

PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Viktor Orbán with new govt commissioners

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU affairs ministers meet in Luxembourg

Plenary session of parliament

War in Ukraine

World Aquatics Championships

TOP STORY

HUNGARY OFFERS ROUTE FOR GRAIN EXPORTS

Hungary has offered to provide a route for Ukrainian food produce exports, the foreign minister has said.

The war in Ukraine is threatening to cause global food shortages and triggering further migration waves, Péter Szijjártó noted on the sidelines of a European Union foreign ministers' meeting in Luxembourg, adding that for a transport corridor to work, the border between the two countries must be kept safe. Szijjarto said "the vicious circle threatening the world" was fuelled by high inflation and dwindling exports of agricultural products from Ukraine and Russia, resulting in rising prices. The lack of alternative resources and the fact that Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are important players of the world market of artificial fertilisers is exacerbating the problem, he said.

Szijjarto noted that several speakers at the meeting called for further arms deliveries to Ukraine. "I am not entirely sure that this is the best global solution to a food shortage." He called for a "sound" plan to rebuild Ukrainian and Russian export capacities to be accepted speedily. Russia and Ukraine provide 30% of wheat and 80% of sunflower seed exports globally, he noted.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: WORLD FACES FOOD SHORTAGES

The World Bank has said a food crisis looms over some 400 million people in the Middle East, Africa and South-East Asia, "countries that are already sources of migration or are avoiding that fate with great efforts," Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó noted on the sidelines of a European Union foreign ministers' meeting in Luxembourg. While Hungary currently produces "approximately" double the food consumed in the country, the government will need to take further steps to protect Hungarians from the crisis, he said. The price caps introduced on basic foods earlier this year will have to be maintained to keep inflation in check, he said. At the same time, Hungary will also have to maintain and strengthen border protection elsewhere to thwart people smugglers and migrants arriving on the Western Balkans route, he said.

Responding to a question, Szijjártó said Hungary had seen no obstructions in gas and crude deliveries, and the gas reservoirs are being filled according to plan. Meanwhile, he called on the European Commission to "pull itself together and come up with a credible and realistic schedule on expanding the transport capacity through Croatia," he said.

ORBÁN CALLS FOR EU CANDIDATE STATUS FOR UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán attended a video conference in preparation for a two-day European Union summit on Thursday and Friday, and has called for member state candidate status to be granted to several European states. At the meeting with European Council President Charles Michel and the prime ministers of Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta, Orbán agreed with the EU proposal to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. At the same time, Orbán and several other heads of state called for the same status for Georgia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, he said.

NÉMETH CALLS FOR DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION TO WAR

In view of the severe impact of Russia's war on Ukraine, the time has come to "allow diplomats, rather than generals, to take centre stage", the head of Hungary's delegation to the Council of Europe told the summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on Monday. Zsolt Németh, who also heads Hungarian parliament's foreign affairs committee, called for an end to the slaughter in Ukraine, saying the conflict had already claimed too many lives and had borne "catastrophic"

military, economic, political and social consequences. "We must see that the old world order is coming to an end and a new one will follow. The world order enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Accords is coming to an end," he said. "We central European states are certain that we do not want the return of a world order based on spheres of influence ... we do not want the restoration of the Soviet Union," he said.

Németh said convening the fourth summit of CoE leaders would give the CoE the opportunity to carve out an important role in shaping the new political leadership, he said.

Opening the summer session, PACE President Tiny Kox called on member states to refuse accepting the war in Ukraine as the "new normal", and to help end the suffering of the Ukrainian people. Kox welcomed that the CoE ministers' meeting in May unanimously supported convening the fourth summit of CoE heads of state and government.

NOVÁK DISCUSSES ROLE OF FAMILIES WITH LATVIAN PRESIDENT

Katalin Novák, the Hungarian president, discussed the role of families and traditional family ties with Egils Levits, her Latvian counterpart, on Monday in Riga where she is attending the Three Seas summit. Hungary and Latvia both support the European integration of Ukraine, Moldova

and the Western Balkans, Novák said on Twitter. After the talks, Novák laid a wreath at the memorial of Hungarian Jewish women deported to Latvia during the Holocaust. Afterwards she held talks with Borut Pahor, the Slovenian president and Rumen Radev, her Bulgarian counterpart.

