

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Defence minister speaks to the media after Hungarian troops injured in Kosovo clashes return home

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on April PPI, Q1 foreign trade of services

NATO foreign ministers meet in Oslo

Events related to the war in Ukraine

European Parliament holds plenary session

TOP STORY

DEFMIN: TROOPS PROVED SKILLS IN KOSOVO

Hungary's troops have proved their skills and that they can be counted on in every task they perform, the defence minister said after the military aircraft carrying the 12 Hungarian soldiers injured in violent clashes in Kosovo landed in Budapest.

"We have altogether 27 troops who have been injured," Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky told journalists at Liszt Ferenc International Airport after conversing with those on board the plane. He said the troops had told him that "the incident lasted long and was very heavy". "The Hungarian battalion serving under an international Italian-US command was deployed at the site where they faced the protesters," the minister said. The troops serving in a KFOR mission were deployed to disperse the rioters in front of the town hall in Zvečan on Monday afternoon. After talking with the Hungarian troops who returned home with the plane, the defence minister said that those seriously injured were in a stable condition. After meeting their family members, all 19 troops will be taken to the Honvéd military hospital, he said.

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Tuesday morning that 15 Hungarian soldiers were treated in hospital. A Hungarian army aircraft was dispatched to the region to take those injured home on Monday evening.

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FINMIN: 2024 BUDGET SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT

The 2024 budget bill was submitted to parliament on Tuesday, the finance minister announced, saying that in times of war, Hungary required a budget that guaranteed the country's security, protected families, pensions, jobs, and cheaper household energy bills. Mihály Varga said the budget prioritised stability and predictability, and, adhering to the custom introduced nine years ago, MPs will hold a vote on the budget during the summer and may pass it as early as July 7. The bill takes into account today's known dangers such as the protracted war in Ukraine, he said. Protecting and maintaining the government's results achieved so far are the budget's main aims, the minister said, noting that the Fiscal Council has endorsed it and the target of reducing the deficit and public debt, while it had also identified several which the government has taken into consideration. Varga said the bill targets a deficit of 2.9% and a public debt of 66.7% of GDP, with inflation at around 6%. The economy is set to grow by around 4%, higher than the EU average. The employment level is expected to stay level at 4.7 million, while the jobless rate is likely to be 4%, he said. More than 1,360 billion forints (EUR 3.7bn) will be available for the fund which helps households, state and local government bodies and companies

pay their energy bills, ensuring the lowest utility costs in Europe, he said. Varga said the European Commission had no powers to cancel the scheme to lower energy bills, and the scheme would remain in place.

Defence spending will amount to almost 1,310 billion forints, exceeding 2% of GDP, the minister said. Family support will be preserved in the 2024 budget, Varga said, with 3,307 billion forints channelled to support families. Also, the value of pensions will be ensured next year, with 6,542 billion forints set aside for pensions, 392 billion forints more than this year. If economic growth exceeds 3.5%, an additional 20.5 billion will be released for the pension premium, while 449 billion will be available for the payment of 13th monthly pensions. Fully 3,434 billion forints are allocated for education and 3,225 billion for health care, both several hundred forints more than this year, with wage rises for teachers and nurses in the pipeline. The wage increase for teachers may reach 20% if a deal is struck to resolve open issues with EU bodies, so that Hungary can access its EU funding, he said. In 2024, the tax on excessive profits will be phased out. Central reserves will amount to 220 billion forints, he added.

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér said the general budget debate will fall between June 13 and 15, and a detailed proposal will be submitted on July 2, with a final vote scheduled for July 7 concluding the extraordinary summer session.

