

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Noémi Bruzák

President Katalin Novák (c) with Yad Vashem president Dani Dayan

UPCOMING EVENTS

President continues Israel visit

War in Ukraine developments

Karácsony marks Budapest Day

NBH report on housing market

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: 'WE WANT PEACE, CEASEFIRE'

Viktor Orbán, in Belgrade on Wednesday, called for a ceasefire in Ukraine "to avert imminent danger".

"We want peace and a ceasefire," the prime minister said at a joint press conference with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer. Referring to the missile incident in which two people died in Poland on Tuesday, Orbán said: "It is important to express our sympathy and to be aware that since there is war in the neighbourhood, we are in danger." "We are in danger in an economic sense, too," Orbán said, referring to an outage of oil supplies to Hungary via the Druzhba pipeline on Tuesday. "When your citizens and your economy are in danger, you must singularly focus on averting that danger, and this can only be achieved through a ceasefire," he said.

The Hungarian government continues to urge the European Union to facilitate Serbia's full and swift integration into the bloc, he said, adding that Serbia's EU membership was in the interests of Europe, and the community "could fight migration a lot more easily were Serbia inside the EU already". Had Serbia been "granted membership yesterday, or the day before yesterday, we'd be in a better situation now," he said.

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HUNGARY TO ADVANCE SERBIA’S ACCESSION DURING EU PRESIDENCY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán vowed to “build an alliance with countries that support [Serbia’s] membership.” Hungary assumes the rotating EU presidency in the second half of 2024, and it will be able to aid the integration process, he said at a joint press conference with Serbian President Alexander Vučić and Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer. Until Serbia becomes an EU member, “there can be only one goal: to shift the lines of defence further south and to create joint border defence with Serbia and Austria,” he said. Hungary stands ready to provide personnel and equipment, he added.

Orbán said Hungary had to bear the “dual pressure” of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine and illegal migration from the direction of Serbia. Hungarians and Serbs, he said, stood together “in good times and bad”. The two countries have been destined to cooperate, he said, adding that Vučić was “the best Serbian partner to Hungary in its history”.

Concerning illegal migration, Orbán said 250,000 illegal entries had been prevented in 2023 and “there are not only more migrants but they are increasingly aggressive”. “People smugglers not only have guns but will use them against Hungary’s border guards,” he added. The whole of the Balkans “suffers from migration”, which must be stopped “rather than managed”, he insisted. “It must be made clear that they cannot enter our countries illegally,” he said.

Since 2015, Hungary’s border control-related spending has totalled 1.6 billion euros, of which the EU reimbursed a mere 1.2%, he said. “This clearly shows we can only rely on ourselves,” he added. Serbia is key to Europe’s security, and when it protects its own borders it also protects Hungary, Austria, and the whole of the EU, Orbán said.

Answering a question, Orbán said refugees were governed by international regulations, and guest workers could be granted residence and work permits by their host countries. “The category of the migrant, however, is not legally regulated, so it is illegal by definition.” “Migrants are persons seeking to make an illegal border crossing, and violations of the law must be met with the force of the law,” Orbán said. “Hungary is a serious country, with its own regulations; and it will enforce those regulations by force if needed.”

Meanwhile, Orbán noted that the only pipeline “transporting significant amounts of gas” to Hungary runs through Serbia, while Serbia had received its gas from Hungary for long periods in the past. “This clearly shows how the two countries can rely on each other,” Orbán said.

Before the talks, the three leaders signed a Memorandum of Understanding on fighting illegal migration.

GULYÁS: HUNGARY CALLS FOR UKRAINE-RUSSIA CEASEFIRE, PEACE TALKS

Hungary wants a ceasefire and peace talks to get under way as quickly as possible, especially in light of the recent missile strike in Poland, Gergely Gulyás,

the prime minister’s chief of staff, said on Wednesday. Gulyás noted that the prime minister convened Hungary’s Defence Council in line with the usual protocol in such situations, and the defence minister contacted his NATO counterparts and the alliance’s secretary-general. Also, the foreign and defence ministers spoke with their Polish counterparts, and Hungary assured Poland of its support, he added.

