

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Novák and outgoing Czech counterpart Miloš Zeman in Prague

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the war in Ukraine

LMP presser on national transport passes

Momentum organises protest against battery plant in Debrecen

DK shadow PM Klára Dobrev hosts national event in Miskolc

TOP STORY

NOVÁK: VISEGRAD COOPERATION 'ALLIANCE OF HEART AND MIND'

The Visegrad cooperation is an alliance of the heart and mind, President Katalin Novák said at a joint press conference with outgoing Czech counterpart Miloš Zeman in Prague on Friday.

Novák said "those who attack the Visegrad cooperation also attack the alliance of the heart and mind" and vowed to work effectively towards countering such attacks while she is in office as president. She added that as a strong supporter of the Visegrad cooperation she believed in its power to integrate common economic, cultural and historical values. Novák said her talks with Zeman focused on three main topics: the Russian-Ukrainian war, Czech-Hungarian bilateral cooperation and Visegrad ties. She said they both condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and stated support to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. They also stated their support to brokering peace as soon as possible as a solution to the conflict. As regards bilateral ties, Novák pledged to further strengthen them in the economy and in the areas of culture and tourism. At the meeting, Novák presented to Zeman the Order of Merit of Hungary, Grand Cross with Chain "as an expression of the Hungarian nation's esteem" for his achievements in strengthening the friendship between the two countries and enhancing the Visegrad cooperation. The Hungarian president also held informal talks with president-elect Petr Pavel.

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INTERIOR MINISTRY PUBLISHES EDUCATION BILL ON WEBSITE

The interior ministry has published the draft legislation on public education on its website to enable further consultation with professional organisations and the public. The government and advocacy groups have agreed on the schedule of the consultation, the ministry said in a statement late on Thursday.

The government raised teachers' wages by 10% from January, but will bump them up to 21% retroactively "as soon as Hungary receives the European Union funding it is entitled to", the statement said. Wages may increase by 25% in 2024 and by up to 30% in 2025, compared with 2021 levels, it said. Teachers' wages may reach 80% of the average wage of degree holders by 2025, it said.

Regarding further issues in public education, the ministry took the results of last year's National Consultation public survey into consideration when drafting the bill, the statement said. Teachers working in disadvantaged regions or with children struggling with multiple disadvantages will have higher raises, it said. Performance will also be a factor. The bill would also simplify teachers' progress in the wage system, the statement said.

GULYÁS: GOVT TO DEVELOP STRATEGY FOR WINE MARKETING

The government is preparing a Hungarian Strategy for Wine Marketing to boost the image of Hungarian wines abroad, the head of the Prime Minister's Office said on Friday. The aim of the coordinated campaign, in cooperation with the sector, is to improve the international image and retail price of wines from regions like Tokaj, Somló, Szekszárd and others, Gergely Gulyás said in his speech at the 11th Wine Conference in Budapest. The government has earmarked 3 billion forints (EUR 8m) for the scheme, he said.

Pál Rókusfalvy, the commissioner responsible for developing the strategy over the next four years, said he would work with a team of experts and the agriculture ministry among other bodies to coordinate wine marketing and launch programmes and research. Hungarian wines will have to receive a more unified, comprehensive image and protection of origin to eliminate cases where "the same type of wine can be bought for 2,000 forints as well as 200,000 forints," he said. The strategy will have to prevail at a time when wine consumption is falling, wine producing lands are shrinking, and competition is strong, he added.

MINISTRY: NUMBER OF REGISTERED JOBSEEKERS FALLS TO RECORD LOW IN JAN-FEB

The number of registered jobseekers was at an all-time low in January-February, the ministry of economic development said on Friday. In February, 245,121 people were unemployed, down by 7,000 from February 2022 and a record low, the ministry said in a statement. The number of jobholders has been around 4.7 million for eight consecutive months, the ministry added. The government is continuing its work to protect families, pensioners and to maintain full employment at a time when war and sanctions are weighing on the economy, the statement said. It has launched a 700 billion forint (EUR 1.9bn) re-industrialisation scheme and a 600 billion forint capital investment programme, while ploughing 7 billion into support schemes to help the training and employment of jobseekers, the statement said.

SZÁZADVÉG: HUNGARIANS SUPPORT CEASEFIRE, PEACE TALKS

An overwhelming majority of Hungarians, 91%, support an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and peace talks, the Századvég Institute said on Friday. Some 7% said the war should continue until Russian President

Vladimir Putin is defeated, the pollster said in a statement.

Fully 62% were of the view that neither parties had a chance of winning the war, Századvég said. Fully 70% of respondents said the sanctions imposed on Russia harmed the European Union and Hungary. The results are in line with the policies of the Hungarian government, which has been pursuing a pro-peace policy, urging a ceasefire rather than measures likely to escalate the conflict, Századvég said.

Századvég gauged public approach to the war and EU and US policies after EU and US politicians, including EU Vice-President Vera Jourová, MEP Guy Verhofstadt and David Pressman, the US Ambassador to Hungary, criticised Hungary's policies with a view to putting pressure on the government to change its approach, Századvég said. Ukrainian deputy foreign minister Yevhen Perebyinis said Hungary was "blocking sanctions against Russia".

