

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Balázs Mohai

Construction of an abbey in Gödöllő, near Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

NBH Monetary Council holds rate-setting meeting

Stats office reports on Nov 2021 wages

EU General Affairs Council meets

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

HUNGARY BACKS TALKS ON UKRAINE

Hungary opposes any measures that may exacerbate the situation in Ukraine while supporting efforts aimed at resolving the conflict through negotiations, the foreign minister said in Brussels.

Péter Szijjártó said everything must be done to prevent a new Cold War from emerging, adding the historic standoff had resulted in "several wasted decades" for central Europe. "We don't want to fall prey to any East-West conflict," the minister said. Hungary backs direct talks, he said, adding that "all the hysteria needs to stop". Regarding the possibility of intensified sanctions against Russia, Szijjártó said it would be worth assessing the impact of existing sanctions on the economic cooperation of various countries with Russia. Szijjártó said central Europe was heavily reliant on Russian energy supplies. "Those who are now the loudest in demanding sanctions have a big role to play in maintaining" the status quo. He called on the sides in negotiations to take central European countries into account when "addressing the future of this sharpening East-West conflict". Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary had no plans to evacuate its diplomats or their families from Kiev. Neither has it updated its advice on travel to Ukraine, he added.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: NOT EVERY NATO MEMBER ON SAME PAGE

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on the sidelines of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels that not that every single NATO ally shared the exact same assessment of the Ukraine situation. Nor was there a full consensus on possible measures, he added. As regards the upcoming meeting of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Szijjártó said it was “natural” for them to hold talks. He called criticism of the meeting “unserious”. The minister added: “When will US President Joe Biden or Secretary of State Antony Blinken be criticised for recently meeting their Russian counterparts on several occasions?”

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR CHANGE IN EU’S AFRICA, MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Péter Szijjártó, Hungary’s foreign minister, has called on the European Union to change its “failed” policy in Africa and the Middle East, to allow the return of Syrian and Libyan migrants to their homelands. Szijjártó told a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday that the EU must also strive to stop migration from those countries, and stem migrants’ transit through them. Szijjártó said the past few years’ measures had been “utterly unsuccessful”, and warned that the

EU would lose all weight in the region unless it adapted its policies radically.

The EU must provide aid to Turkey to help as many Syrian migrants return to their homelands as possible, lest Turkey fail to maintain the agreement signed in 2016 on holding migrants if it is hit by further waves, he said. Brussels should also launch security, economic and health-care development projects in the Middle East and Africa rather than “inspiring further waves of migration”, Szijjártó said. It should also support African countries in protecting their southern borders, he said. “If the European Union cannot do that, and we carry on with the Africa and Middle East policy of the past few years, the bloc is going to face further security risks,” he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY READY TO COOPERATE IN TAKUBA MISSION IN MALI

France can count on Hungary’s cooperation in the Takuba mission in Mali to strengthen security and reduce migration from the region, “as long as the risks are reasonably manageable”, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels after an extraordinary meeting of the seven European states participating in the international task force. Extremist ideologies and terrorism are inducing migration waves from the Sahel which is why building peace and security in the region is in Hungary’s strategic and national security interest. This endeavour requires military presence

as well, Szijjártó said, according to a statement by the foreign ministry.

A 12-strong Hungarian unit is already in Mali, working to prepare the arrival of an 80-strong Hungarian contingent in the spring, he said. “Our position is that migration waves from Africa should be stopped rather than encouraged, and security needs to be improved [in the region] in order to achieve that,” the foreign minister said.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY CTTEE ADOPTS REPORT CONCERNING ALLEGED CITY HALL SALE PLANS

The municipal assembly of Budapest’s committee examining alleged plans to sell City Hall adopted a report on the investigations on Monday, concluding there had been no decision to sell the landmark building. The report, drafted by Tamás Soproni of the Momentum Movement, the mayor of the 6th district, said no committee member had come up with any evidence to support the alleged wrongdoing. The document also established that the municipality’s property sales practices were “entirely transparent”. The committee also voted down an alternative report by Péter Kovács, the (Fidesz) mayor of the 16th district, who insisted the municipal assembly’s left-wing majority “has, from the beginning, sought to deny or belittle the facts that have come to light”. Kovács insisted on his own conclusion that “Budapest’s leadership did indeed want to sell City Hall”. The documents

available, leaked recordings and testimonies of witnesses heard by the committee all pointed to “the likelihood of plans” to sell the building.

