

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Hungary PM Viktor Orbán, Czechia PM Petr Fiala, Slovakia PM Eduard Heger, Poland PM Mateusz Morawiecki and their wives at Slovak statehood anniversary gala in Bratislava

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on Nov foreign trade, industrial output

Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference holds holy mass honouring Pope Benedict XVI

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Athlete of the Year Gala

TOP STORY

ENERGY MIN: HUNGARY GAS STORAGE LEVELS HIGH

Gas storage levels are high across Europe, including in Hungary, thanks to a mild winter, Energy Minister Csaba Lantos said on Sunday.

Though Europe continues to receive gas from Russia, a protracted war cannot be ruled out, the minister told public broadcaster Kossuth Radio, adding that a rise in gas prices was also a possibility. Commenting on European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's remark that the European Union could face a gap of 30 billion cubic metres of gas, Lantos said that around 25 large liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals were being built across the bloc. He added, at the same time, that the winter of 2023-2024 would be a "tough" one for the continent. Hungary, however, is in a slightly different position given its relatively high number of gas storage facilities, Lantos said. As long as the Serbian pipeline is functioning, those facilities will be filled, he added. The minister said the government will continue to provide cheap gas to Hungarians up to average consumption levels. The gas price above the threshold for average consumption is also below the market price, he said, noting that the government has decided not to raise that price in the current heating period ending on April 30.

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.

All rights reserved. Enquiries should be made to the English Help Desk at +361 441 9340
For MTI's real time coverage please visit <http://english.mti.hu>, <http://econews.hu>



ENERGY MINISTER: HUNGARY MUST REDUCE FOREIGN ENERGY DEPENDENCE

Energy Minister Csaba Lantos, in an interview with public radio on Sunday, emphasised the need to strengthen Hungary's energy sovereignty. "We are highly dependent on foreign suppliers when it comes to energy," he told Kossuth Radio. "This dependence has to be reduced." Though Hungary's natural resources are not limitless, "we are not completely helpless," Lantos said. He noted that in 2021 the country's annual natural gas consumption came to around 10 billion cubic metres, 1.5 billion of which can be produced domestically. The aim, he said, was to increase domestic natural gas extraction to 2 billion cubic metres a year. Also, Hungary will continue to make use of weather-dependent renewable energy sources like solar and wind energy, Lantos said. Hungary's solar plants were originally planned to reach a capacity of 6,000 megawatts by 2030, but that goal is now ahead of schedule, he said. Meanwhile, Lantos said the upgrade of the country's nuclear plant in Paks could be completed by 2032.

ORBÁN ATTENDS GALA MARKING ANNIVERSARY OF SLOVAK STATEHOOD

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his wife, Anikó Lévai, attended a gala

event marking the 30th anniversary of Slovakia's independent statehood in Bratislava on Saturday evening, the PM's press chief said. The Hungarian, Czech and Polish premiers and their spouses had all been invited by Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger to the event held at the Slovak National Theatre. The event was addressed by Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová, House Speaker Boris Kollár and Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CONGRATULATES NEW CHINESE FOREIGN AFFAIRS LEADERS

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has congratulated Qin Gang on his appointment as China's new foreign minister as well as his former counterpart Wang Yi on his promotion to the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party, the foreign ministry said on Friday. In his congratulatory letter to Qin, Szijjártó welcomed that Hungary and China had set up the "Belt and Road" intergovernmental cooperation committee at the end of last year following the milestones that had been the Belt and Road initiative, the China-CEE cooperation and the lifting of Hungarian-Chinese ties to a strategic partnership. Szijjártó highlighted the comprehensive partnership between Hungary and China, their "excellent" economic

and financial cooperation as well as the significance of the resumption of direct flights between the two countries. He said Hungary and China were "in a good position" to further develop their ties. Hungary has a clear interest in reasonable cooperation between China and the European Union on the basis of mutual respect, he added. The minister expressed hope that he would soon meet his new Chinese counterpart in person.

In his letter to Wang, Szijjártó emphasised that ties between Hungary and China were stronger than ever. He highlighted cooperation in trade, investments, education, interpersonal ties, networking and finance and thanked Wang for his personal efforts in promoting it. Szijjártó expressed hope that he and Wang would continue to work together in expanding Hungary and China's relations and partnership.

