

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Samarkand

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

PAKS EXPANSION 'NATIONAL STRATEGIC INTEREST'

The project to expand Hungary's Paks nuclear power plant is a national strategic and security interest, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said after meeting Rosatom's CEO to review the Paks investment.

The war in Ukraine and the European Union's "failed" sanctions policy have led to a global energy crisis, which will be prolonged, Péter Szijjártó wrote on Facebook. Countries that can produce most of their energy needs will be in the strongest position in the future, he added. With Hungary's scarce mineral resources, the country will rely on nuclear energy to insulate it from "totally insane changes in the international energy market and skyrocketing energy prices," he wrote. "So far, we've succeeded in stopping Brussels from placing our nuclear developments under sanctions, and we will prevent this in the future, too," Szijjártó added.

The minister noted that he and Alexei Likhachev, the chief executive of Russian nuclear energy company Rosatom, reviewed the Paks investment at a meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. They agreed on steps to be taken in the coming weeks to ensure that the two new blocks are up and running at Paks by the end of the decade, he said.

OFFICIAL: PAKS PLANT CRUCIAL TO HUNGARY'S LONG-TERM ENERGY SECURITY

Hungary must think long-term about the security of its electricity supply, Attila Steiner, the state secretary for energy policy, told lawmakers on Thursday, introducing a bill on extending the lifespan of the existing blocks of the Paks nuclear power plant. According to the bill's justification, the extended operating permits of the plant's four blocks are set to expire between 2032 and 2037. From a technical point of view, it is possible that their lifespans can be extended by another 20 years, it adds. The severe price increases caused by the war in Ukraine and Brussels's flawed sanctions policy, along with energy shortages in Europe, have made the role of power plants like the nuclear plant in Paks even more important, Steiner said. The Paks plant has for decades provided a safe, reliable and cost-efficient way to produce electricity domestically, he said. The extension of the blocks' lifespans will follow a long preparatory procedure which also includes talks with the governments of neighbouring countries, gathering information from international partners and signing a cooperation agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), he added. Concerning the safety

aspects of the extension, Steiner said all the nuclear licencing procedures will be carried out by the National Atomic Energy Authority (OAH). OAH will inspect each block to determine whether their lifespans can be extended, he added.

Commenting on the bill, Rebeka Szabó, co-leader of opposition Párbeszéd, said the proposal was "an open admission" that the project to expand the Paks plant was failing. Addressing a press conference, Szabó criticised the government for extending the lifespans of the plant's existing blocks instead of investing in renewable energy. Bence Tordai, the party's other co-leader, said the existing four blocks and the planned two new ones would not be able to operate simultaneously, suggesting that the Danube's water was already getting too warm during the summer to cool the plant's reactors.

ORBÁN: UZBEKISTAN STRATEGIC PARTNER IN CENTRAL ASIA

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed economic and energy cooperation as well as the deepening of bilateral cultural and education relations with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Samarkand on Thursday.

Uzbekistan welcomes Hungarian businesspeople and companies and is prepared to provide them any help needed for their investments to be successful, Mirziyoyev said.

Orbán said that in the current crisis caused by the war and the related sanctions, the entirety of Europe, including Hungary, was fighting to maintain its economic momentum. "But even in the current situation we aren't slowing but rather increasing the intensity of cooperation with our strategic partner in the region, Uzbekistan," Orbán said. "We're strengthening the joint projects we've launched in the areas of nuclear energy, the chemical industry, finance and telecommunications." Because the global energy crisis will last a long time, Hungary is exploring opportunities for joint gas extraction with Uzbekistan, Orbán said. He also said Hungary will increase the number of scholarships granted to Uzbek students from 120 to 170 a year.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: TURKIC COUNCIL 'FORUM OF PEACE'

Hungary sees the Turkic Council as a "forum of peace", where all members stand for a diplomatic solution to the war in Ukraine, in opposition to the "rhetoric of escalation" prevalent in international politics, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told the foreign ministers' meeting in Samarkand. At the Turkic Council, the common aim is an immediate ceasefire and peace talks, he said. Turkey has so far been the only successful mediator between Ukraine and Russia, and the agreement on relaunching crop deliveries showed that "steps towards peace are possible

even in seemingly hopeless situations," the ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying. The council stands for cooperation between East and West, and as such, is key to global security, he said.

