

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Novák at B9 meeting in Warsaw

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office publishes report on demography for Jan. 2022

Stats office publishes report on wages for Dec. 2022

45th Travel Expo opens

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

PRESIDENT NOVÁK: PEACE TOP PRIORITY

Creating and preserving peace must be made the topmost priority, President Katalin Novák told a meeting of the Bucharest Nine, the countries on NATO's eastern flank, in Warsaw on Wednesday.

Once there is peace in Ukraine, the country should be given support in making it a "democratic and prosperous state", the president said. Novák noted Hungary's large-scale humanitarian and medical aid to Ukraine, including accommodation to people fleeing the war. "The situation has made it clear since February 24, 2022, that each country must be able to defend itself," the president said, adding that NATO was "clearly the framework for effective cooperation". She said it was in the participants' fundamental interest to strengthen NATO's eastern flank, and Hungary "fully supports" those endeavours. EU members, especially those within the B9 should also enhance their own military capabilities, she added. Novák said she trusted that Sweden and Finland would soon become NATO members. She said US President Joe Biden's attending the meeting offered an excellent opportunity "to again confirm our joint commitment to peace". On another topic, she noted the importance of protecting the rights of minorities in Ukraine, and said "a country aspiring to be an EU member should do a lot in that area".

PRESIDENT NOVÁK MEETS POLISH PM IN WARSAW

President Katalin Novák met Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki ahead of a B9 summit of central and eastern European NATO member states in Warsaw on Wednesday. Novák and Morawiecki were in agreement to further strengthen Hungarian-Polish friendship. After the talks, Novák said on Facebook that Polish-Hungarian friendship was "not only a historical slogan but a current reality".

The Polish prime minister said that he had discussed with Novák the Russia-Ukraine war, economic challenges, the energy crisis and inflation. "I am glad that our Hungarian friends understand the severity of threats we are facing in the near future," he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: DECISIVE ACTION NEEDED AGAINST NUCLEAR ENERGY SANCTIONS

Decisive action is needed to ensure that EU sanctions do not impinge on Russia's nuclear sector, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Wednesday, adding that sanctions of this type would harm Hungary's national interests as well as global nuclear security. Noting that the tenth sanctions package is being finalised in Brussels, Szijjártó told a joint press conference with

the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, that any kind of restrictions that affected nuclear cooperation with Russia must be fought against resolutely. "We must act decisively against any listing of Rosatom and its officials," the minister said, saying that sanctions imposed on nuclear energy or Rosatom would "harm Hungary's fundamental national interests" as well as threaten global nuclear security. Szijjártó accused "two green ministers of the German government" of hampering the supply of German control technology for the new blocks of Hungary's Paks nuclear power plant "without any legal" grounds. He said that only countries which can produce a significant part of their own energy needs would be strong, given the volatile global energy market, its politicisation, and skyrocketing prices. For Hungary, that meant "cheap, sustainable and safe" nuclear energy, he said, adding that Europe and the world can only achieve their environmental goals with nuclear energy in the mix. "So Hungary is committed to increasing the use of nuclear energy..." he said, adding that the expansion of the Paks plant adhered to "the highest safety standards".

Szijjártó welcomed the IAEA's "rational approach based on common sense" and expressed his support for Grossi's efforts to

establish a security zone around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Warnings about the risks of a nuclear accident also prove that the Hungarian argument calling for immediate ceasefire and peace talks is right, he added. "Let's not forget that every day, while the war lasts, carries the risk of a nuclear incident or nuclear accident," Szijjártó said. "We who remember Chernobyl would like to avoid this taking place here in central Europe," he added. In response to a question concerning speeches by the US and Russian presidents on Tuesday, he said: "They would have done a far greater service to humanity had they talked to each other."

"We are in the 25th hour, and this war must end immediately," Szijjártó said.

"If there is no immediate ceasefire and the peace talks do not start immediately, there could be great trouble," he added. Commenting on obstacles raised by the German government to the transport of control technology required for the expansion project in Paks, he said a consortium of Siemens Energy and Framatome had received the commission. If Berlin renders the German company's participation impossible, then increasing the role of the French partner must be discussed, he said. "It is somewhat wild that a nuclear power station could be built in the European Union with control technology from the two strongest European

countries and the German government currently risks it that it might have to be replaced by Russian technology," he said. "Is that a rational move by the German government?" At the same time, he added that there was no issue regarding the quality of Russian technology considering that Rosatom was a leading company in the global market.