Before the vote, Socialist deputy Csaba Horváth said Kovács’s report was not objective and could not be adopted, while Soproni accused Kovács of peddling government propaganda.

In a statement, Kovács said former Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai had not made himself available to the committee. “It is up to the investigative authorities to find out about his role in the operations of the municipality and its property sales,” he added. Kovács said the committee had been “doomed to failure from the beginning” as leftist deputies were in a majority and they “openly expressed their preconceptions”.

HUNGARY RECORDS 39,928 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 122 DEATHS OVER WEEKEND

Altogether 122 patients died of a Covid-related illness over the weekend, while 39,928 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 6,342,496 people have received a first jab, while 6,080,592 have been double-jabbed. Fully 3,554,502 Hungarians have received a booster shot. The number of active infections has risen to 191,312, while hospitals are treating 2,921 Covid-19 patients, 176 of whom are intubated on a ventilator. Since the first outbreak, 1,441,385 have

been registered with the virus, while 40,944 deaths have been recorded. Fully 1,209,129 people have made a recovery.

ELECTION 2022 - OPPOSITION PLEDGES HIGH LEVEL HEALTH SERVICES

The united opposition will ensure that everybody has access to high quality public health services if it wins the April 3 general election, representatives of the Democratic Coalition (DK), Párbeszéd and Momentum parties told an online press conference. Zoltán Komáromi, DK’s health spokesman, accused the government of transforming public health care into pay-for services “by stealth”, and insisted that private health care was “increasingly controlled by oligarchs and beneficiaries of the system”. The next government will have the obligation to build “a decent, state-financed system available to everybody”, he said.

Párbeszéd co-leader Tímea Szabó said the “privatisation by stealth” of the health sector had started when “the social security contribution was made into a tax”. She said the principle that contributions are spent on the area they were collected for specifically should be upheld since taxes “can be spent on anything the government chooses to”. The government, she added, had in effect “built sports stadiums” using national insurance funds.

Szabó insisted that nurses’ pay was being “kept low” with a switch-over to private health care in mind. The

opposition, she added, promised to hike nurses’ pay and restore the prestige of the profession.

Momentum’s Gábor Havasi said the government had “deliberately neglected” health services in the past twelve years while supporting private services, and he insisted that private health care was largely controlled by circles close to the government. Public health care, he said, was “opaque and fragmented”, and patients found it difficult to get referrals to appropriate specialists.

IAEA PRAISES HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY’S NUCLEAR STUDIES

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has praised the nuclear studies courses of the Budapest University of Technology (BME) after a review of the BSc and MSc courses between Dec. 14 and 17, the university said. The IAEA generally offers high-level Knowledge Management Assist Visits to countries with the most advanced nuclear programmes, it said. By reviewing BME’s training programmes, the IAEA aims not only to support the host university, but also to gather international good practices to support similar programmes in other countries, it said.

Attila Aszódi, the dean of BME’s Faculty of Natural Sciences, said the international delegation concluded that the university’s nuclear technology programmes “are of impressive depth and breadth, providing students with a high quality and well-structured

nuclear technology education and competences required in the nuclear industry." The experts highlighted the importance for students to have access to a working training reactor on BME's campus which aids a high-level education, the dean said. They advised the university to increase the international visibility of its nuclear training programmes and further tap alumni networking opportunities. The delegation comprised the IAEA's mission head and experts from the Imperial College of London and the University of West Bohemia in the Czech Republic.

ORBÁN VISITS NURSERY IN NW HUNGARY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán over the weekend visited a nursery re-opened in Acsalag, in north-western Hungary, with central support provided under the government's Hungarian Village development scheme. The nursery was closed by the previous government in 2009 but reopened in September last year with a 60 million forint (EUR 167,000) government support. The Hungarian Village programme was launched in 2019 with a budget of 150 billion forints. It had a budget of 270 billion forints in 2021 increased to 1,000 billion this year.

GULYÁS: GOVT PROVIDING HUF 26.5 BN FOR PREMONSTRATENSIAN ORDER RENOVATIONS

The government is providing 23 billion forints (EUR 63.9m) towards

the cost of renovating the institutions of the Premonstratensian Order in Hungary, the prime minister's chief of staff said on Monday at the ground-breaking ceremony of a new abbey in Gödöllő, near Budapest, which is also receiving a 3.5 billion forint government grant. Gergely Gulyás said the Premonstratensians were an important part of Hungarian history, adding that the order's thirteen friars and six nuns oversaw several schools across the country which were pillars of local communities. "Where a church is built, people believe in God and that each person has a special value; where a church is built, a community develops," he said. All communities that build values can rely on the government, Gulyás said, adding that it was important the church organisations "are provided the means necessary to successfully fulfil their mission".