Szijjártó noted that Hungary, an observer in the Council alongside Turkmenistan, is eager to amp up its role in the group. The government has opened embassies in all member states, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan, he added. Hungary is also offering a total of 990 grants for students from the six Council participants wishing to study there, he added. Trade turnover between Hungary and the six Turkic Council states has grown two-and-a-half-fold in the past 12 years to 4.5 billion euros, he said. The Hungarian foreign ministry and the Turkic Council have signed an agreement on setting up an Institute for Drought Prevention in Budapest.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: UZBEKISTAN EXCELLENT MARKET OPPORTUNITY FOR HUNGARIAN COMPANIES

Uzbekistan offers excellent market opportunities for Hungarian companies using advanced technology, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said in Samarkand on Thursday, where he opened an Uzbek-Hungarian business forum. The governments of Uzbekistan and Hungary have provided the conditions

for mutually beneficial cooperation and "there are no political disputes between the two countries", Péter Szijjártó said in his address. He called the bilateral strategic partnership agreement signed last year important especially "in the current recession environment" for Hungary, one of the world's ten most open economies.

Szijjártó noted that the business forum is attended by representatives of 44 Hungarian companies and its schedule includes 180 business meetings. With the aim to boost cooperation between Hungarian and Uzbek companies, Hungary's Eximbank has opened a 110 million dollar credit line, he said.

Speaking about ongoing projects, Szijjártó noted the construction of a gas-fuelled power plant and the modernisation and management of water and sewage systems with Hungarian participation. He said that Uzbekistan would authorise a simplified licensing procedure for Hungarian medicines. Szijjártó said he hoped Uzbekistan would decide in favour of a Hungarian technology for the cooling system of a nuclear power plant it is building.

Economic Development Minister Márton Nagy said the government will provide financial and all other support to Hungarian companies seeking cooperation in Uzbekistan. Nagy praised the fast development of bilateral ties, and said that Hungary's open, export-oriented economy was consistently looking for new business opportunities. Hungary has set up a

capital fund to mitigate the risk for companies looking for cooperation in new markets in Uzbekistan, he said. The relevant chambers and economic development companies will also help promote cooperation, Nagy said.

The forum was opened by Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Khodjaev.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIAN TOURISTS ALLOWED ENTRY INTO TURKEY WITH IDS

Turkey has allowed Hungarian citizens to enter the country with their IDs, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Thursday. "Good news for those travelling to Turkey: Hungarian tourists will now be able to enter Turkey with their personal IDs (without passports)," Szijjártó said on Facebook. In a post that included a photo of Szijjártó with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the minister wrote: "My friend, Mevlüt, promised it and delivered. As he always does."

AGMIN: HUNGARY TO SPEND OVER EUR 14.7 BN OVER 5 YEARS

Under Hungary's strategic plan for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), approved recently by the European Commission, a budget of 14.7 billion euros will be allocated to Hungarian agriculture over a period of five years, the agriculture minister said on Facebook. Brussels will provide

funding worth 8.4 billion euros, and the other half of the budget will come from state coffers, István Nagy said on Facebook. The first pillar of the funding, to the tune of 6.8 billion euros, will be fully funded by the EU, he said. The second pillar will comprise 6.3 billion euros in state and 1.6 billion euros in EU funding, the minister added.

Hungary's "extraordinarily large contribution" will amount to the largest ever support for Hungarian rural development projects, farmers and food processing companies, Nagy said. Over the next five years, 52% of rural development funding, some 1,500 billion forints (EUR 3.7bn), will go towards economic development and agricultural and food industry investment, he said. That is four times the amount the sector received in the last financing cycle, he added. "The effective use of those funds will contribute to achieving the aim... to increase gross value-added of agricultural production by 53%, to 862 euro per hectare," he said.

