, a Paralympic gold medallist in pursuit cycling, said Romanian politicians should also welcome Hungary's support of sports projects in Transylvania. "I will always support these kinds of projects, because they are good and they are about the people who live there," Novák said. Since taking office last year, he added, he had elevated sports to a level where the Romanian government had now recognised its importance. Novák emphasised the importance of the year ahead, saying certain strategies he had implemented needed to come to fruition in 2022. Romania is also expected to pass a new sports law and plans to reform coach training in the country, he said.