

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Skaters at the City Park Ice Rink

MTV/Tibor Illés

UPCOMING EVENTS

Orbán addresses Hungarian Permanent Conference meeting

EU General Affairs Council meeting in Brussels

Events related to war in Ukraine

Budapest Fashion Week

TOP STORY

HUNGARY, IRAN WORKING ON COOPERATION

Hungary and Iran are working on developing economic cooperation in line with the policy of common sense and a pragmatism, the foreign minister has said.

This could contribute to Tehran returning to a peaceful coexistence in the international community, Péter Szijjártó told a press conference after the second meeting of the Hungary-Iran economic mixed committee in 2022. Tuesday's missile incident in Poland "finally forced everyone to realise that it would be best for the whole world if as many conflicts as possible could be ended" he said. "This requires common sense and a pragmatic approach. We apply a policy of common sense and pragmatism when working on developing economic cooperation between Hungary and Iran," he said. "We'd like Iran to be able to return as soon as possible to the system of peaceful coexistence within the international community, and considering that the global economy is facing serious challenges, we believe that [economic cooperation] could be a first stage in this return," he added. Participants at the meeting reviewed the possibilities for developing economic cooperation. Fully 96 companies from Hungary and Iran were represented at a business forum held parallel with the meeting.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ WELCOMES ROBUST HUNGARY-IRAN TRADE

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó welcomed a 45% increase in the volume of bilateral trade with Iran last year -- and 55% this year -- thanks to the increase in Hungarian textile and pharmaceutical exports and plastics imports from Iran. Hungarian agricultural and food processing companies are accessing new export opportunities, and import licences are being issued for seed, poultry and certain medical instruments, he added. Some 2,000 Iranian students are attending university courses in Hungary, mainly in health sciences and the economy, and the Hungarian state maintains 150 scholarship places for students from Iran, he said.

He also welcomed Iran's efforts to stop migration waves and narcotics trading. He added that the country neighbouring Afghanistan and Pakistan had an important role to play in reducing the pressure of migration on Europe. He also said that Hungary was dedicated to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and supported the renewal of the Iran nuclear deal "which would strengthen global security".

Szijjártó told a joint press conference with the Iranian finance minister that during the events of recent days "it was reassuring how global and European decision-makers maintained strategic calm and responsible behaviour". "An important lesson was that not

everything is what it seems at first sight, and fake news and unfounded statements should not be trusted in such tense situations," he added.

PRESIDENT NOVÁK MEETS HERZOG IN JERUSALEM

Hungary and Israel are promoters of peace, President Katalin Novák said after bilateral talks with Isaac Herzog, her Israeli counterpart, in Jerusalem. Ties between Hungary and Israel are very strong, and the governments continue to preserve and strengthen them in economy and politics, she said in a press statement.

Hungary has taken a stance for peace, and Israel is also committed to it, Novák said. Hungary condemns "Putin's aggression" and wants peace, she added. All nations have a right to peace; Israeli and Hungarian people "have a first-hand experience of that," she said. "Israel is protecting strongly its people and country, which we can learn and draw consequences from," she said.

The alliance between Hungary and Israel is "unshakeable", and Hungary has taken a stand for Israel many times at international forums, she said. Hungary is proud to be home to Europe's third largest Jewish community, and Jewish culture is "seeing a renaissance" in the country, she said. Hungary will continue to support Israel and do everything in its power so that its Jewish citizens live in as safe an environment as possible, she added.

DEPUTY PM ANNOUNCES HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME FOR DIASPORA HUNGARIANS

The government is launching a special scholarship programme for young diaspora Hungarians looking to pursue higher education in Hungary, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén said after a meeting of the Hungarian Diaspora Council. The scheme will be implemented in coordination with Culture and Innovation Minister János Csák.

Meanwhile, he said the government on Wednesday approved the establishment of a so-called Welcome Office aimed at helping those who decide to temporarily or permanently repatriate to Hungary. The office will be responsible for handling matters related to pension payments, the nostrification of higher-education degree certificates and the validation of driver's licences, Semjén said.