"I hope that one day somebody will be brave enough in the German media world, where media freedom is obviously fantastic, to ask one of the two ministers what is the reason for this behaviour," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, PAKISTAN TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN COOPERATION

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó met Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, his Pakistani counterpart, to discuss bilateral ties, in Budapest on Wednesday. At a joint press conference, Szijjártó said both countries were facing serious security challenges posed by their immediate neighbourhood, according to a statement by the foreign ministry. The foreign minister said pressure posed by illegal migration was increasing due to a spread of terrorism and radical ideologies. He expressed thanks to Pakistan for its role played in curbing illegal migration and fighting against terrorism. Regarding economic ties, Szijjártó noted Hungarian oil and gas

company Mol "being practically the only western energy company still present in the South Asian country". Mol will continue its investments in Pakistan giving jobs to 800 people, he said. Szijjártó praised Hungarian-Pakistani cooperation in many areas and announced to double the number of state grants to Pakistani students to 400 at Hungarian universities.

The two foreign ministers signed cooperation agreements in higher education, diplomatic training and sport affairs.

OFFICIAL: GOVT TO INCREASE AID PROMOTING HUNGARIAN EDUCATION IN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The Hungarian government has decided to increase the aid to ethnic Hungarian families sending their children to Hungarian schools, a state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office told a press conference in Cluj (Kolozsvár) on Wednesday. Miklós Panyi also announced that the government would contribute to a school bus project by the Rákóczi Association, to be implemented in small settlements of Transylvania. Panyi pointed to negative demographic trends in Europe, and said they especially impacted Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. A decreasing number of children has caused problems in the financing of Hungarian schools, and "the Hungarian government must address

that problem," the state secretary said. Providing school buses could be key in ensuring access to education in Hungarian, Panyi said. This could be crucial for Hungarian families, communities and schools in their efforts to survive, he added. From January on, students of Hungarian schools in Ukraine receive a gross 100 forints (EUR 262), increased from 22,400 forints, while students in other countries will receive a similar amount from September on, Panyi said.

Csongor Csáky, head of the Rákóczi Association, said the school bus programme, launched in southern Slovakia last year, would be rolled out to a further 31 settlements in Romania. All together, the service will help over 500 children from over 100 towns to 34 primary schools, he added.

PM SENDS CONDOLENCES OVER REAL MADRID STAR'S DEATH

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán expressed his sympathy over the death of Amancio Amaro, Real Madrid's former football player, on Wednesday. In a letter to Florentino Perez, the president of Real Madrid, Orbán said Amaro's personal greatness and impressive career, during which he was champion nine times and La Liga's best scorer twice, could be set as an example to the younger generation. "He was a real gentleman, an ambassador of football," his press chief quoted Orbán as saying in his letter.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY: BUILDING BATTERY PLANTS WOULD REQUIRE RESIDENTS' APPROVAL

The Budapest assembly passed a position on Wednesday regarding the construction of battery plants, namely that the city's residents must be consulted before any plans are made to build battery plants or assembly lines within the administrative boundaries of Budapest. The body approved a joint proposal by group leaders of the opposition Democratic Coalition, Socialists, Momentum and Párbeszéd. The proposal was approved by 17 votes in favour, with representatives of ruling Fidesz-KDNP and independents abstaining from the vote.

DOBREV: DK 'TOOL TO TOPPLE ORBÁN REGIME AND CREATE NEW EUROPEAN HUNGARY'

The Democratic Coalition (DK), the largest opposition party in Hungary, is the means to topple the "Orbán regime" and to create a new, European Hungary, the party's shadow prime minister, Klára Dobrev, told a rally in Pécs, in southern Hungary, on Tuesday. The MEP called on more than 1,000 participants from all over the country to "form little islands of resistance" and to "tell everyone the truth that there is no European welfare under the Orbán government but there are high prices and dysfunctional health-

care and education systems". DK has 1.1 million supporters, an "opposition force able to govern" that may bring European prosperity to Hungary, she said. Regarding the war in Ukraine, she said Hungary should work with the international community to ensure that "Putin does not win the war". Rather than external forces, "the greatest danger to Hungary's peace is [ruling] Fidesz", she said.

Hungary will be successful if wages catch up with European ones, employees have strong representation and the education and health-care systems are "put in order", Dobrev said.