ORBÁN SENDS GREETINGS TO CROATIAN COUNTERPART ON NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Monday sent his greetings to Croatian counterpart Andrej Plenković on the occasion of Statehood Day of Croatia, Orbán's press chief said. "National sovereignty is one of the most important values for us here in central Europe," Orbán said in the letter marking the national holiday. "We are proud that Hungary was among the first countries to assure Croatia of its support [in achieving statehood] and was also among the first countries to recognise the country's independence," he added. Bertalan Havasi cited Orbán as saying that Croatia's Schengen accession was also a common historic success for Hungary and central Europe. Eliminating the internal borders of the European community brings several new opportunities in developing ties, in economic cooperation, and also in terms of citizens' daily lives, he added. At the same time, Orbán said that protecting the external borders of Schengen was a common responsibility. "We must succeed as neighbourly Schengen countries in the protection of the southern borders, and I can assure you that my country is ready to give all its support to Croatia," Orbán said in his letter.



SZIJJÁRTÓ: EGYPT NEEDS MORE SUPPORT TO COPE WITH MIGRATION PRESSURE

Countries that rein in illegal migration deserve special respect when “the ill-fated policies of Brussels” result in increased pressure of migration on Europe, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Tuesday, calling for greater financial support for Egypt. Szijjártó told a joint press conference with Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Budapest that relations between the two countries had always been based on mutual respect, adding that Hungary had gained much as a result in terms of security and the economy. “The value of this long-standing friendly cooperation has become rather fragile,” he said. “What makes Hungarian-Egyptian cooperation even more significant is that we both belong to the pro-peace global majority,” he added. “We’d like to see the war in Ukraine end as soon as possible,” he said. “We represent the position that there is no solution to this war on the battle field; only diplomacy, talks, a ceasefire and peace talks can bring the desired results,” he added. Szijjártó said that mass illegal migration was a severe security challenge, adding that Hungarian authorities had prevented 270,000 illegal border crossing attempts last year “without any help from Brussels”. “In addition to not getting help, Brussels is

continually worsening the situation by making pro-migration statements and encouraging migration,” he said. “By now, human smuggling has basically become a flourishing business throughout Europe thanks to Brussels’ migration policies,” he said. “And since Brussels policies are stoking migration pressure, we must respect countries that help prevent this pressure from growing further,” he added. Egypt is one such country, being one of strongest bastions of the line of defence in north Africa, despite the internal warfare in neighbourly Sudan which is also unleashing a wave of migrants, he said. “So we’re asking Brussels ... to increase financial support for Egypt, to enable Egypt look after the refugees from Sudan,” he added. “We also call on Brussels to give technical and technological support to Egypt to help the country protect its borders so that refugees from Sudan cannot cross over to Libya, from where there is straight passage to Europe,” he said. Cairo deserves gratitude for reining in the wave of migration because in the current situation Europe would find it very hard to cope with an additional security challenge, he said. Szijjártó highlighted cooperation in energy, technology and training, adding that a new nuclear power station was being built in both countries with the same technology and main contractor. He also noted that 125 Egyptian students study with scholarships in Hungarian higher education, and 890 applications have been received so far this year.

Meanwhile, the sides signed an agreement at the meeting on cooperation in plant protection. In response to a question on Hungarian peacekeepers injured during Kosovo riots on the previous day, Szijjártó said it was a Hungarian national security interest to ensure peace in the Western Balkans, which is also why the government is calling for EU enlargement in that direction as soon as possible. “We are not only talking about this but also making an effort, which is why hundreds of Hungarian soldiers are serving in the Western Balkans, in a NATO mission in Kosovo and EU mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” he said. Commenting on Monday’s events, he said Hungarian soldiers had acquitted themselves with supreme professionalism and acted in line with commands. The fifteen soldiers injured received hospital care and none is in life-threatening condition, he said. The Hungarian group of doctors sent to the site will decide which must be transported home, Szijjártó added. No decision has been made yet on whether new soldiers will be sent to replace the injured, the minister said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY WANTS PEACE IN W BALKANS

Hungary wants to see peace and calm in the Western Balkans, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, has said on Facebook in connection with clashes in

Kosovo in which KFOR peacekeepers, including Hungarian soldiers, came under attack.

