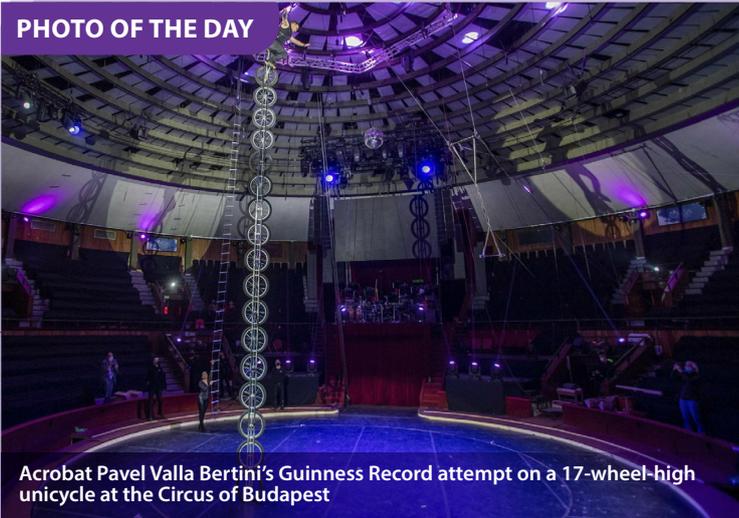


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zoltán Balogh

Acrobat Pavel Valla Bertini's Guinness Record attempt on a 17-wheel-high unicycle at the Circus of Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on Nov 2021 commercial lodgings

Coronavirus updates

Presser on European Wrestling Championships being hosted by Hungary

TOP STORY

HUNGARIANS BEING EVACUATED FROM KAZAKHSTAN

The Hungarians who have requested help from the Hungarian government to leave Kazakhstan are being evacuated as planned, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said.

The evacuees are scheduled to arrive in Budapest on Monday evening aboard an aircraft of the Hungarian military, Szijjártó said on Facebook. Hungary's diplomatic representations have been in contact with some 100 Hungarians in Kazakhstan since the beginning of unrest in that country, he said, adding that altogether 12 of them asked for help to leave. Five people were rescued from Almaty last week, while six are being evacuated now and one person, holding dual citizenship, decided to stay in Almaty, Szijjártó said. Under a recent agreement with Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, the six Hungarians are leaving Almaty on board a Russian aircraft. They will land near Moscow later in the day, and will be picked up by the Hungarian military plane, Szijjártó added. The Hungarian government offered its assistance to the Kazakh state last week, Szijjártó said, adding that on Tuesday foreign ministers of the Turkic Council, in which Hungary has observer status, will hold a video conference on the subject.

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ORBÁN ASSURES KAZAKHSTAN PRESIDENT OF HUNGARY'S SOLIDARITY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Monday and assured him of Hungary's solidarity over victims of recent developments in the country, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. Referring to the unrest, he said that in Kazakhstan "an attempt was made to topple the constitutional order, and a well-coordinated attack was made against the Kazakh state itself". The protests in the country broke out after state price caps on liquefied petroleum gas, a mixture of propane and butane gas, were removed on New Year's Day.

ORBÁN HAS TALKS WITH ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Naftali Bennett, his Israeli counterpart, by phone on Monday night, the Hungarian PM's press office told MTI in a statement. At the talks, Bennett thanked Orbán for the Hungarian government's consistent support of his country at international forums. The two prime ministers also agreed to continue the cooperation between their countries in many areas and keep regular contact, the statement said.

SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION LIST SLIDES 6 PP FROM 2018

If the general election was held this weekend, the ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrats (KDNP) would win 50% of the vote, while the opposition would garner 43% -- a 6-point drop from its results in 2018, a fresh poll of the Nézőpont Institute has shown. According to the poll published in the Monday edition of the daily Magyar Nemzet, the ruling parties have gained 3% among all active voters resident in Hungary since 2018. Of the 43% who would support the opposition alliance, some 33% are considered decided voters, the pollster said. The Two-tailed Dog party (Kétfarkú Kutya Párt) and Our Homeland (Mi Hazánk) poll around three percent, the highest among smaller parties but still well below the parliamentary threshold. They would need to add some 120,000 voters to their camps to make it to parliament, Nézőpont said. At the election likely to be held in April, the turnout is expected over 70%, or 5.7-5.8 million voters at the ballot domestically, Nézőpont said.

OPPOSITION PARTIES PROMISE PUBLIC DEBT REDUCTION WITHOUT AUSTERITY

Politicians of opposition Jobbik, Momentum and Párbeszéd told a joint press conference on Monday

that they would reduce public debt from its current record high without introducing austerity measures if the opposition came to power in the spring election. Jobbik deputy leader Anita Kőrösi Potocska said that the public debt of 42,000 billion forints (EUR 117.2bn) exceeded 80% of GDP. Inflation has increased to a level not seen over the past ten years, the trade balance is deteriorating and the forint had never been worth as little against the euro as currently, while the Orbán government is continually overspending, she added. She also said that "massive corruption" was also to blame for the high public debt.

Momentum deputy leader and economic policy expert Márton Ilyés said the government was financing wage increases and tax returns to the detriment of the budget deficit and public debt. If the Orbán government remains in power, it will be either forced to introduce austerity or "inflate the measures" it has introduced, he added. He said opposition prime ministerial candidate Péter Márki-Zay would be able to avoid austerity by gaining access to European Union resources suspended "because of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán" and cleaning up public procurements. He added that such planned projects as Fudan University's Budapest campus and Budapest-Belgrade railway construction would be re-assessed.

Párbeszéd deputy group leader Bence Tordai said that Orbán undertaking a large public debt only served to strengthen ruling Fidesz

supporters and make preparations for a potential period of four or more years in opposition.