45TH ANNIVERSARY OF HOLY CROWN'S RETURN BY US MARKED

The Holy Crown of Hungary represents the values that make Hungarians great, Tamás Vargha, a state secretary of the defence ministry, told a ceremony marking the 45th anniversary of the return of the Holy Crown by the United States to Hungary, on Friday. The return of the Holy Crown was the "harbinger of change" during the communist era, Vargha told the

ceremony in Budapest's Inner City Parish Church, adding that Hungary was grateful "to our American friends for having protected the Holy Crown in a dignified manner and returned it to Hungary unharmed". The state secretary noted that until 1527, no one in Hungary could be considered a lawful king unless they were crowned with the Holy Crown. Contenders to the throne therefore did whatever they had to in order to get the crown, he added. The Holy Crown embodies the idea of the Hungarian state, it is a symbol of Hungarian statehood and is the most valuable and an irreplaceable national asset, Vargha said. He noted that in the recent period Hungary's government had "settled two debts to the Holy Crown", namely that it had the crown moved from the Hungarian National Museum to the Parliament and established the Crown Guard.

David Pressman, the US ambassador to Hungary, said that in spite of confrontation between the two countries' governments during the second world war, Hungarians had seen the US as a friend that could be entrusted with safeguarding the Holy Crown, one of their most important and most precious treasures. "This 1,000-year-old, priceless artefact made of gold and jewels was hidden away in a plain black satchel by brave, patriotic Hungarians. It was smuggled out of the country and passed from a Hungarian colonel to an American colonel," the ambassador said. The United States took the protection

of the Holy Crown "so seriously that we placed it in the famous vaults of Fort Knox", he said. The Holy Crown was returned not to the Soviet Union or a "puppet regime", but to the Hungarian people, Pressman said. The US wanted to give Hungary more than a crown, he said, adding that his country wanted to give back to Hungary the hope that the Holy Crown represented.

The Holy Crown was taken to the United States in 1945 and returned to Hungary by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on January 6, 1978.

ANNIVERSARY OF MASSACRE AT MADÉFALVA COMMEMORATED

Commemorations were held in Siculeni (Madéfalva), in central Romania, on Saturday, marking the anniversary of a massacre in which hundreds of Szekler Hungarians were slain by Austrian troops 259 years ago. In a commemorative speech at the Siculidium Memorial, Hungarian Justice Minister Judit Varga said that like the history of the Hungarian nation, "our joy and our sorrow are also one". Varga said it was an honour for her to give her first speech of the year in front of her "Szekler brethren".

The Szeklers of Siculeni were defending their sovereignty and identity, the minister said, adding that though the world had changed a lot since then, "defending Hungarian constitutional identity and sovereignty remains our everyday responsibility to

this day". "Whether it be the rule of law or the joint European Union decisions concerning energy security, we must always defend our right to have the final say on issues that determine the fate of our nation," Varga said. She added that in Hungary's experience as an EU member, "Hungarians always ended up being right about the important issues". What matters most to the Hungarian government is for the Hungarian community in Transylvania to be able to preserve its Hungarian identity, the minister said. "You are the ones who have to preserve the thousand-year Hungarian history and culture and ensure the future of the Transylvanian Hungarian community," she said. "It's not an easy task, but God always gives the hardest battles to the best warriors." Concerning the war in Ukraine, Varga said Hungarians wanted peace, emphasising the need for central European countries to find common ground and room for cooperation.

On January 7, 1765, the troops of Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, retaliated a protest by some 2,500 Szeklers who refused to serve in the Austrian army under command in German.

GOVT OFFICIAL VOWS TO CONTINUE NATION- BUILDING WITH ETHNIC HUNGARIANS IN 2023

The government's policies for ethnic Hungarians last year were defined by joint action, the state

secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad said on Saturday, vowing to continue the nation-building together with ethnic Hungarians in 2023. A total of 318,083 ethnic Hungarians voted in the April general election, almost 94% of whom backed the current government, Árpád János Potápi said in a video posted on Facebook. Thanking Hungarians beyond the border for their support, Potápi said that after the pandemic the Russia-Ukraine war presented another challenge to the entire Hungarian nation, especially the Hungarian community in western Ukraine's Transcarpathia region. Hungarians both within and beyond Hungary's borders are united in aiding the Transcarpathian Hungarian community, Potápi said.