Addressing the Three Seas Summit, Novak expressed support for a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine and promoted Hungary's economic interests. Novak noted on Facebook that the Three Seas Initiative was launched in 2015 to promote the North-South infrastructure axis in Europe to complement the existing East-West one. At the Riga summit of the presidents of 12 countries, she highlighted issues "that are important to Hungary and the Hungarian people". As well as efforts to establish peace in Ukraine, Novák argued that the interests of countries without direct access to the sea must be taken into consideration when it comes to energy supplies. Further, the president said: "We support the swiftest possible accession to the European Union of Ukraine and Western Balkans countries." The presidents of Germany, Poland, Austria, Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria also attended the summit, alongside the prime minister of Croatia, the speaker of the Czech Senate and, through a video link, the Ukrainian president.

FINMIN: HUNGARY THREE PLACES UP IN COMPETITIVENESS RANKING

Hungary ranks 39th on the list of the world's most competitive economies, up three places from last year, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said on Monday, citing information from Swiss competitiveness research institute IMD. Since 2017, Hungary has improved its position by 13 places, the minister said on Facebook. Concerning the National Competitiveness Council, whose tasks have recently been transferred to the economic development ministry, Varga said its work had helped the government implement significant tax cuts and reduction in red tape, and take measures aimed at promoting electronic procedures and simplify the administration around employment and investments. All those measures have contributed significantly to the country's improving competitiveness, he said, noting that Hungary was ahead of Slovakia and Poland in the competitiveness ranking, but added that "there is still room for further improvement".

PALKOVICS DISCUSSES TRANSPORT, MILITARY INDUSTRY COOPERATION IN EGYPT

Hungary and Egypt will continue transport cooperation and explore expanding military industrial

cooperation, László Palkovics, the minister of technology and industry, said after talks in Cairo on Monday. Palkovics and Kamel al-Wazir, Egypt's transport minister, agreed on the growing importance of railways and electrified rail infrastructure powered by solar panels, as well as the potential involvement of Hungarian businesses in related projects. Hungary may also deliver electric busses to Egypt, he added. Hungary is participating in the delivery of 1,300 railway carriages to Egypt, and other opportunities may arise for Hungary in the north African country, Palkovics told MTI by phone.

Palkovics noted that tourism was a key source of income for Egypt, adding that both countries had an interest in Wizz Air launching new flights to Egypt, and he asked his Egyptian partner to eliminate administrative and financial obstacles to the Hungarian low-cost carrier's expansion. The minister also highlighted new areas for bilateral military industrial cooperation. Hungary and Egypt will soon continue discussing those opportunities, as Egypt's minister in charge of military production is scheduled to visit Hungary in the coming months, Palkovics said. Besides the transport minister, Palkovics met Mohamed Ahmed Morsi, the minister in charge of military production, Mohamed Manar Anba, the civil aviation minister, and Abdelmonem Eltarras, chairman of the Arab Organization for Industrialisation.

SEMJÉN: HUNGARY AMONG SAFEST COUNTRIES IN EUROPE FOR JEWS

Hungary is one of the safest countries in Europe -- possibly even the safest -- for Jews, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén said on Monday. Semjén told a conference of the European Jewish Association (EJA) in Budapest that Hungary maintained zero tolerance against anti-Semitism, regardless of whether they are connected to the extreme right, extreme left, Jihadists or anti-Israeli sentiments.

Semjén said that in Hungary anti-Israeli sentiments are viewed as a form of anti-Semitism, adding that the government represented this position both in Hungary and in European Union forums, where Israel can count on Hungary. "Hungary vetoes any measures that unfairly attack Israel," he said.

GOVT SPOX: 'PEOPLE'S WALLETS MUST BE SPARED FROM WAR INFLATION'

It is primarily "the Hungarian people's wallets" that need to be spared from war inflation, government spokeswoman Alexandra Szentkirályi told public news channel M1 on Monday. Szentkirályi said there was a clear link between the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and high inflation, which was why the government had

looked into how it can use its own tools to help people.