Hungary has close institutional ties with more than a hundred diaspora organisations, he said. The government considers it a strategic task to make diaspora and emigration organisations "a home to all Hungarians", Semjén said. He highlighted the importance of the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor programme aimed at helping Hungarian diaspora communities preserve their language and national identity, which has so far had around 1,000 participants. Hungarian Houses have been

opened in several countries and the government has contributed to the construction and reconstruction of churches in Hungarian communities abroad, Semjén noted.

Meanwhile, he said that so far 43,000 Hungarians abroad have received maternity benefits and 38,000 have applied for the childbirth incentive baby bond. More than 1.15 million ethnic Hungarians have been granted citizenship, Semjén said, adding that some 320,000 ethnic Hungarians had voted in the last general election, 50,000 more than in 2018.

NAVRACSICS: TRADE TOOL FOR PEACE, MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Trade is a tool to bring about peace and mutual understanding between communities, the regional development minister told a business forum organised by the Zala County and the Prekmurje chambers of commerce in Lenti, in southwest Hungary. Joint economic regions, independent from "borders which merely outline administrative units", make trade easier, cheaper and safer, thereby boosting growth and prosperity, Tibor Navracsics said.

Aleksander Jevšek, the Slovenian minister for development and EU cohesion, said the joint projects offer new business opportunities in the region. The next financial cycle prioritises digitalisation, innovation, green transition and shaping a smart society, and will

offer opportunities to companies as well as local authorities and non-profits, the traditional beneficiaries of cross-border schemes, he said.

KOCSIS: FOREIGN OPPOSITION PARTY FINANCING REPORT SHOULD BE DECLASSIFIED

Given the "shocking" and "serious" evidence presented in a secret service report concerning the foreign financing of left-wing parties in the last general election, the material should be declassified, a top Fidesz politician said on Thursday. "The facts of the case are shocking and far more serious" than initially thought, Máté Kocsis, the leader of the ruling party's parliamentary group, said after a meeting of parliament's national security committee, noting that he had initiated the declassification of the report. "The secret service report is classified until 2051," Kocsis said. "But at today's meeting ... I initiated its declassification," he said, adding that the evidence indicated serious breaches of Hungary's sovereignty, "which the Hungarian public has a right to know about," he wrote on Facebook. He called on left-wing parties to support his initiative, and he called the foreign financing the "gravest scandal" since the 1989-1990 change in political system.

DEUTSCH: LEFT WANTS HUNGARY STRIPPED OF EU FUNDING

Hungary's left wing wants "Brussels to strip Hungary of its EU funding once and for all," Fidesz MEP Tamás Deutsch said on Thursday. It was clear from a Brussels press conference left-wing politicians held earlier in the day that their sole political aim was to prevent Hungary from accessing the EU monies, the head of the ruling party's European parliamentary group said in a video statement. "The situation is clear," he said. "The Hungarian and the European left wing absolutely want Hungary punished." He said they did not care what commitments Hungary had made in agreement with the European Commission to resolve rule-of-law issues "invented by them". Deutsch added that they were taking revenge on Hungarian citizens who voted against left-wing parties in general elections four times in a row.

He noted that another European parliamentary debate on Hungary has been initiated next week with a view to adopting another EP resolution condemning the country and calling on the European Commission to withhold EU development funds. The government, he added, would represent Hungarian interests and fight the "unworthy attacks against Hungarians" in next week's debate.

At a press conference in Brussels on Thursday, MEPs handling rule-of-law issues said Hungarian measures

taken to satisfy related concerns had fallen short of the requirements. Petri Sarvamaa, a Finnish MEP of the European People's Party, told the press conference that the European Commission had interpreted its remit "very narrowly" when it came to Hungarian corruption cases and conflicts of interest in connection with public procurement, adding that these accounted for only a small portion of Hungary's rule-of-law problems.

OFFICIAL: HUNGARY'S CAP STRATEGY SERVES BALANCE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

Hungary's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategy aims at maintaining the balance of sustainability and competitiveness in line with the interests of producers, an official of the ministry of agriculture said on Thursday. State secretary for agriculture and rural development Zsolt Feldman told a professional meeting at the Herman Ottó Institute in Budapest that the European Commission insisted on making support conditional on meeting certain environmental conditions, but the Hungarian government had also considered economic and social impacts when preparing the system of support.