Szijjártó noted that the Hungarian KFOR peacekeepers under Italian command were deployed on Monday in the settlement of Zvečan. The soldiers “saw to their duties in line with the orders they were given”, and several of them were injured, the minister said, adding that KFOR and Hungarian army medics treated the wounded. He said hundreds of Hungarian soldiers were serving in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina with the aim of keeping the peace. “This is precisely why we’re doing this,” he said.

JUSTICEMIN: EP’S LEFT-WING MAJORITY DISLIKES HUNGARY’S PRO-PEACE POSITION

The European Parliament wants to prevent Hungary from fulfilling the presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024 because the left-wing majority in the EP “dislikes Hungary’s pro-peace position”, Justice Minister Judit Varga said in Brussels on Tuesday. Varga told Hungarian journalists ahead of a meeting of European Union affairs ministers that the EP initiative to prevent Hungary from fulfilling the council presidency only showed the body’s frustration. One of the priorities of Hungary’s presidency will be to check the functioning of the rule-of-law principles in the EP’s operations, she added.

Hungary, she said, intends to monitor whether the “scandal-ridden EP” complied with its own rules and EU laws, and whether it served the interests of European democracy and citizens or its own power interests.

“The EP respects neither democracy nor the rule of law, as it wants to introduce an initiative this week which clearly goes against the EU treaties,” she said. Varga called Tuesday’s hearing related to the Article 7 procedure against Hungary to assess the country’s compliance with the rule of law “a sick, tired procedure” which had been held under political pressure.

The minister said Hungary’s stance on immigration had been the initial cause of EP objections, before the government’s protection of families became the source of ire in Brussels. Now, she added, it was the government’s pro-peace stance, supported by the Hungarian people, that the left-wing EP majority rejected. Varga said the Article 7 procedure was unrelated to the Council of the EU presidency. She said the EP had not been “dealt any cards” to decide which country fulfils the presidency of the Council of the European Union. She added that the EP, which “always wants to become part of the problem instead of the solution”, must know its place, and rather than attack the democratically elected government and voters of a country, MEPs should serve the needs of their own constituents.

EU COMMISSIONER: RISK OF SYSTEMIC BREACH OF EU VALUES IN HUNGARY STILL STANDS

The Article 7 procedure, the EU’S strongest possible tool, needs to continue in the case of Hungary because a risk of a systemic breach of European values still stands, Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, said in Brussels on Tuesday. At a press conference following the meeting of the General Affairs Council, she said “the process has to continue as long as concerns are there, and the concerns are there”. Jourová said the procedure would only be finished if there was no further risk of a systemic breach of fundamental EU values, adding that “we are not there, the discussion must continue”. She called the procedure an important EU tool, saying that uncertainty and distrust was becoming stronger among EU member states. Hearings conducted in the framework of the procedure offer respective member states an opportunity of clarification, the commissioner added. Speaking about Hungary, Jourová said the commission had not seen any progress made in the fulfilment of proposals made concerning the elections and the independence of the ombudsman’s office and the public service media. “Hungary is obliged to implement the agreed super-milestones in order to receive

funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan,” the commissioner added. “The Commission stands ready to support the Hungarian government in its reform efforts,” she said. She noted that the European Parliament had adopted a declaration in September 2018 proposing that the European Council examine under paragraph 1 of Article 7 of the EU basic treaty whether there was a clear risk of breaching fundamental EU values in Hungary. Answering a question in this context on a debate scheduled in the EP about blocking Hungary from taking over the EU’s rotating presidency in the second half of 2024, Jourová said it was not on Tuesday’s agenda. The European Commission will proceed in line with the EU treaties, she said.

PRESIDENT RECEIVES HUNGARIAN SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES TEAM

President Katalin Novák met the members of Hungary’s Special Olympics World Games team in her Sándor Palace office on Tuesday. The athletes set to compete at the Berlin event next month took a ceremonial oath at the meeting. In her welcome speech, the president said the team would swear to prepare for the Special Olympics World Games honestly, with unbroken will and to the best of their ability. They also vowed to be driven by their patriotism and compete in the spirit of fair play, Novák said. “You will become role models for us,

because your oath sets an example we should all follow,” Novák said. “We can learn respect, humility, honour, perseverance and a competitive spirit from you, as well as how to fight.” Novák thanked the athletes’ parents, coaches, corporate partners as well as the sports organisers. The president said she will attend the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics World Games and cheer on the athletes from the grandstands.