Agricultural exports are expected to grow by 57% to 15 billion euros. Food industry investments could shoot up by 117%, to 1.8 billion euros. Meanwhile, one-third of rural development funds will go towards sustainable and green goals, raising the sector's funding by 150%, he said. As a result, forest areas could grow by 148,000 hectares, accounting for 27% of the country's territory, the minister said.

PRESIDENT NOVÁK MEETS FORMER FRENCH PRESIDENT SARKOZY IN PARIS

"We must find a common language that can lead us to a just peace as soon as possible," President Katalin Novák said on Facebook after meeting former French president Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris. This was the reason, Novák said in an English-language post, she had accepted French President Emmanuel Macron's invitation to the international Peace Forum in Paris. The president said she started the day by visiting "Hungary's long-standing friend", Sarkozy, whom she called a representative of the "grand generation". She noted that the former president had been a "prominent shaper of French and European public life for a long time".

Novák said her discussion with Sarkozy had centred on "how much Europe and the world needs Hungary acting as a bridge". "We Hungarians are not only geographically located at the meeting point of East and West, North and South, but also understand the various nations and people, and are able to mediate between them," Novák wrote.

Novák said she held a lecture on Hungary's family policy and demographic challenges at the Institut de Philosophie Comparee in Paris later on Thursday. The president noted that fertility rates are below 2 in all European countries, the ratio necessary

to maintain the population. "The fact that Europe's population is growing is not a natural process but a result of immigration," she said. Hungary's population has been declining for four decades, Novák said. Therefore, family policy has been strong in the past 10-12 years, with the government focusing on narrowing the gap between the number of children couples strive to raise and the number they end up having. Hungary spends 6.2% of its annual GDP on family support in various forms such as the home purchase subsidy (CSOK), and forgiving university fees after the third child, she said.

Referring to the war in Ukraine, Novák said that over 200 ethnic Hungarians have died in the war so far. The situation is "extremely fragile", and escalation should be avoided at all costs, she said.

OFFICIAL: HUNGARY'S HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS IN UKRAINE EXTENDED TO EDUCATION

Hungary is broadening its humanitarian actions in Ukraine to cover education, Levente Magyar, the parliamentary state secretary for foreign affairs, said during a visit to western Ukraine on Thursday. Since the outbreak of the war, Hungary has provided billions of forints of humanitarian aid via the Ecumenical Aid Organisation to Transcarpathia and other areas of western Ukraine that are the most burdened by internal

refugees, Magyar told public media. This money is also going towards rebuilding several buildings in the vicinity of Kyiv. In a matter of only a few weeks, a kindergarten building on the outskirts of Borodjanka was built costing one million euros. In Bucsa, a school is under reconstruction, while a community centre is also being built there thanks to Hungarian aid, he noted. Also, Hungary has paid for the construction of shelters at dozens of schools and colleges, he said.

Talks are under way on taking over activities from universities and colleges destroyed in eastern Ukraine on a temporary basis, as well as contributing to the maintenance of universities relocated to western Ukraine, Magyar said. "Hungary is there for Ukraine as a friend ... and is mobilising its resources to ensure that excellent cooperation is maintained in this strategic area, too."

During his trip to Transcarpathia, Magyar met Viktor Mikita, Transcarpathia's governor, and visited the maternity home in Berehove (Beregszász). He also inaugurated the local kindergarten and then visited a refugee hostel being built in Vynohradiv (Nagyszőlős).

MINISTER SEES BIG POTENTIAL IN HUNGARIAN-ROMANIAN ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Major opportunities in Hungarian-Romanian economic and infrastructure cooperation can be tapped, János Lázár, the minister

of construction and investment, said in Bucharest after talks with several members of the Romanian government. The two countries want to connect their motorway networks, Lázár said, adding that Hungary will continue constructing the M49 motorway towards the Romanian border next year. Access to cohesion and recovery funding has created proper conditions for Romania to launch big infrastructure projects, the minister said. Bucharest will earmark 30% of these funds for transport development, including motorway construction in Transylvania, the western Romanian region where many ethnic Hungarians live. Lázár called the latter an "encouraging and reassuring development". Romania is eager to catch up with the European average in terms of its transport network, which also lies in Hungary's economic and national strategic interests, Lázár said.