MTVA: DK LOSES 7 LAWSUITS AGAINST PUBLIC MEDIA

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) led by Ferenc Gyurcsány has lost seven lawsuits against Hungarian public media, MTVA's press and marketing office said in a statement on Thursday. DK launched the suits in connection with the way the Hungarian news agency MTI handled press releases. MTVA's statement said that DK attempted to put pressure on

MTI in a way that recalled "the times of the party-state".

The Kúria (supreme court) confirmed that MTI's national press release service (OS) had the right to refuse to publish any statement that may breach the privacy rights of an individual, and that MTI was entitled to editorial freedom, the statement added. Also, MTI has the right to refuse to publish DK statements, the court ruled, reasoning that provisions of the Act on Media Services and Mass Communication related to the national news agency did not guarantee anyone carte-blanche to demand publication of a specific statement via its OS service.

MTVA's statement noted that the left-wing party had already brought the matter before the court on six occasions, and the courts, including the Kúria, had recognised MTI's right to assess the relative merits of each individual statement submitted for publication. DK must pay the full legal costs to the defendant, Duna Médiaszolgáltató Nonprofit Zrt.

JUSTICE MINISTRY SETS UP ANIMAL WELFARE FOUNDATION

The justice ministry has set up a foundation for enhancing animal welfare and protection in Hungary. The foundation aims to promote animal welfare and responsible animal husbandry, and to strengthen cooperation with relevant NGOs, the justice minister told a press conference on Thursday, introducing the Animal

Protection Our Joint Cause Foundation. Judit Varga noted that Hungary recently passed one of Europe's most rigorous animal protection laws in response to a survey in which 260,000 contributed their views. The law has broadened the definition of animal torture, she said. The foundation is the first of its kind in Hungary aiming to involve everyone with long-standing experience in animal welfare, including civil groups, experts, the authorities and local councils, Varga said. The government has donated 250 million forints (EUR 667,000) to the foundation, the minister noted.

DK: ORBÁN BREAKING PROMISE TO EU OVER FAST-TRACKED LEGISLATION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has broken a promise made to the European Union to consult professionals as part of the legislative process and not to fast-track laws through parliament, an opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) lawmaker said on Friday, insisting that the government was thereby jeopardising Hungary's EU funding. Commenting on a new bill, MEP Sándor Rónai told an online press briefing that by seeking to hobble the operations of the Hungarian Medical Chamber (MOK), Orbán was breaking a promise he made to the European Commission not to ram laws through the legislature, adding that DK is turning to the commission in writing with the aim of "saving EU funds".

PROSECUTORS INVESTIGATE A FURTHER 9 PEOPLE IN EU TENDERS BRIBERY CASE

Prosecutorial investigators are investigating nine people in connection with suspected bribery pertaining to European Union tenders, bringing the overall number of suspects to 34, the Central Investigative Prosecutor's Office said on Friday. Last April, prosecutorial investigators questioned 18 people suspected of corruption related to tenders involving Hungarian state budget and European Union funds as part of the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP), and the prosecutor's office also seized ill-gotten assets.

On March 2, the authorities carried out further raids at the headquarters of business companies and other places in 17 locations nationwide, conducting searches and seizures. These raids were also made in connection with applications submitted within the framework of the Health Industry Support Programme, with 400 million forints (EUR 1.1m) being the minimum possible support, the statement said. The bribery cases involve nine officials and 11 other individuals. In April last year, prosecutors examined

graft around applications for tenders in the region of ten billion forints. Three finance ministry employees were suspected of accepting bribes and other crimes. Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, said at the time that the highest-ranking suspect was a head of department at the PM's office who was involved in assessing applications, but this individual had been suspected of minor fraud.

HUNGARY JAN GUEST NIGHTS UP 18% YR/YR

Commercial guest nights in Hungary increased in January by an annual 18% to 1,417,000, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Nights spent by domestic tourists rose by 6.2% to 723,000, while those spent by foreign visitors jumped by 33.5% to 695,000. Revenue increased by 55.3% to 31.5 billion forints (EUR 83.7m).

HUNGARY POSTS EUR 168 M DEC TRADE DEFICIT

Hungary posted a 168 million euro trade deficit in December, down from 1.395 billion in November, according to a second reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Friday. In KSH's first reading, the December shortfall was estimated at 154

million euros. Exports grew by an annual 12.1% to 11.188 billion euros, while imports were up 9.8% at 11.356 billion.

MORE THAN 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 4,955 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 5,122 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 97 people, ORFK said on Friday. Budapest received 45 people, 11 children among them, by train, ORFK said.

BUDAPEST TAXI FARES RISING FROM MONDAY

Budapest taxi fares from Monday are increasing by 10%, with the basic fare rising to 1,100 forints (EUR 2.9) and the per-kilometre fare to 440 forints, while per-minute fare will go up to 110 forints. On January 25, the City Assembly amended the taxi price regulation at the proposal of Gergely Karácsony, the mayor. The fuel price cap was scrapped at the start of December, leading to a big increase in costs for taxi drivers, according to the justification of the measure.