Lajos Lengyel, president of Special Olympics Hungary, said 76 Hungarian athletes will compete in 15 disciplines in June. The event will feature a total of some 7,000 athletes from around 200 countries, he added. Lengyel said Novák will be the first president to accompany and lead the team at the opening ceremony on June 17.

MOMENTUM: PAYMENT OF EU FUNDS SHOULD BE CONTINGENT OF EDUCATION REFORM IN HUNGARY

The opposition Momentum party has said payment of European Union funds to Hungary should be contingent on the government implementing a comprehensive reform of the country’s education system and raising teachers’ salaries. Momentum MEP Anna Donáth told a news conference in Budapest on Tuesday that she would turn to the European Commission and ask it to make this a condition for the release of European funds to Hungary. Momentum wants teachers to receive

an immediate 50% salary increase, she added.

The ruling Fidesz party issued a statement in response, saying that left-wing politicians “like Anna Donáth” were responsible for teachers not getting a salary hike because they had been working to block Hungary’s EU funding, thereby depriving teachers of the chance to earn 800,000 forints (EUR 2,160) each month. The statement added that Hungarian opposition MEPs Klára Dobrev, Csaba Molnár, Attila Ara-Kovács, Márton Gyöngyösi, Katalin Cseh, Sándor Rónai and István Ujhelyi were doing the same, meanwhile earning 5-6 million forints each month. Had the left wing not undermined their own country, Hungary would have already received the EU funds due to it, Fidesz said.

DK TO FILE LAWSUIT DEMANDING RUSSIAN GAS CONTRACT DETAILS

The opposition Democratic Coalition will file a lawsuit with a view to revealing precisely how much Hungary “pays Russia for Europe’s most expensive gas”, the party’s deputy leader and MEP said on Tuesday. Csaba Molnár told an online press conference that Russian President Vladimir Putin had “cheated” Prime Minister Viktor Orbán when he told a joint press conference in Moscow that Hungarians were getting Russian gas for one-fifth of the market price. Molnár added that since the government’s “seven-fold utility fee increase, we know that this is a lie” because, he insisted, Hungarians were paying the steepest

price for gas in the whole of the EU. Molnár said that at the same time it was still unknown exactly how much the government paid and the level of interest for charged for gas sold to Hungarian consumers, he said. When the party demanded data of public interest from the Hungarian energy company MVM and the Hungarian Hydrocarbon Stockpiling Association, one of them refused to make the data available and the other redacted the most important details, including the price of gas, he added.

ALMOST 14,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 5,297 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 8,650 came to the

country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 57 people, ORFK said on Tuesday.

HUNGARY Q1 INVESTMENT VOLUME DOWN 2.8%

Investment volume in Hungary fell by an annual 2.8% in the first quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Tuesday. Quarter on quarter, investments were up 1%, based on seasonally adjusted data. The volume of construction investments fell by 1.6%, while that of machinery and equipment investments went up by 5.9%. Investments were worth 2,892 billion forints in the first quarter, with manufacturing accounting for 916 billion of the total and real estate 673 billion forints.

HUNGARY SENDS NEW POLICE UNIT TO SERBIA

The Hungarian police force has sent a 35-strong unit to Serbia to assist local forces in border protection, the police's official website said on Tuesday. The Hungarian officers will mostly patrol the border to prevent and investigate illegal border entries, and will cooperate with local forces in arresting people smugglers and illegal migrants, the statement said. The contingent will also patrol roads farther from the border, it added. The Hungarian officers will use their own equipment, which includes off-road vehicles, night vision devices and mobile infra-red cameras, police.hu said.