Ruling Fidesz said in response that during the 2006 parliamentary election campaign, the opposition had “lied throughout the entire campaign, promised big handouts, and did just the opposite when in power.” The Gyurcsány-Bajnai government which ruled between 2004 and 2010 “was all about austerity measures, they raised utility fees, raised the taxes on families, workers and entrepreneurs, froze wages, took away the 13th month pension bonus, scrapped family allowances and ... made the country an IMF debt slave,” Fidesz said in a statement. The leftist parties’ programme is once again “a programme of austerities” as ever, the statement said.

DK FILES CHARGES OF MISCONDUCT IN FORMER STATE SECY VÖLNER CASE

The Democratic Coalition (DK) has filed a report on suspected misconduct of duties concerning the case of Pál Völner, former justice ministry state secretary, who is under investigation for alleged bribery and other crimes, Balázs Barkóczi, the opposition party’s spokesman, said on Monday. Völner resigned from his post a month ago. Hungary’s public prosecutor afterwards initiated the suspension of Völner’s immunity so he could defend himself against charges of

having received sums of 2-5 million forints (EUR 5,500-13,700) from the president of the branch of bailiffs over a sustained period of time. Parliament lifted his immunity in a vote on December 14. Barkóczi told an online press conference that Völner had not been taken into pre-trial detention or home arrest which he said “raises the possibility of exerting political influence”. “The prosecutor’s office has enabled Völner to obstruct the investigation by removing evidence and possibly influencing witnesses for over a month,” the spokesman said. He called it “inexplicable” that Völner, a lawmaker of ruling Fidesz, is still at large “while he has failed to either testify or cooperate with the authorities, and has not answered questions or showed the slightest sign of remorse”.

LMP PLEDGES TO RETURN POWERS, FUNDING TO LOCAL GOVTS

Should the opposition receive the mandate to form a government after the spring election, it will return funds and powers to local governments that “the Orbán government had taken away”, LMP said on Monday. The central government has withdrawn funding worth several hundreds of millions of forints from the government of Budapest’s 9th district, Antal Csárdi, the party’s deputy group leader and a lawmaker for the district, told a press conference streamed

on Facebook. The 8th district has lost over one billion forints worth of funding in a similar measure, Csárdi said about the two districts which are both governed by the opposition since the 2019 municipal elections. “The district governments would have spent these monies on investments that clearly aimed to serve to interests of local residents,” he said, adding that a continued withdrawal of central funding has already cost providing basic municipal services in appropriate quality. Csárdi accused ruling Fidesz of “seeking to paralyse local governments”.

HUNGARY REGISTERS 14,655 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 167 DEATHS OVER WEEKEND

Altogether 167 patients died of a Covid-related illness over the weekend, while 14,655 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 6,292,759 people have received a first jab, while 6,027,578 have been fully vaccinated. Fully 3,286,577 Hungarians have received a booster jab. The number of active infections has risen to 111,895, while hospitals are treating 2,931 Covid-19 patients, 281 of whom are intubated on a ventilator. Since the first outbreak, 1,297,612 have been registered with the virus, while 39,947 deaths have been recorded. Fully 1,145,770 people have made a recovery.

MANDATORY DECLARATION OF CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL EXPORTS EXTENDED UNTIL MAY 31

The government has extended the mandatory declaration of the export of strategic building materials from Hungary until May 31, the innovation and technology ministry said on Monday. The government obligated building materials sellers to declare exports in the summer amid concerns that runaway prices could counter the benefits of a home renovation subsidy scheme. Tamás Schanda, a state secretary of the ministry, said that iron and steel products, isolation materials, sand, stone and gravel, among others, can be exported only after the say-so of the ministry so that "exports do not hinder or risk the building, operation or development of key domestic infrastructure". The transport of strategic products and raw materials also has to be registered, he said. Schanda said that measures to control the price of two of the most important building materials, gravel and sand, has brought 5 billion forints (EUR 13.9m) in state revenues until the

end of December. At the same time, prices have also gone down, he said, pointing to the price of gravel in the Budapest area, which dropped to 3,000 forints/ton from 8,000 forints/ton.

HUNGARY TRADE BALANCE RETURNS TO SURPLUS IN NOV

Hungary's trade balance returned to a surplus in November, a first reading of data by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Monday shows. Hungary, an export-driven economy where trade surpluses are the norm, had trade deficits every month since July. In November, the trade balance showed a surplus of 81 million euros. Exports rose by an annual 7.7% to 11.113 billion euros and imports climbed 13.6% to 11.033 billion euros. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 77% of Hungary's exports and 72% of its imports. For the period January-November, exports increased by 13.2% year on year to 109.255 billion euros and imports rose by 17.2% to 106.895 billion euros. The trade surplus reached 2.360 billion euros, narrowing from 5.339 billion euros in the same period a year earlier.

Takarékbank chief analyst Gergely Suppan said growing industrial output, especially in the automotive segment, led to growing exports in November, but the global chip shortage still had an effect. Imports rose mainly on investment demand and higher prices for raw materials and energy. The trade surplus probably fell to around 2 billion euros in 2021 from 5.62 billion in 2020 and the surplus should continue to fall in H1 2022. This year's outlook is surrounded by major uncertainties because of supply chain disruptions and price fluctuations, he added.

FŐTAXI ENTERS EXPRESS DELIVERY MARKET

Főtaxi, a leader on the capital's cab market, on Monday announced the launch of a 24-hour package delivery service. Főtaxi pledges pickup within four hours of the time an order is placed with its Főtaxi GO service. Főtaxi boasts around 1,500 cabs, including those of group members Budapest Taxi and MB Elit Taxi. The company, which is more than a century old, had net revenue of 1.2 billion forints (EUR 3.33m) in 2020, public records show.