Even though Romania's accession to the Schengen zone is on the agenda and backed by Hungary, there is a pressing need to open as many border crossings as possible to boost trade between border regions, he said. "Whatever the political situation, Romania and Hungary are one another's major trade and economic partners. As Hungary has a trade surplus of nearly 3 billion euros in two-day trade, it has a vested interest in safe, smooth and quick traffic flows between the border regions and on the major

European traffic arteries," Lázár said. Asked whether any progress had been made in opening new border crossings, the minister said that the related projects could gain momentum and "some previous brakes are being released".

Lázár appreciated RMDSZ's role in the Romanian government, adding that the alliance serves as an important bridge of cooperation between the two countries. The minister noted that the Hungarian government was financing some major investment projects in Transylvania, and has supported Romania's ethnic Hungarian community with 400 billion forints (EUR 995m) since 2010. Lázár said these projects are also meant to benefit Romanian and are being implemented with the knowledge of the Romanian government.

His negotiating partners included Deputy Prime Minister Hunor Kelemen, leader of the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party, Minister of Development Attila Cseke and Deputy Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu, the minister of transport.

SPEAKER MEETS QATARI AMBASSADOR

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér met Abdulla Falah Abdulla Nasser Al-Dosari, Qatar's Ambassador to Hungary, in his office on Thursday at the diplomat's request, the parliament's press office told MTI. The two sides praised bilateral economic, political and cultural

relations. The ambassador expressed appreciation for Hungary's support strengthening Qatar's ties with the European Union, and Hungary's advocacy for peace and the negotiated settlement of the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine conflicts, it said in a statement.

The Emir of Qatar is scheduled to visit Hungary next year, it said, adding that Kövér has invited the president of the Shura Council, the legislative body of Qatar, for a visit.

Concerning international criticism of Qatar before the forthcoming soccer World Cup, the two sides agreed that "double standards" and "ideological pressure" were "unacceptable". Kövér said politics should not be brought to bear on sports, and athletes should not be forced to make political statements. The speaker expressed appreciation for Qatar's efforts to host the world's second biggest sports event successfully.

VESZPRÉM-BALATON EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE PROGRAMME PRESENTED IN BRUSSELS

Bearing the title European Capital of Culture in 2023 is "an opportunity for Europe and for Hungary, and for Veszprém to further develop its cultural life and present it to domestic and foreign audiences", György

Hölvényi, MEP of Hungary's allied ruling Christian Democrats, told an event at which the Veszprém-Balaton region's programme was presented in Brussels. Andrea Bocskor, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, said it was important "to treasure and preserve Europe's cultural heritage and diversity, and support the arts and creative industries all across Europe". Veszprém Mayor Gyula Porga told Hungarian reporters that the programme was designed not only to present the special culture of his city and its region but to take Hungarian culture to other countries while "bringing to the region Europe's diversity". He said the European programme was instrumental in developing the city and a community, while it created "good financial and intellectual opportunities for Veszprém to belong among Europe's most liveable cities by 2030".

CLOSE TO 9,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON WEDS

Fully 4,972 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Wednesday, while another 3,998 crossed from Romania, the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued 30-day residency permits to 185 people. These can be renewed until final permits are awarded, ORFK said on Thursday.

BAKONDI: BODY FOUND AT HORGOS SHOWS INCREASING VIOLENCE IN BORDER REGION

The body of a young man discovered at Horgos on the Serbian side of the border shows that violent incidents linked to illegal migration have become frequent in Hungary's border region, the prime minister's chief security advisor told public broadcaster M1. Whereas in the past illegal migrants would run from police, it is now a common phenomenon along the entire Balkan route that they attack police officers, pelting stones at them and firing shots in the air, György Bakondi said. "It should be clarified how people smuggler gangs have managed to obtain guns in the past six months," he said.

Bakondi said it was important that the Serbian government respond to the discovery of the body at Horgos by making every effort to provide for the security of residents in the border region. "Hungarian police are cooperating with their Serbian colleagues in that effort," he added. He noted the Hungarian government's measure of reinforcing the border fence and increasing its height to make it much harder to cut through or climb over using ladders.