Ruling Fidesz said in response that the "dollar left was bringing the threat of war" to Hungary. Leftist parties "do and say what their pro-war clients are paying for: they want to drag Hungary into the war and into one sanction after the other, which Hungarians would have to pay for", the statement said. Leftist parties "have not supported a single measure designed to protect families and jobs from inflation," it said.

DK MEP PLEDGES 'STRONG, TRANSPARENT, EFFICIENT' STATE

The Democratic Coalition plans to have a strong state in place in Hungary which operates transparently and efficiently, an MEP of the opposition party said on Wednesday. Addressing a conference of the party focusing on economic issues, Klára Dobrev, DK's shadow prime minister, criticised the

performance of the Orbán government over the past 12 years, saying that despite an economic growth, there had been "stagnation" in almost all sectors including education and health care. "A modern world is about an economic policy, knowledge-based economic development, education and a strong social sector focusing on people." Dobrev called wage increases an important measure in boosting Hungary's productivity. She pledged to present a clear timeline for introducing the common European currency which she said was key in restoring international confidence towards Hungary, as well as managing a transparent budget and pursuing a credible monetary policy.

CHARGES RAISED AGAINST NATIONAL ROMA COUNCIL LEADER FOR BRIBERY

Budapest prosecutors have raised charges against the head of the National Roma Council who is suspected of offering to pass on his post at the organisation against the payment of a bribe. The suspect has admitted to the charge, and the prosecutor's office has proposed a six-year prison sentence, a fine of 2 million forints, as well as barring him from public affairs for six years, a statement of the central investigative prosecutor's office said on Wednesday. According to the charges, before the suspect's term as head of the Roma body came to an end in the spring of 2022, he offered his post in exchange for a payment

of 30 million forints (EUR 80,000). He approached a Roma representative, who rejected his proposal, but he appealed to him to approach another representative.

ALMOST 8,900 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,766 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 4,132 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 79 people, ORFK said on Wednesday. There were no train arrivals in Budapest.

CORONAVIRUS - 867 NEW INFECTIONS, 7 DEATHS REGISTERED LAST WEEK

Fully 867 new Covid-19 infections were confirmed last week, while 7 fatalities were registered in connection with the virus, the Coronavirus Press Centre said on Wednesday. The number of active infections stands at 3,542. Currently, 357 coronavirus patients are being treated in hospital, 6 intubated on a ventilator.

Altogether 6,421,825 people have been vaccinated against the coronavirus, with 6,209,015 having received a second jab, 3,904,864

a third, and 423,998 a fourth. The number of registered infections since the start of the pandemic has reached 2,194,969 in Hungary, while there have been 48,745 deaths. Fully 2,142,682 people have made a recovery.

BUDGET ENDS JAN WITH HUF 144 BN SHORTFALL, FINMIN CONFIRMS

Hungary's cash flow-based budget posted a 143.6 billion forint deficit, the Finance Ministry confirmed on Wednesday. The central budget was 190.8 billion forint in the red, the social security funds had a surplus of 3.6 billion, while the separate state funds also posted a surplus, of 43.6 billion forints.

The ministry pledged to reduce the deficit and public debt further while ensuring resources for key government programmes. The economy should avoid a recession this year and grow by above 4% in 2024, it added.

The deficit is targeted at 3.9% of GDP this year, while the public debt is set to fall below 70%, it said. The detailed reading of the data showed net revenue from VAT up 15.2% at 866.1 billion forints in January from the same month a year earlier. Net revenue from personal income tax rose by 102.1 billion to 371.9 billion. Payouts for European Union programmes came to 151.1 billion forints in January, while

transfers from Brussels totalled 34.6 billion. Net interest spending came to 158.7 billion in January, 122.9 billion more than in the same month a year earlier.

HOME BUILDING PERMIT ISSUES UP 17% IN 2022

The number of home building permits issued in Hungary rose by an annual 16.9% to 35,002 in 2022, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Wednesday. The number of permits issued for homes in the capital increased by 144 pc to 13,399, while the number issued for homes in county seats and cities with populations over 50,000 fell by 5.6% to 5,546. The number issued in smaller cities dropped by 15.8% to 8,518.

BUDAPEST AIRPORT SHUTTLE FARES TO RISE FROM APRIL 1

The Budapest municipal council voted to raise the fare for the city's 100E airport shuttle bus service from 1,500 forints to 2,200 forints (EUR 5.7) from April 1, at a meeting on Wednesday. The fare increase was justified citing higher ticket sales parallel with a rise in turnover at Liszt Ferenc International airport, as well as favourable assessments of service quality and price by passengers.