A Ukrainian anti-aircraft missile is thought to have landed in Poland, Gulyás told a government press briefing, adding the outcome of a full investigation is pending. But for a short period of time it was assumed that Russia had attacked Poland, he said, adding that the events showed just how important an immediate ceasefire and peace talks were. A long-term solution is required that takes into account the interests of Ukraine and guarantees its territorial sovereignty, Gulyás said.

The Hungarian government, he emphasised, regards the NATO basic agreement and Article 5 to be binding on all the alliance’s member states, including Hungary. Proof of good relations between NATO allies was no better demonstrated than by the speed with which NATO assured Poland of its solidarity, he added.

Gulyás warned against exploiting the missile incident in Poland for political purposes “in a fragile, difficult, and dangerous global situation... If something is unclear, an investigation must be called for, and the political consequences drawn afterwards.” He welcomed the sober-minded reaction to the incident on the part of Hungary’s allies. He added, however, that Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelensky had not “acted responsibly” by accusing

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Russia after the incident. "If the missile that hit Polish territory came from Ukraine, the Ukrainians should provide answers, Gulyás said. On the subject of Finland and Sweden's NATO accession, Gulyás said: "We will not be the last country to decide", adding that Hungary planned to ratify the document "before Turkey does".

Meanwhile, Gulyás noted that at 2am on Wednesday, crude oil deliveries to Hungary through the Druzhba pipeline restarted, albeit at low pressure, after being interrupted on Tuesday due to missile attacks on Ukraine's energy network. Pressure will be upped to normal within a few hours or days, he said. Hungary's crude supply would have been safe even had the pipeline not been restarted, he said, noting that Hungarian oil and gas company MOL has reserves at its refinery in Százhalombatta in addition to the country's strategic reserves, guaranteeing supplies for several months for households and businesses alike.

Meanwhile, Gulyás said the government has adopted an action plan to support the tourism sector with the aim of ensuring that hotels and restaurants can stay open in the winter season despite high energy prices. Businesses in the sector will be exempted from paying a tourism development contribution of 4% of their net takings between Oct. 1, 2022 and March 31 next year, Gulyás said.

The government has also decided to abolish restrictions within the Széchenyi Card scheme, so that in future employees can use their cards in restaurants, hotels, or pay for recreational activities freely, Gulyás said. Data reporting requirements for tourism businesses will be relaxed for six

months, and the deadline for rating hotels will also be delayed by a year, Gulyás said. He noted that tourism is an important source of income for the country, adding that after difficult years on the back of the pandemic, the sector is ending a good year this year despite the energy crisis. In the first ten months, 13 million guests spent 33 million nights in domestic accommodation, 34% more than last year and only 8% behind the record year of 2019, he noted.

Referring to existing exemptions on personal income tax and funding for family support measures, Gulyás said the cost to the budget will be established by early December based on the forecast of next year's energy prices; decisions will then be made accordingly.

He said the government wants to keep spending on family support in 2023 level with this year's allocation.

Asked about whether a cabinet or Fidesz representative planned to travel to Ukraine, Gulyás said a visit was on the cards, but like "every other state" which communicated only after such an event took place, he would not divulge details for security reasons.

Concerning the resignation of László Palkovics as minister of technology and industry, Gulyás referred to structural changes within the ministry which reflected the importance of energy in the current environment, adding that Palkovics had stepped down because he had refused to accept the ministry's diminished powers.

Concerning the resignation of Dávid Vitézy as the state secretary of transport, he said Vitézy had made the decision to

step down and this must be respected, but his policies would be pursued by his successor.

Gulyás said the government planned to award a big pensions increase in January to protect retirees from high inflation. Referring to pensions, he said: "We're not in a bad position compared with other European countries."