But the government is not giving up on its strategic goals and will do everything in its power to continue working towards a unified Hungarian nation, he said. Since 2010, 1.15 million ethnic Hungarians have been granted citizenship and 5,400 investment projects have been carried out in ethnic Hungarian communities, Potápi said, adding that the government will continue contributing to the Hungarian-language education of 300,000 Hungarian children and young people each year. "As stated in the closing statement issued by the Permanent Hungarian Conference, every member of the Hungarian nation has a shared interest in peace being achieved as soon as possible," Potápi said. "We trust that 2023 will bring peace to Europe."

GOVT OFFICIAL COMMEMORATES ETHNIC GERMANS DEPORTED TO SOVIET UNION

War must be avoided because it is impossible to know how it will end and could have consequences that nobody is prepared for, interior ministry state secretary Bence Rétvári said on Sunday, commemorating the ethnic Germans who were deported to the Soviet Union after the second world war. The deportees were guilty of nothing and had never even fought against the Soviet Union, Rétvári said in Kismaros, in northern Hungary. They were forced to leave their homes only because every settlement had to fulfil a quota, he said, noting that the deportees had no idea where they were being taken. Altogether 800,000 Hungarians were deported to forced labour camps, 200,000 of whom never returned, Rétvári said. "Wherever communists came to power, they set up forced labour camps," he added. Noting that it was impossible to know early on how a war will end, Rétvári said that at the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, many European countries had promised to only send Ukraine non-lethal weapons, but this had completely changed by now. "When we remember, we should also think of the present and make decisions that ensure that the terrible situations of the past are not repeated," the state secretary said.

LMP CALLS FOR INFLATION-LINKED PAY RISE IN PUBLIC SECTOR

The opposition LMP's co-leader called for an inflation-linked pay rise for all public sector employees at a press conference on Sunday. Máté Kanász-Nagy said that inflation now exceeds 20% and wage workers, typically public sector employees, were the worst hit by soaring food prices. LMP proposes that for those working in the social sector, education, health care and state administration, there should be a wage correction on January 1 and July 1 of each year, equal to the rate of inflation. This could be financed by raising the corporate tax, Kanász-Nagy said, adding that a new, 25% corporate tax rate should be introduced above sales revenue of 500 million forints (EUR 1.3m). Kanász-Nagy also called for the introduction of a minimum wage for college or university graduates, which LMP has already advocated earlier. This would exceed the minimum wage for skilled workers by 30%, he added. For teachers and other professionals in the education sector, whose situation, he said, had been deteriorating since 2016, LMP urges a one-off pay rise of 45% to compensate for the inflation of the previous years, which then should be followed by an inflation-linked wage rise in their case as well, Kanász-Nagy said.

MARCH FOR EDUCATION REACHES BUDAPEST

A march for education started from Miskolc, in northern Hungary, on

Monday reached the Kölcsey Ferenc Secondary School in Budapest's sixth district on Saturday afternoon, where student and teacher organisations held a demonstration. The speakers, who completed the 180km distance of the march, talked about their hope that a free and child-friendly education system would be established as soon as possible. They emphasised the importance of solidarity and pledged to continue what they started in education last year. They also addressed the "systemic segregation" affecting the Roma in Hungarian public education and criticised the dismissal of the fourteen teachers who had been laid off for participating in civil disobedience. Participants raised banners saying "No teacher, no future", "Strike is a fundamental right", "We want our form teacher back" as well as the national and the European Union flag and the flags of the teachers' unions.

MORE THAN 23,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 4,887 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 18,440 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 192 people. Altogether 71 refugees, 22 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said on Sunday.

BUDAPEST COURT APPROVES BELGIAN- MOROCCAN TERRORIST SUSPECT'S EXTRADITION

The Budapest Municipal Court on Friday approved the extradition

to Belgian authorities of a Belgian-Moroccan woman wanted on suspicion of terrorism, the court's press department said in a statement. The international warrant under which the woman was arrested had been issued by a French-language lower court of Brussels on charges of participation in the activities of a terrorist group and leaving the territory of the country with the intent of carrying out or supporting a terrorist act, the department said. "Based on available data, the woman can be explicitly suspected of seeking to visit a terrorist group active in a Syrian field of operation," it said. The maximum term for crimes included in the warrant is ten years in prison, said the department. The suspect agreed in the court to her extradition in a simplified procedure which according to the ruling must follow by January 16.