"We must prevent a situation where people are worse off, where businesses are in worse shape and where we risk the achievements that have allowed many people to have jobs and families to feel safe," Szentkirályi said.

She also said she expected a "fierce battle" with Brussels when it came to the issue of sanctions. As a European Union member state, Hungary has an interest in agreeing on a joint European position, but this cannot supersede the government's goal of representing the Hungarian people, she said. If the EU's proposed sanctions are not good for Hungarians, the government will make that clear, Szentkirályi added. "If the original proposal for the oil embargo would have been equivalent to Europe shooting itself in the foot, the gas embargo would practically be akin to a shot in the lungs," Szentkirályi said, arguing that European countries would not be able to properly substitute Russian gas imports. Concerning the taxes on extra profits introduced by the government, Szentkirályi said the measure had not been introduced for the businesses it applies to not to comply with it. She noted that the government could order a consumer protection review of any company that tries to transfer the extra burdens to consumers.

Meanwhile, Szentkirályi told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio that the closer a country is to the war, the higher inflation is there. Estonia is experiencing inflation of 20%, Latvia

and Lithuania have seen their inflation rates exceed 16-18% and inflation is also higher in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic, she said. Szentkirályi said the government had decided to extend price caps on food and petrol until October and the loan moratorium and cap on mortgage rates until the end of the year with a view to shielding Hungarians from the effects of war inflation.

KARÁCSONY: GOVT PLANS TO PASS ON 'SEVERE AUSTERITY' TO LOCAL COUNCILS

The government's 2023 draft budget would pass on the responsibility for enacting "severe austerity measures" to local councils, Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, told a press conference, adding that the opposition parties plan to submit a package of amendments. Karácsony said the opposition proposals were aimed at ensuring the operability of municipalities "in these difficult times". It is crucial for Budapest to get the package passed, but the proposals would also ensure "important opportunities" for all localities, Karácsony said after talks with opposition representatives. The government, he added, lacked the courage to enact the austerity measures itself.

Outlining the details of the opposition proposals, Erzsébet Gy. Németh, deputy leader of the Democratic Coalition, said localities'

“solidarity” tax should be reduced to 2019 levels, when Budapest had to pay an annual 10 billion forints (EUR 25m). In 2022, Budapest is expected to pay 36 billion forints, and 56 billion next year if the government’s draft is passed unchanged, she said. Next year, Budapest will have to pay a much larger sum for energy as municipalities have been removed from the energy price-cap scheme, Gy. Németh said, and suggested that the electricity produced by Budapest’s waste incinerator should be used for public lighting.

Rebeka Szabó, MP of the Párbeszéd party, said the vehicle tax should be returned from central coffers to the municipalities, and localities should also be given 25% of the excise tax on fuels for the maintenance and resurfacing of roads. Also, the central budget should pay out 6 billion forints to Budapest for the renovation of the Chain Bridge, a sum the government had earlier pledged to contribute, she added.

Zoltán Vajda, Socialist head of parliament’s budget committee, proposed that the government and the city of Budapest should take an equal share in financing the city’s public transport, and called for funds for the city to buy new vehicles, adding that monthly public transport passes should be exempted from VAT. Answering a question concerning an earlier proposal to introduce a fee for drivers during the rush hour, Karácsony said the city council would launch consultations with residents

in September, but added that such plans were “not timely in the current situation” and he would not support such a proposal.

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH IOC PRESIDENT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed topical international sports matters and Hungarian aid provided to Ukrainian athletes with International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach, in Budapest, the PM’s press chief said on Monday. The meeting was also attended by Zsolt Gyulay, head of the Hungarian Olympic Committee (MOB), Pal Schmitt, Hungary’s former president, Balázs Fürjes, a state secretary at the Prime Minister’s Office, and IOC Director General Christophe De Kepper. The sports officials praised Budapest’s role as a sporting capital and the major sporting events it hosts like the ongoing World Aquatics Championships and next year’s World Athletics Championships.