Meanwhile, he said inflation was tightly linked to energy prices, which the state absorbs, so higher VAT revenue far from covered the state's increased spending on energy.

On the topic of the media, Gulyás said journalists in western Europe covering Hungary had to "write bad things" about the government if they wanted to keep their jobs in the long run. The government, he added, had no means to influence media content, and Hungary enjoyed press freedom.

Responding to a question about solidarity with Ukraine, he said Ukraine was under attack, but Ukraine had mistreated its national minorities in recent years, grossly violating human rights and international conventions.

SZIJJÁRTÓ IN TALKS WITH POLISH COUNTERPART, URGES 'STRATEGIC CALM'

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó urged "strategic calm" after a phone call with his Polish counterpart, Zbigniew Rau, on Wednesday morning after a missile crashed on Polish territory, killing two people in the previous evening. Szijjártó expressed Hungary's solidarity with Poland and offered help, saying the ties between Poland and Hungary were

“more than strategic partnership, this is a brotherhood”.

In a video posted on Facebook, Szijjártó said Rau had told him that the circumstances of the missile hit were still unknown. Authorities are still investigating who used the missile, who launched it and what was the motivation, Szijjártó cited Rau as saying. Poland will conduct a comprehensive investigation and will brief Hungary, the foreign minister said. The Polish foreign ministry summoned Russia's ambassador to the country and handed him an official note demanding “immediate and detailed explanation”, Rau said. Poland has also initiated a consultation under Article 4 of the NATO treaty, Rau said. In the video, Szijjártó called for “strategic calm from decision-makers ... so we can avoid tragic and uncontrollable consequences”.

Regarding stoppage of crude deliveries on the Druzhba pipeline late on Tuesday due to a Russian missile attack damaging Ukrainian energy infrastructure, Szijjártó said the pipeline itself was unharmed. He said that according to information on Wednesday morning not the pipeline itself but a transformer supplying power to it had been hit. Deliveries are expected to restart soon, Szijjártó added. Hungary currently has reserves covering demand for several months, energy supplies are not in danger, he said.

DRUZHBA PIPELINE OIL DELIVERIES TO HUNGARY RESTART

Crude oil deliveries to Hungary through the Druzhba pipeline have now restarted, albeit at low pressure,

after being interrupted on Tuesday due to missile attacks on Ukraine's energy network, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Belgrade on Wednesday. The foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying that work was under way to restore the regular pressure in the pipeline. “Hungary's energy security was not at risk even during the hours without deliveries ... as Hungary has sufficient reserves to prevent such outages from jeopardising the security of energy supplies,” the minister said. The missiles on Tuesday damaged a transformer crucial for the operation of Druzhba, through which Hungary receives almost all its crude oil imports, the ministry said.

NOVÁK VISITS JERUSALEM HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL CENTRE

President Katalin Novák, arriving in Israel on a two-day working visit on Wednesday at the invitation of President Isaac Herzog, visited the Yad Vashem Institute, the Holocaust memorial centre in Jerusalem. Dani Dayan, Yad Vashem's president, received President Novák who viewed the Hall of Names and the Children's Memorial. She lit the eternal candle before placing a wreath in the Hall of Remembrance. The president also talked to Holocaust survivors in the Holocaust Museum's educational centre. She declared it “our duty” to remember the victims of the Holocaust and to apologise to the survivors. Parents, she said, are best suited to educating their children about history and the need to prevent horrors like the Holocaust.

Dayan said everyone's duty was to confront anti-Semitism forcefully and nip it in the bud as soon as it is first manifested.

After her meeting with President Herzog on Thursday, the Hungarian president will meet Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu and acting Prime Minister Jair Lapid.

