

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Sándor Ulvári

Border patrols take over border protection duties from the military at the Hercegszántó army base

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

EU MONIES 'POSSIBLY ACCESSIBLE BY MAY'

Should the European Parliament approve related legislation on time, EU funding could be accessible for Hungary by April or May 2023, the regional development minister has said.

The Hungarian government and the European Commission have always discussed contentious issues and differences of opinion, and will continue to do so, Tibor Navracsics told daily Magyar Nemzet in an interview published on Thursday. The paper noted that Hungary had signed all agreements with the European Commission facilitating access to EU funds by the end of the year, adding that an advance payment of 130 billion forints (EUR 323m) was expected to arrive, after which public tenders would be announced and actual projects could be launched.

Commenting on "attacks" against the government during the talks, Navracsics said the EC had raised no objections, other than in points of "political tastes". As regards the timetable for the releasing of the funds, Navracsics said consultations would be held in the coming weeks with Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, to be followed by parliamentary approval of a package of related laws at the end of March. If the March deadline is met, the EC said the release of funds could follow in April or May, Navracsics said.

ORBÁN CONGRATULATES ISRAEL'S NETANYAHU ON SIXTH TERM AS PM

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Thursday congratulated Benjamin Netanyahu on being sworn in as Israel's prime minister for the sixth time, Orbán's press chief said. In his message to his Israeli counterpart, Orbán called Netanyahu's return to power after his election victory last month a "remarkable" political achievement. Such perseverance is particularly important in these difficult times, he said. Orbán said Hungary's commitment to its strategic partnership with Israel and Israel's security was "as firm as possible", adding that Hungary will continue to support Israel against "the biased and unfair approaches" to it on the international stage. Hungary is prepared to further strengthen its close cooperation with Israel based on a common understanding of national interests, Orbán said.

GOVT OFFICIAL: WAGES OF DOCTORS, NURSES TO FURTHER INCREASE NEXT YEAR

Despite the crisis caused by sanctions related to the war in Ukraine, the government will fund further wage hikes for doctors, nurses and other health-care workers next year, a state secretary of the interior ministry told MTI on Wednesday evening. The

wages of doctors will be raised by an additional 11% as of January 1 under an agreement concluded with the Hungarian Chamber of Doctors during the pandemic, Bence Rétvári said. With the increase, a doctor starting a career will earn 687,000 forints (EUR 1,705) per month, a doctor with 21-25 years of professional experience 1.5 million and a senior professional with some 40 years of experience 2.38 million forints, he said.

The wages of nurses will be hiked in two phases, in July next year and in March 2024, Rétvári said. The increase will follow a 21% pay rise in January this year. The goal is to ensure that the average wages of nurses reach 37% of a doctor's average monthly wage by March 1 in 2024, in line with the average ratio in Europe, he said. Rétvári noted that the government had given the largest pay hikes in the health-care sector since taking power in 2010. Doctors earn five to nine times more and nurses three times more on average than before the change of government, he said.

BORDER PATROL UNITS REPLACE TROOPS ON HUNGARY-SERBIA BORDER

The Hungarian Armed Forces on Thursday ended active service on the Hungarian-Serbian border, and were replaced by the border patrol units set up earlier this year. Addressing the handover at the Hercegszántó army base near the border, Bence Rétvári, a state secretary of the interior ministry,

said that more than 263,000 illegal entry attempts had been thwarted this year on that border section alone. Those serving here "are protecting one of the most-attacked border sections in the European Union", he said. Tamás Vargha, a state secretary of the defence ministry, said that three-quarters of all Hungarian troops had already served at the border, "a testimony to their preparedness, patriotism and commitment to peace".

LMP CONCLUDES 'GREEN CONSULTATION'

Opposition LMP has concluded a "Green Consultation", and said an "overwhelming majority" of respondents had agreed with the party's proposals towards a green transition. Deputy group leader Máté Kanász-Nagy told a press conference on Thursday that 95% of respondents agreed with the party's proposal that the government should launch a national home insulation programme "as soon as possible". Currently, only some 20% of residential buildings are insulated, barely a quarter of the ratio in Austria, he said.

Fully 91.8% agreed with the party's proposal to withdraw legislation curbing the construction of wind turbines, and 91.5% agreed with scrapping the fees on solar panels, he said. Some 72.3% of respondents "said yes" to a comprehensive public transport "climate pass" encouraging the use of public transport rather than cars, and the same proportion agreed

that the contract to upgrade the Paks nuclear plant should be scrapped, he said. "Unlike the government's consultation designed to deflect responsibility", LMP was looking for answers to "real" issues such as energy and climate crisis and energy poverty, Kanász-Nagy said.

CLOSE TO 12,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 6,148 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 5,751 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 296 people. Altogether 118 refugees, 38 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said on Thursday.

SEPARATED SIAMESE TWIN UNDERGOES RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

One of the Siamese twins separated by a team of Hungarian and Bangladeshi doctors in 2019, Rokaiya, underwent reconstructive surgery before Christmas in an operation led by Hungarian plastic surgeon Gergely Pataki in

Bangladesh. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Adbul Momen visited the 6-year-old twins in the hospital and praised the successful cooperation, the Foundation for Defenceless People said in a statement. The team completed several other operations in Bangladesh in December, including a complicated seven-hour procedure. Rokaiya and Rabeya were separated in a 33-hour operation organised by the foundation in August 2019 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in what was the third step of a series of procedures. After the fourth step this December, Rokaiya and Rabeya returned to spend Christmas in their village, where Rabeya has started attending school while Rokaiya, who lives with multiple disabilities, continues to receive developmental therapy.

SZÉP VOUCHER CARD SPENDING RESTRICTIONS SCRAPPED

Hungary's government has eliminated dedicated SZÉP voucher card spending accounts for catering, commercial accommodations and recreation in a decree, the Hungarian Tourism Agency said on Thursday. The change will benefit the 2.5 million SZÉP card holders and the close to 50,000 local businesses active in the tourism sector, the agency said. It added that there was about 88

billion forints (EUR 218.8m) available to spend on SZÉP card balances at the end of November. During the coronavirus crisis, the government lifted restrictions on spending from the SZÉP card sub-accounts to support the hard-hit tourism industry.

CAPA PRIZE HOLDER PHOTOGRAPHER MÓRICZ-SABJÁN DIES AT 42

Internationally acclaimed photographer Simon Móricz-Sabján died in an accident at the age of 42 on Wednesday, his wife told MTI on Thursday. Móricz-Sabján won the Capa Grand Prize for Permanently Overcast, a photo series on life in Hungary's Great Plain, in October 2022. Born in 1980 in Kiskunhalas, in southern Hungary, Móricz-Sabján worked with the daily Népszabadság, Manager Magazin and business daily Világgazdaság. He won numerous awards including that of the China International Press Photo Contest twice, Pictures of the Year International (POYi), NPPA Best of Photojournalism, Prix International de la Photographie, PDN, FCBarcelona Photo Award, Slovak Press Photo and ASPAward. His work has been displayed in the House of Hungarian Photographers, the Capa Centre, Arles, Barcelona, Denver, Milan and several other locations.