Orbán and Bach underscored the importance of establishing peace in Ukraine as soon as possible, noting the ability of sports and the Olympic movement to promote peace. They also discussed the joint efforts of the IOC, sports federations, charity organisations and the Hungarian government that have brought nearly 100 Ukrainian athletes safely to Hungary.

According to the newsletter of the event’s organising committee, Bach said during his visit to Budapest that

Hungary has hosted many world and European championships in recent years, and that all events had passed “exceptionally well”. “The icing on the cake is that the athletes, too, are successful; they’re real role models for the Hungarian people. So being in Hungary once again is a very good experience,” Bach said. Referring to the Duna Aréna which hosts swimming events, he said the Hungarian audience not only cheered their own competitors but everyone else, too, and he praised the atmosphere of FINA World Championship events in Budapest. Looking ahead to the next Olympics, he said expectations were high for the Hungarian swimming team in Paris. Regarding the organisation of the World Championships, he noted that Hungary had had 131 days to prepare for the event, proving its flexibility, creativity and efficiency. For the 2027 event, which Hungary won in 2019, the country will be even better prepared, he said. “Budapest is a beautiful, sports-loving city, as is the country as a whole. Walking about here, you’re surrounded by history, but when you go to a sporting event, you see the future,” Bach said.

BUDAPEST BIDDING TO HOST 2026 TRACK AND FIELD EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Budapest is bidding to host the 2026 track and field European championships, in competition with

Birmingham, the European Athletics Association (EAA) said on Monday. "We have two excellent candidates for the 2026 European Athletics Championships, with both potential Local Organising Committees having great experience staging major outdoor athletics events. They also have excellent stadia and either one of them would make an excellent host," European Athletics President Dobromir Karamarinov said, according to the EAA's website. Hungary will host the track and field world championships in a new arena in Budapest in 2023, and Birmingham will be home to the Commonwealth Games this year, the statement said.

The EAA will decide on the venue of the 2026 championships in November this year.

POLICE: NEARLY 14,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON SUNDAY

Fully 6,125 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Sunday, while another 7,638 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 232 people, ORFK told MTI on Monday. Holders of such permits must contact a local immigration office near their place of residence

within thirty days to apply for permanent documents, it added. Budapest police received 182 refugees, 71 children among them, arriving by train, ORFK said.

GOVT EXTENDS SZÉCHENYI CARD CREDIT SCHEME

The government has decided to extend the Széchenyi Card programme, a state scheme that provides cheap credit to businesses, and streamline and consolidate its credit products, Economic Development Minister Márton Nagy has said. The new Széchenyi Card loans, carrying a fixed rate of 3.5% or lower, will be available from July 2022 until the end of this year, the minister said in a statement. "Hungary's government is committed to supporting Hungarian families and businesses in spite of the economic difficulties caused by the war. SMEs form the economic backbone of the country and provide livelihood for hundreds of thousands of families so it is key to support them with credit. Providing adequate and well-structured lending to businesses is a key pillar of growth. The government can promote this economic policy goal by improving the conditions of SME financing through providing interest subsidies and credit guarantee," the statement said.

The Széchenyi Card programme, launched in 2022, has helped Hungarian SMEs obtain preferential credit of more than 4,600 billion forints (EUR 11.5bn) in 390,000 transactions. Széchenyi Card loans now account for 13% of the sector's total loan portfolio, with state-owned guarantor Garantiqa backing 39% of its loans, the minister said.

SZÉKELY FESTIVAL RETURNS TO BUDAPEST AFTER TWO-YEAR HIATUS

The Székely Festival dedicated to Szekler gastronomy, handicrafts and music will return to Budapest after a two-year hiatus from Friday to Sunday, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. Varga told journalists that the event strengthened economic cooperation between Szekler Land and Hungary, with some 150 Transylvanian businesses getting a chance to present themselves in Budapest's Millenáris Park. Following a two-year hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic, visitors can once again experience Szekler hospitality and learn about the treasures of Szekler Land, Varga said. The revival of person-to-person ties is much needed after the pandemic, he added, noting that Tusványos, a large intellectual meeting of the Carpathian Basin, is scheduled to be held between July 19 and 24 this year.