Despite some differences between the positions, the CAP talks that will determine the agricultural support system until 2027 are expected to conclude with a compromise that

is favourable to Hungary, he said. Agriculture and food production have become strategic areas in Hungary, and the government wants the sector to become an engine for the economy, he added. Productivity and profitability have significantly improved in recent years, and the nearly 5,400 billion forints (EUR 13bn) worth of support available under the arrangements of CAP represents an unprecedented opportunity for rural Hungary, he said. Holding consultations as soon as possible about the conditions of support to farmers also serves their interests, Feldman added.

BUDAPEST MAYOR AWARDS HONORARY CITIZEN OF BUDAPEST TITLES

Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, handed over honorary citizen of Budapest titles on Thursday at a ceremony celebrating Capital City Day coinciding with the launch of a two-year series of celebrations marking the approaching 150th anniversary of the unification of Budapest. Titles were awarded to musician László Dés, historian János Gyurgyák, actress Dorottya Udvaros, and author Pál Závada among others. The late architect Bálint Nagy, a Kossuth and Ybl Miklos laureate, and the late human rights activist Jenő Setét, who was awarded the Raoul Wallenberg Prize in his lifetime, were honoured posthumously. Karácsony called the recipients "the good face

of Budapest" and representatives of the city's diversity. He said Budapest had preserved "the remnants" of Hungary's "civic ethos". Civic ethos, he added, was about "the search for truth and solutions" rather than "looking for scapegoats", and he highlighted the value of solidarity "in times of peace and certainly in times of crisis". The mayor added that Budapest residents would not be able to endure "this long, shivering winter" any other way than showing each other solidarity. "This city's greatness lies in its diversity and our conviction that we who believe in humanity, fairness, civil courage and solidarity, have a better story to tell," Karácsony said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY MEETING POINT FOR EASTERN, WESTERN CAR INDUSTRIES

Hungary is the meeting point for the Eastern and Western automotive industries, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said at the inauguration of South Korean chemicals company Chokwang Paint's new plant in Heves, in eastern Hungary. The plant will produce heat dissipation adhesives for batteries in electric vehicles, Péter Szijjártó noted at the inauguration. The Hungarian government is supporting the 3.8 billion forint (EUR 9.3m) investment with a 380 million forint grant, he added. The project will further strengthen Hungary's role in the EV industry and boost capacities for battery production, Szijjártó said.

“Hungary is the European champion of the automotive sector’s transition to electric vehicles,” the minister said, adding that the EV industry was a determining factor in the Hungarian economy’s long-term future. Szijjártó said that with Europe “heading towards a recession” because of the war in Ukraine and the related sanctions, reliable and strategic partnerships like the one between Hungary and South Korea were becoming even more important.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIAN GOVT ‘MOST STABLE IN EUROPE’

The Hungarian government, with a fourth election win under its belt, is Europe’s most stable, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, told a forum in Budapest on Thursday, adding that the Fidesz government represented the nation’s interests fully. Szijjártó emphasised the importance of the outcome of the spring general election in terms of determining Hungary’s reaction to current events. Whereas in times of peace a country’s future and political direction is determined in an election, much more was at stake in the April election as voters not only opted for an economic and social vision but they also decided whether the next few years could be spent in peace, the minister said. So the past few months have underlined just how important Fidesz’s win was, he added. The ruling party made clear in its election campaign that the primary

aim was to stay out of the war, he said, noting that at the same time Hungary is providing “serious humanitarian aid” to Ukraine.

Szijjártó said the EU had reacted to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in the “worst possible way” by introducing sanctions. The war is still raging while Europe’s economy is moving towards a recession, he said, adding that prices were skyrocketing while Russia’s economy had withstood sanctions. He accused the EU of pursuing new sanctions only to “somehow excuse” its own poor decision-making that was causing such damage. Admitting that sanctions were “a dead end” would tar those responsible for introducing them in the first place, he added. Yet leaders who backed sanctions should take responsibility for bringing the European economy to the brink of recession by resigning, he said.