HUNGARY DEFMIN INSPECTS ISRAEL'S IRON DOME MISSILE DEFENCE SYSTEM

President Katalin Novák and Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky on Wednesday inspected Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system. Szalay-Bobrovniczky told journalists that he and President Novák had attended “important” meetings at the invitation of Israel's president and prime minister-elect, as well as Israel's outgoing PM. He said bilateral relations “have been very good for a very long time”, especially when it comes to defence matters. Hungary is examining Iron Dome, especially in light of Tuesday's events in Ukraine, the minister said. In addition, it is studying Israel's “well-structured” high-tech cooperation between its defence industry, army and air force.

MTVA HEAD MEETS OSCE DELEGATION

Dániel Papp, the chief executive of Hungary's public media services and support fund MTVA, met a delegation of the OSCE headed by Teresa Ribeiro, the

organisation's Representative on Freedom of the Media, at MTVA's headquarters in Budapest on Wednesday. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe delegation was briefed about the media system that determines MTVA's operations, the relevant public service requirements, and the regular cooperation between MTVA and Duna Médiaszolgáltató, which guarantees trustworthy and objective programming, the statement said. Papp also gave the delegation an outline of the Hungarian public service media landscape and operations. He insisted that public service programmes were balanced and impartial, in line with international standards, MTVA's code of ethics, and the Hungarian media law. He told the delegation that ever since the spring elections, opposition representatives had received 3,976 invitations to appear on public media broadcasts, yet they had accepted on 69 occasions only, or 2% of the opportunities available to them.

OFFICIAL: GOVT TO ALLOCATE EXTRA HUF 7 BN TO FOSTERED WORK SCHEME

The government will allocate an additional 7 billion forints (EUR 17m) for the fostered work scheme this year and 110 billion in 2023, a state secretary of the interior ministry said in an interview in the daily Magyar Nemzet. Bence Rétvári said the scheme had been one the government's most successful measures since 2010. "The number of workers included in the programme continued to increase to over 200,000 until 2016, then gradually dropped

to 70,000 as a result of economic growth," he said. Rétvári said left-wing parties had criticised the programme ever since it was introduced. Recently, "they tried to scare people saying that government funding would be severely cut next year, and so fostered work programmes would sputter. That was, of course, baseless fearmongering," he said.

KÚRIA HEAD RECEIVES US AMBASSADOR

András Zs Varga, the president of the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, received David Pressman, the new ambassador of the United States to Hungary, in his office on Wednesday. The ambassador's meeting with Varga and the court's staff members was part of a courtesy visit, the Kúria's communications department said in a statement. At the end of the meeting, at the ambassador's request, the President of the Court showed one of the Court's courtrooms and the gallery of portraits of the former Presidents of the Court, the statement added.

DK CALLS FOR PENSION INCREASE

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) calls for a 10% pension increase with retroactive effect and the one-off payment of 100,000 forints (EUR 246) for pensioners. Data of the Central Statistical Office show that food prices in Hungary have gone up by 40%, Erzsébet Németh Gy told an online press conference. The 5% pension increase implemented by the government "is far not enough to offset inflation," she

said. DK will soon meet pensioners' trade unions for talks and present them the party's proposal, she said.

SOCIALISTS DEMAND STRUCTURAL OVERHAUL OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Wage rises for teachers are indispensable but not sufficient to assuage their concerns, the opposition Socialist party on Wednesday, calling for a structural overhaul of Hungary's public education sector. "Wages hikes alone without structural changes will not be enough to tackle problems in the sector," Socialist official István Hiller told an online press conference. Further, wage rises should be fully covered by the state budget once EU co-financing runs out, he said, referring to government plans to use EU funding to cover the wage hikes. The Socialists' package of proposals include replacing the National Curriculum with a temporary one drafted by academics and a group of experts. It includes reducing the number of classes for teachers and students and the administrative burdens on teachers, as well as ensuring the free choice of textbooks, Hiller, a former education minister, said. The focus in public education should be on problem-solving instead of accumulating lexical knowledge, Hiller said. He also proposed setting up a stand-alone ministry of education.