MATOLCSY CALLS FOR BUDGET TO BE BROUGHT BACK TO BALANCED PATH

To curb inflation, the central budget should once again be put on a balanced course and the government must double down on enhancing the country's competitiveness, György Matolcsy, Hungary's central bank (NBH) governor, wrote in an article published by *magyarnemzet.hu*. "Unless we make rapid and major advances in productivity and competitiveness, the country's fiscal balance cannot be restored," Matolcsy said. Drawing

a parallel between the 2020s and the 1970s, Matolcsy noted that fifty years ago runaway inflation, a high budget deficit, swelling government debt, foreign loans and bad government policies had spoiled the entire decade and in the case of several countries including Hungary had cast a long shadow over the 1980s too. "Winning or losing the coming two decades will depend on the measures we take now," the governor wrote. Catching up with the advanced economies will remain one of the top three priorities for Hungary in the coming decade, Matolcsy said. To achieve this goal, domestic savings, foreign direct investments and EU funds should be complemented with the central bank's targeted credit facilities, he added. The central bank's gauge of Hungary's competitiveness registered no improvement during the successful 2020-2021 crisis management, and Hungary is still in 18th place among the 27 EU member states, Matolcsy said, accusing the ministry in charge of competitiveness of "sabotaging ... the ministry responsible for the budget".

FRENCH PEOPLE SMUGGLER SENTENCED TO 4.5 YEARS IN PRISON

A French national was sentenced in a first-instance ruling to four years and six months in prison and ordered to stay outside Hungary for a subsequent period of nine years for attempting to smuggle 24 illegal migrants into Austria last year, the Veszprém County

prosecutor's office said on Monday. Last October, the man transported 24 migrants, who said they were Syrian citizens and entered Hungary illegally in a sealed van at the Serbian-Hungarian-Romanian border. He was apprehended in Veszprém County, in central Hungary, the prosecutor's office said. The man had received 1,500 euros from an unknown client, the prosecutor's office said. The accused is launching an appeal.

HUNGARY SIGNS MOU ON KAMAZ R+D, PRODUCTION BASES

Hungary's Innovation and Technology Ministry has signed a memorandum of understanding with the management of Russian truck maker KAMAZ on establishing a local electric vehicle R+D base and, later, a production facility. KAMAZ will launch its R+D base in Hungary this year, with a staff of 65 engineers, the Innovation and Technology Ministry said. The number of engineers at the base will double to 130 by 2024, it added. KAMAZ could start production in Hungary as early as 2025, turning out 32,000 EVs a year.

By 2030, output at the local base could approach ten times that number.

Hungary and KAMAZ is slated to establish a joint venture to implement the plans, the ministry said. The MoU was signed by Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics and Igor Povarazhnyuk, who heads KAMA JSC, a company KAMAZ has launched to make EVs.

NBH LEVIES HUF 1.4 BN OF FINANCIAL MARKET OVERSIGHT FINES IN 2021

The National Bank of Hungary (NBH) levied 1.4 billion forints of fines for violations of compliance and consumer protection rules last year, according to the business daily Világgazdaság. The central bank and financial market watchdog told the paper it levied 347 fines during the year, not including ones related to data provision and cash logistics shortfalls. The biggest fine, of 100 million forints, was levied on F-Hold in the spring, for unlicensed lending. The NBH also fined five private individuals a combined 7.5 million during the year. Fines levied by the NBH last year compared with 2.1 billion forints levied in 2020.

STATE SUPPORT ACCOUNTS FOR CLOSE TO HALF OF NON-PROFIT REVENUE

State support accounted for close to half of non-profits' revenue in 2020, data compiled by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) show. State support made up 48% of non-profits' combined revenue of 2,576 billion forints during the year. Non-profits' revenue from core activities and other business activities accounted for 40% of the total. Private sector support accounted for just 12% of non-profits' revenue. Non-profits in the cultural sector accounted for 16% of all non-profits' revenue, while municipal development non-profits made up 14% of the total. Economic development non-profits accounted for 13% of the total, non-profits in sport for 12%, social services non-profits 10% and environmental protection non-profits 9%. Non-profits' revenue rose 7% in 2020. They employed 156,200 people during the year, including 106,200 full-timers, while they also had around 311,000 people registered as volunteers.

