

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Szilárd Koszticsák

Winning team at year-end rally in F1 Hungaroring track

UPCOMING EVENTS

President's New Year address

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

GOVT AMENDS 2023 BUDGET

Hungary's government on Thursday issued a decree amending the 2023 budget, the finance ministry said.

Next year's budget envisages GDP growth of 1.5%, a declining budget deficit and falling public debt, the ministry said. It targets a deficit of 3.9% of GDP, the ministry said, adding that growth over the 1.5% assumption should be used to further reduce the deficit. Year-end public debt is targeted at 70.2% of GDP.

The budget increases the utilities protection fund to 2,610 billion forints (EUR 6.5bn) from the originally planned 670 billion. Central reserves have also been increased to 255 billion forints from 170 billion. It also allows for raising all pensions by 15%, the ministry said, adding that spending on pensions in 2023 will exceed 6,150 billion forints.

The budget is dedicated to keeping household utility bills low, the ministry said. The protracted war and the "sanctions-fuelled energy crisis" are a threat to Hungarian families, the Hungarian economy and jobs, it added. The ministry said the most important task of 2023 would be protecting families and jobs, preserving the value of pensions, keeping the caps on household utility bills in place and preserving Hungary's peace.

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DEFENCE MINISTER: SECURITY HUNGARY'S MOST VALUABLE ASSET

Security, as the year 2022 has shown, is Hungary's most valued asset, and maintaining it is the most important objective for the Hungarian government, the defence minister said on Friday, in a year-end message. "There is nothing without security," Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said in a video message on Facebook, adding that this is why the government continues to promote peace, and is working to prevent the country from "drifting into a war", and is further developing its defence capabilities. He noted that the government had further raised the wages of soldiers who as a result "could take home 20% more from September". The wage increases will continue in 2024, the minister said. The upgrade of the army has also continued with Hungary's taking delivery of a batch of Lynx combat vehicles and PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers. The minister thanked the troops for their "patriotic" service throughout the year and Hungarian people for their support to the armed forces and cooperation in protecting Hungary's security.

ENERGY MIN: HOUSEHOLD ENERGY BILLS TO STAY UNCHANGED UNTIL END-APRIL

Household energy bills in Hungary will stay level until the end of April,

the Energy Ministry said on Friday. The ministry, which was established in December amid strained circumstances on the international energy market, is focused on ensuring that households continue to benefit from caps on their energy bills while guaranteeing supply security, it said in a statement. As well as households with independent heating, residents in homes linked to district heating will also continue to enjoy subsidies on their bills. By next autumn, non-residential consumers will also be able to take advantage of much cheaper district heating services, it added.

Meanwhile, businesses, municipalities and social organisations will benefit from an emergency measure which caps electricity fees from January, affecting 1,700 consumers, including 200 municipalities and their institutions.

The statement said gas storage capacity in Hungary, in proportion to consumption, is around double the European average. Halfway through the heating season, stored gas is sufficient to provide the country's heating needs for roughly 90 winter days. It added that supplies will be impacted by new EU-wide rules introduced from February, including the gas-price cap and a stricter ban on the import of Russian oil products, but the government will ensure that consumers in Hungary do not experience any energy shortages.

OVER 36,600 FAMILIES IN VILLAGES AVAIL OF HOME SUBSIDIES

More than 36,600 families who live in Hungary's smallest communities have been awarded close to 200 billion forints (EUR 498.6m) of subsidies available under a scheme supporting home purchases, renovations and expansions since its launch in 2019, government commissioner Alpár Gyopáros said in a video message posted on Facebook on Friday. The programme, part of the Home Purchase Subsidy Scheme for Families (CSOK) available to all Hungarians with children or planning families with children, offers residents of villages with populations under 5,000, where the rate of depopulation exceeds the national average, subsidies of between 300,000 and 5 million forints for home renovation and 600,000 to 10 million forints for home purchase and renovation. The village CSOK programme was set to expire at the end of 2022 but has been extended for another two years, until December 31, 2024, Gyopáros noted. Residents of around 2,600 villages are eligible to participate in the programme, he added.

MORE THAN 12,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURS

Fully 6,372 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on

Thursday, while 5,821 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 245 people. Altogether 165 refugees, 47 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said on Friday.

FREE TRAVEL ON BUDAPEST PUBLIC TRANSPORT EXTENDED FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

The possibility of free travel on Budapest public transport has been extended for Ukrainian refugees until March 31 next year, Budapest transport centre BKK said on Thursday. In line with the scheme initiated by the Budapest metropolitan council, refugees who want to use public transport in Budapest must present a Ukrainian passport or ID, or a residence permit issued by the Hungarian authorities which shows Ukrainian citizenship, BKK said. Foreign students from Ukraine can travel free of charge in Budapest if they can present their Ukrainian student card or any other document verifying their address in Ukraine. Free travel for Ukrainians was first introduced on March 4 of this year and it applies to all BKK services, with the exception of airport shuttle bus 100E, the funicular on Castle Hill,

“nostalgia” transport services and boats. It also applies to the suburban railways HÉV and all suburban “blue” bus services within the borders of the capital.

BDPST UNIT PLOUGHS HUF 2 BN INTO GRÁNIT BANK

Shareholders of Gránit Bank on Thursday approved a 2 billion forint (EUR 5.0m) capital raise in the lender by Tiberis Digital, a unit of Hungarian-owned BDPST. Gránit Bank said Tiberis Digital’s stake will rise from 43.2% to 44.8% as a result. BDPST acquired a 57% stake in Gránit Bank a year ago. Gránit Bank said Q1-Q3 after-tax profit of 8 billion forints was placed into profit reserves. Éva Hegedüs, Gránit Bank’s chairman-CEO and minority owner, told shareholders that the lender’s pre-tax profit is expected to climb over 12 billion forints, while its balance sheet comes close to 1,000 billion forints. Growth of both deposit and lending stock beat the average for the sector, she added.

FILM PRODUCTION SPENDING IN HUNGARY UP 20% IN 2022

Spending on film production in Hungary rose by 20% to more than 250 billion forints (EUR 625m) in

2022, a new record, the government commissioner for the film industry said in an interview with Origo. Csaba Káel noted that most of that spending was in foreign currency. He said Budapest has become Europe’s biggest base for film production after London. The commissioner called FILMIO, a state-sponsored streaming service that showcases Hungarian films, “a great success”, adding that the initiative is unprecedented in Europe.

AIR QUALITY IN NORTH- EASTERN PARTS ‘DANGEROUS’

Air quality due to pollution is “dangerous” in three settlements in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, in north-eastern Hungary, and in Várpalota in Veszprém County, north-west of Lake Balaton, the National Centre for Public Health (NNK) said on Friday. Meanwhile, in Miskolc, Salgótarján and Pécs air quality is in the “unhealthy” category. Poor air quality (the category above “unhealthy”) affects Szombathely, Győr, Tatabánya, Veszprém, Székesfehérvár, Dunaújváros, Százhalombatta, Tököl, Budapest, Vác, Kecskemét, Debrecen and Nyíregyháza. Air quality is likely to worsen in the northern counties, the statement added.