HUNGARY RECORDS 4,431 NEW CORONAVIRUS CASES LAST WEEK, 73 FATALITIES

Fully 4,431 new Covid-19 cases were registered last week, while 73 people died in connection with the virus,

koronavirus.gov.hu said on Wednesday in a round-up of last week's data. Last week there were 18,533 active infections and 749 Covid patients hospitalised, 10 intubated on a ventilator. Altogether 6,419,758 have been vaccinated, with 6,206,156 having received a second shot, 3,901,052 a third, and 381,998 a fourth. Fully 2,157,995 Covid cases have been registered in Hungary since the start of the outbreak and 48,184 have died. So far 2,091,278 people have made a recovery.

SOME 8,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,509 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Tuesday, while another 3,263 crossed from Romania, the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued 30-day residency permits to 135 people, ORFK told MTI on Wednesday. Budapest received 30 people, 19 children among them, by train, ORFK said.

PALKOVICS INAUGURATES AVL CENTRE ON ZALAZONE CAMPUS

Hungary's role in automotive industry research and development is growing, outgoing Minister of Technology and Industry László Palkovics said at the inauguration of a technology centre of Austrian vehicle developer AVL, at the ZalaZone test track in western Hungary. The new facility will have place for 150 engineers and test pilots and a capacity to prepare 50 vehicles simultaneously, Palkovics said, noting that the Hungarian vehicle industry had outperformed in the last decade, with the number of engineers in the sector

rising from around 3,000 to over 10,000. The government has done everything in its power to support investments and to create the necessary background for R+D and education, he said. Value-added in car industry currently stands at 45-50%, with plans to increase it to 65% by 2030, he said.

KÖVÉR'S TALKS IN EGYPT FOCUS ON ECONOMIC, SECURITY TIES

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér is on a visit to Egypt at the invitation of Hanafy Ali El-Gebali, the speaker of Egypt's House of Representatives, the Hungarian parliament's press office said in a statement on Wednesday. Kövér had talks with his host and Senate President Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Razeq, focusing on bilateral ties in the areas of the economy, culture, security, and education.

Hungary provides 115 scholarships to Egyptian students, Kövér noted in his talks, adding that "we are proud that Hungarian-Egyptian ties have reached an record level, while the highest-level cooperation between our parliaments is regular". The foreign ministers of Hungary and Egypt meet several times a year, he noted, while agreements between the two countries' ministries and institutions are creating close cooperation, the statement said. Concerning the economy, the statement noted a Hungary-Egypt joint project to produce 1,300 railway carriages, as the "largest component" in bilateral cooperation. "We have had fine results in economic and trade relations in the recent period, but they lag far behind the intensity of political ties," the

statement quoted Kövér as saying. He pointed to a "rather uncertain" political and economic situation, in which businesses need to be circumspect, but added that "it is in these situations that new opportunities open up".

On another subject, Kövér said alternative energies were appreciated in Europe's energy crisis, and Egypt was a potential energy supplier to Europe. "We rely on Egypt's help," he said.

Kövér and El-Gebali signed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at promoting regular communication between parliamentary committees and groups. During his visit, Kövér will be received by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and meet representatives of the Egyptian-Hungarian Friends Chapter.

WIZZ AIR JOINS EC'S ZERO-EMISSION AVIATION INITIATIVE

Hungarian low-cost carrier Wizz Air on Wednesday said it joined the Alliance for Zero-Emission Aviation (AZE), a voluntary initiative launched by the European Commission to pave the way for next-generation sustainable aircraft. Wizz Air has joined a range of public and private aviation stakeholders who will "work together to identify barriers to advancing zero-emission aircraft, establish recommendations and a roadmap to address them, and promote investment projects". Wizz Air noted that it has set a target to reduce carbon emissions intensity per passenger kilometre by 25% by 2030.