Hungarian energy supplies, Szijjártó said, would not be put at risk, and Hungarian interests must be protected when negotiating any sanctions package, adding that tough talks lay ahead, and the outcome of the National Consultation public survey was important in terms of bolstering the government’s negotiating position.

KÖVÉR EXPRESSES REGRET OVER CANCELLATION OF V4 SPEAKERS’ MEETING IN BRATISLAVA

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér on Thursday expressed regret over the

cancellation of the Visegrád Group meeting of speakers in Bratislava next week, the parliament’s press office said. “In the past 30 years, regional cooperation by the four countries have helped bridge ideological differences, and we successfully represented our common interests together,” he said. “Remarks by the Czech parliamentary speaker are untrue and disrespectful; they contravene the facts and question the Hungarian government’s right to pursue policies along the lines of Hungarian national interests,” the statement added.

DEFENCE MINISTER HOLDS TALKS WITH ISRAELI COUNTERPART IN JERUSALEM

Recent events are proof that all international alliances must now focus on strengthening defence capabilities, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said after talks with Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz in Jerusalem. An effective and systemic defence force must be developed, he said. The Hungarian government launched its multi-year defence force development project in 2017, he noted. Thanks to acquisitions and defence industry developments, Hungary can fulfil its international obligations at a high level in addition to being able to protect the country and the Hungarian people, he added.

Hungarian-Israeli relations work based on historical experiences, common values and interests, he said.

The two countries have maintained “close and excellent relations” for a long time, including in defence, he added. Under the arrangements of the Hungarian armed forces development scheme, “considerable Israeli ties have been established” in the defence industry which has gained new impetus and is now considered “a new cylinder in the engine of the Hungarian economy”, he said. Parts of a new radar system are expected to arrive from 2023, and Hungarian-made components will be incorporated from 2025, he added.

HUNGARIAN SENTENCED TO PRISON IN NETHERLANDS ARRESTED IN NW HUNGARY

A Hungarian national sentenced to prison in the Netherlands for human trafficking was captured in the city of Mosonmagyaróvár, in north-western Hungary, on an international arrest warrant, Hungarian law enforcement said on Thursday. The 30-year-old man was sentenced for forcing vulnerable Hungarian women into prostitution in the Netherlands, the National Investigation Bureau (NNI) said on the website police.hu. The women were physically and emotionally abused and withheld payment, they added.

Dutch law enforcement started investigating the prostitution ring

in late 2020. Its members were later captured and sentenced to prison for human trafficking in a legally binding ruling this spring. The Hungarian national fled, however, and the court issued a European and international warrant for his arrest. Dutch investigators tracked the man to Hungary and appealed to Hungarian law enforcement for assistance in his capture. He was apprehended by the NNI within a few weeks and is currently in custody pending extradition proceedings.

SOME 8,700 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 4,954 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Wednesday, while another 3,810 crossed from Romania, the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued 30-day residency permits to 163 people, ORFK told MTI on Thursday. Budapest received 27 people, 10 children among them, by train, ORFK said.

HUNGARY HOUSING MARKET TIGHTENS

Both supply and demand in Hungary’s housing market is showing “significant” signs of tightening, the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) said in a biannual

report. The NBH’s Home Market Report noted that demand for homes in the third quarter fell by an annual 35% in the capital and were down 36% in the rest of the country.

AIR PASSENGER NUMBERS ON BUDAPEST FLIGHTS TRIPLE

Passenger numbers on Wizz Air’s Budapest flights rose by more than 230% in January-October from the same period a year earlier to almost 3 million, the Hungarian low-cost carrier said on Thursday. Wizz Air operates 62 flights from Liszt Ferenc International.

BKK AGREES WITH CAF ON OPTION TO PURCHASE ADDITIONAL TRAMS

The Budapest Transport Centre (BKK) has signed an agreement with Spain’s CAF on the option to extend a contract to purchase additional low-floor trams, BKK said in a statement on Thursday. In line with the agreement, the option to buy 31 vehicles has been extended until March 18, 2023. The price would be comparable to 2014 prices, the statement added. Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said on Facebook that “the good response to the cost-of-living crisis, the climate crisis and the energy crisis is to continue developing public transport”.

